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# Gaining Legitimacy in Post-Qaddafi Libya: Analysing Attempts of the Muslim Brotherhood

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**Abstract:** The Libyan Muslim Brotherhood needed to manoeuvre underground for several decades, just as most opposition groups in Libya had to—because of the repression from the Qaddafi regime. In 2012, however, the political wing of the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood (LMB), the Justice and Construction Party (JCP, sometimes also called the Justice and Development Party) participated in popular elections just shortly after its inception. Seven years later, one can unanimously say that the movement was not able to take power in the country. This paper will analyse the LMB in post-revolutionary Libya by concentrating on the attempts of establishing legitimacy in the political sphere—while continuously being informed by historical influences. Methodologically, the paper examines primary sources, key academic texts but also factors in interview data from semi-structured interviews. Overall, the paper addresses the puzzle of why Libya as a predominantly Sunni, conservative country did not translate into a conservative Sunni movement like the LMB faring well; with that, derailing the impression that the whole region was “going Islamist” after the so-called Arab Spring. The LMB today is still influenced by the historical treatment it received under Qaddafi, which lead it to base itself mostly in exile, hence it struggled to entrench itself in the country. The LMB was pointed towards their opponents’ fearmongering of an alleged Islamist takeover, mostly without addressing self-inflicted wounds, such as their inability to unite or to convince major parts of the population of their political programme.

**Keywords:** Arab Spring; Libya; legitimacy; political Islam; Muslim Brotherhood

## 1. Introduction

Despite the indubitably unfortunate developments following the so-called Arab Spring that had many countries stumble into violent conflict and turmoil, the protests had still allowed elections to occur in several countries [1] (p. 695), inter alia, in Libya in 2012 [2] (p. 171). In order to shield themselves from Western calls for democracy, North African heads of government fearmongered about Islamists potentially gaining power in the case of uncontrolled democratic measures for decades [3] (p. 1090). However, after these political leaders were toppled, political parties (often established in a rush) competed, for example, in the recently unclenched Libyan political sphere. In accordance with the mentioned fearmongering, the rise of popular Islamic governance<sup>1</sup> replacing the previous Middle Eastern regimes was expected by many [4] (pp. 40). Naturally, the pre-eminent Islamist movement of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) was often regarded as a suitable candidate for this challenge. This paper scrutinises two ways in which the Libyan Branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (LMB) attempted to

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<sup>1</sup> 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 [2].

erect and solidify itself as a legitimate political actor after 2011—attempting that in a particularly challenging environment that was post-Qaddafi Libya: A political sphere lacking any established political entities due to the totalitarian nature of Qaddafi’s system [5] (p. 143). The paper adheres to the following structure: Firstly, a brief overview of the history of the LMB preceding 2011 is provided; secondly, an introduction to the framework of legitimacy that is applied in this paper is given. This will then thirdly lead to the analysis of the LMB and its perception in post-Qaddafi Libya, guided by the two aspects of adherence to and display of ideals from the 2011 revolution, as well as commitment to the national Libyan cause. Finally, the paper will close with tying this assessment back to the LMB’s historical experience and provide an outlook for the movement in Libya that also considers the movement more broadly.

For this analysis, the LMB and the Justice and Construction Party (JCP) are considered equable, as this paper concentrates on the political performance of the LMB after 2011, and it was during the following year (in March 2012) that the JCP mutated into the political wing of the LMB; therefore, the JCP is the natural point of reference when analysing political performance. Still, the paper acknowledges that the JCP was theoretically founded independently from the LMB [6]. The gathered interview data, however, evinces that the JCP is without exception considered identical with the LMB<sup>2</sup> [7].

After spending years below the surface, the 2011 uprisings quickly catapulted the LMB into the open and let it arrive in the political sphere through its elected party officials. Because of the repression from Qaddafi, hence the LMB’s forced existence in the shadows, the group had nugatory experience in interacting with the majority of the Libyan people, contrary to its counterpart in Egypt [8] (pp. 3, 10). As a consequence, a marginal network structure existed that could have been activated to further popular support. Nonetheless, the LMB still expected to do well in the country’s first democratic elections in decades in 2012. To the LMB’s disappointment, however, the election results were lower than aspired; the prerequisites of Libya being a Sunni majority country with a conservative outlook did not align as seamlessly, with the LMB being a conservative Sunni movement, as the LMB had originally hoped for [9] (p. 202). Libya occupies an interesting place, as it never shows up in, for example, rankings of the “Top Ten Biggest Muslim Countries,” which means it often falls under the radar due to its allegedly nugatory contribution to the Muslim landscape. However, the comparatively small population creates a false appearance; proportionally speaking, Libya displays one of the “most Sunni Muslim societies” worldwide, since its homogenising element is its Arab-Sunni Muslim character [10]. This paper will, therefore, offer new insights on the reception of a Sunni movement like the LMB, addressing this extraordinary case of a small population (of about six and a half million) that identifies overwhelmingly as Sunni Muslim, of which most self-identify as Malikis, Libya’s Sunni form of Islam, while, at the same time, tending not to dwell in strictly and sharply divided religious orbits, as the majority does not adhere to one religious leader or school of thought in a strict manner [11] (p. 30)<sup>3</sup>.

Candidly speaking, the election result of 2012 offered another enigma resulting from the Arab Spring: Libya, a country that captured many characteristics that would be considered to foreshadow an Islamist victory, actually produced election wins, compared to which the so-called liberal parties in Egypt and Tunisia were lagging behind [12]. Looking at the situation in 2019, one can comfortably conclude that the LMB seemed to have failed to achieve its objective of taking power in the country. At the same time, the paper acknowledges that the objective of taking power in Libya was unlikely to have been the imminent goal of the LMB in the country—given its limited social reach before 2011 and nascent post-revolutionary political organisation. Unsurprisingly, the LMB itself, but with it

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<sup>2</sup> 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 [7].

<sup>3</sup> No fewer than 162 religious leaders were mentioned as having influence at the local or national level, but most of these were mentioned by fewer than ten interviewees. Similarly, in 2016, a number of Madkhali and Salafi shaykhs were mentioned, but no one featured prominently.

many observers, were puzzled by the election results in 2012 and then in 2014, which unravelled the low levels of support the LMB had in the country [13]. This paper seeks to analyse the LMB's endeavour to manifest itself as a legitimate political actor and assess the extent to which it was successful (or not). To sustain this analysis, the paper assesses two central sources for legitimacy in Libya; namely, portraying the LMB as a "truly revolutionary force," as well as a "truly Libyan/national force." Those two designations capture the central claims to legitimacy this paper will assess. This paper unravels if and why the LMB did not win as a political actor inside Libya. In order to assess this question, the research considers primary sources issued by the LMB and JCP, and factors in social media data; for example, from the leader of the JCP Mohamed Sowane. In addition, semi-structured interviews with Libyans, as well as experts in the field, were conducted to enrich the analysis, which was continuously informed by the relevant academic literature<sup>4</sup> [14].

Basically, the LMB belongs to a scarce, forceful group that can claim germane national reach across Libya, and are not innately and solely tied to one town, region or tribe [4] (p. 186). Institutionally speaking, JCP members entrenched themselves into the existing power apparatus of the Libyan political system [9] (p. 203), even though the election results proved underwhelming [14], allegedly supporting the arguments of post-Islamism [15]<sup>5</sup>. In 2019, the LMB is still striving for legitimacy in the eyes of the Libyan people, while simultaneously manoeuvring in the current power quagmire that is progressively more dominated by military power brokers, such as Khalifa Haftar and the forces of the affiliated and mostly loyal Libyan National Army (LNA). Therefore, the LMB must address challenges originating from a political sphere that has been converting, gradually but steadily, into a militia battleground in which political institutions constitute another means for office holders to expand their influence [16]. Acknowledging the experiences of Libya's neighbouring countries (Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria), reveals that even clear-cut Islamist movements like the LMB need more than religious affiliation to gain a foothold in a conservative Sunni society. Secondly, it is important to acknowledge that the transformation from having a foothold in a country to political capital is not automatic (but instead there are multiple factors that underlie and account for the performance of any social group).

Whereas the Egyptian mothership and the prominent Tunisian branch have been broadly reviewed, the Libyan branch has been inadequately studied. On the one hand, Libya offers a sizable repository for academic insights transcending the country itself and addressing diverse phenomena, such as the challenges of governance and the influence of militarised non-state actors; on the other hand, Libya displays idiosyncratic features that informed the trajectories of several movements after Qaddafi's overthrow. This article fills the research gap on the LMB by bringing together its more distant with its more recent history—the latter pertaining to after 2011, when the movement came "out of the shadows" [4]. Furthermore, this article provides a distinctly Libyan contribution to the debate on how political groups aim to derive legitimacy by building on revolutionary and national credentials.

## 2. Brief History of the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood under Qaddafi's Regime

The Muslim Brotherhood [17], which is considered the "largest, most well-organised movement of political Islam," internationally speaking, and "[Libya's] oldest Islamist group," has its origins in Egypt, Libya's most powerful, and therefore influential, neighbour [18]. Hasan al-Banna founded the movement in 1928 and concentrated on establishing his network in Egypt. After being outlawed as an organisation in 1948 and having its leader assassinated in 1949, the Muslim Brotherhood needed to find refuge in other countries. Some members settled in neighbouring Libya and became active in

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<sup>4</sup> For the paper, Libyans from the Western and Eastern region of Libya were interviewed. However, these interviews serve as additional insights as they are not comprehensively capturing the views of the entire population and therefore not representative of the entire Libyan population. The author also acknowledges that for a future version of the paper, interviews from the Southern region of Libya can hopefully be included.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

Benghazi. Given the MB's Islamist agenda, the king at the time was wary for the stability of Libya, and forbid the Muslim Brotherhood from creating political parties in Libya. Still, the MB managed to engage with Libyan students in particular [4] (p. 123). Al-Bana's definition of Islam as *din wa dawla* (religion and state) reflects the centrality of politics linked to the duties of the state in fostering Islam, according to his understanding of it. Still, this small group remained limited in its outreach, as the Libyan population at the time paid little mind to the developed Islamist ideas and focused more on grappling with the challenges of a desert state in the process of independent development. In addition, Libya showed a particular revulsion towards foreign ideologies and proved difficult to win over [4] (p. 119).

Since its inception in 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood has splintered into many subgroups, each differently understanding the idea of the community of the Brotherhood under the rule of the sharia and the *din wa dawla* [19]. The Libyan Muslim Brotherhood is an offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood that is particularly close, and influenced by its mothership in Egypt, while still being shaped by local characteristics and developments. The awareness and consideration of developments in Egypt are tangible among the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood. In an interview in April 2019 Nizar Kawan entirely dismissed that the party for which he is spokesman (the Muslim Brotherhood affiliated Justice and Construction Party in Libya) had anything to do with the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt [20]. Witnessing the brutal suppression of the Brotherhood in Egypt since the toppling of President Morsi in 2013, as well as the strong anti-Muslim Brotherhood rhetoric applied by powerful regional players, such as the United Arab Emirates, his statement is understandable, given the need to have his movement survive.

Overall, the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood can look back at a history in the country that reaches back to the 1940s, which lends credibility to the claim that the movement is the "country's oldest Islamist group" [9] (p. 178).

The Free Officers' coup d'état in 1969 established Qaddafi in power. It was followed by the *jamāhīriyah*, or in its long version, the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab *jamāhīriyah*, which was Qaddafi's unique construction of a political system, which translates to "state of the masses." The system was adapted over his 42 years of rule and culminated (in theoretical terms) in his self-authored political philosophy, as captured in the "Green Book," that was first published in 1975 (six years after Qaddafi's military coup). The Libyan state under Qaddafi exhibited an obscure bundle of characteristics that, undeniably identify it as an arcane totalitarian political system in which totalitarian norms intertwine the political and the social sphere into one, or; in the words of Hannah Arendt: "The struggle for total domination . . . The elimination of every competing nontotalitarian reality, is inherent in the totalitarian regimes." [21]. Hence, all activity was under constant risk of being classified as pugnacious or even belligerent towards the Qaddafi regime. Qaddafi expressed his prerogative to solutions for Libya regarding all spheres, which are very much in accordance with a totalitarian system [21]. Anticipating the gargantuan challenge in transcending the incongruousness of a tribal society in establishing a modern, centralised state [22], Qaddafi relied first and foremost on his own persona and associated charismatic leadership [23]<sup>6</sup>, capitalising on the revolutionary legitimacy, having overthrown the previous Sanussi monarchy. Over the course of his 42-year rule, however, he extracted and employed other credentials that he gradually and skilfully integrated in, to recondite modernisations of his ideology; for example, an Islamic veil, socialist features, and his ancestral tribal origins. In an interview with Qaddafi in 1979, Qaddafi referenced two ideological sources for his concept of the *jamāhīriyah* (which he calls a blueprint for the whole world and believes "just like with the French Revolution, other countries will follow soon," and become a rule of the masses): Firstly, he elaborates that the Qur'an's calls for social justice. It was, therefore, central for his *jamāhīriyah* and that there was "no

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<sup>6</sup> See Max Weber "The Three Types of Legitimate Rule" for an explanation of his tripartite classification of authority into legal, traditional and charismatic authority.

contradiction between Islam the *jamāhīriyah*;" secondly, that there was "no contradiction between socialism and Islam and *jamāhīriyah*," and that he aspired to have equality between all people in his *jamāhīriyah* [24]. With this, Gaddafi exhibited his intent to incorporate both Islamic credentials, as well as the ideal of socialism into his political system. Therefore, an Islamist organisation like the LMB was banned, since it was considered as potentially challenging the regime [25] (pp. 46, 178).

However, members of the LMB that had fled abroad continued to re-enter the country. These overseas organisations, started to get involved in running student camps and reaching out to imams in Libya to try to secretly exert influence, escaping Qaddafi's attention in the early 1980s [26], and throughout the 1990s, [27]. However, this was once again significantly less than what the Egyptian MB was doing during the same period [28] (pp. 322–377)<sup>7</sup>. Most notably, the severe repression of the Qaddafi regime can be singled out as the main cause for this poor performance. Ultimately, all Islamist opposition groups were to be targeted by the same elimination techniques, either imprisonment in the notorious Abu Salim prison in Tripoli, or public execution [4].

In many public appearances, Qaddafi condemned the LMB, and warned of an Islamist conspiracy [29]. This rhetoric unsurprisingly led the LMB to escape the country, and reinforced its conviction that in order to survive, it needed to stay on safe terrain. Therefore, many in the current leadership first encountered the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood as students in Europe, the US and Canada, and much of the LMB's network and organisational structure is still based overseas, captured in, "The Muslim Brotherhood Review: Main Findings," which was commissioned by John Jenkins, summarising that, "The Arab Spring and its aftermath led to the departure of some overseas Muslim Brotherhood-inspired groups back to their countries of origin (notably Tunisia and Libya)" [30].

Finally, the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood participated in the "Reform and Repent" Programme started by Qaddafi's oldest son, Saif al-Islam. This programme was officially aimed at de-radicalising Libya's Islamist prisoners, and included the release of Islamists, on the condition that they did not engage in political activity in Libya. In hindsight, the process certainly brought short 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 Libyan Muslim Brotherhood's engagement with the 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 Libyan Muslim Brotherhood is subsumed into the plethora of Islamist groups in Libya. By putting them all into the same category, each group could be charged with aspirations for power at any cost. As a result, the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood was considered compromised, with little credibility as an opposition group and appeared neutralised by the regime. This standing evidently still impairs the ideological standing of the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood, and deeply affects their ability to be an influential political force in post-revolutionary Libya.

### 3. The Muslim Brotherhood's Quest for Legitimacy in the Post-Qaddafi Libyan Political Sphere as a "Truly Revolutionary Force"

Legitimacy in this article will follow an empirical conceptualisation. While the main fault line of the term runs between normative or empirical applications in the literature, this procedure [31] can be correspondingly linked to the divergences in conceptualisation between political philosophers portraying the conditions which theoretically justify power accumulation and enforcement in a legitimate manner [32], and political scientists and sociologists focussing on the collection of empirical data to argue for certain, legitimate ways to hold power [33].

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<sup>7</sup> 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.



Important to mention, however, is the fact that countering this theoretical classification, many authors defy subjugation into clear-cut disciplines, and instead follow an approach that draws from both traditions. This paper follows a similar approach, as it is normatively framed, but analytically follows an empirical notion of legitimacy; namely, relying in large part on the opinion of a political actor. With this, a narrower concept is applied that moves away from the macro-level of the political system as a whole<sup>8</sup>, and instead moves it towards the relationship between the domestic population and a political actor. In other words, legitimacy in this article corresponds to the assessment of ascribed credibility to a referent object by its local audience. Still, the paper is normatively infused by the dimensions of Islam, the 2011 revolution and a non-interference necessity, as the main variables to define legitimacy in the contemporary Libyan environment.

At the same time then, this conceptualisation of legitimacy dovetails identity since it is used to assess an actor that promotes a certain ideology. Since the survival of ideological convictions that result in actions rely on the reinforcement of both top to bottom and bottom to top processes of ideological value systems [34] (p. 17), the levels of legitimacy in the eyes of Libyan people will also include an acknowledgement of features of the Libyan society, as well as the country's history, while analysing attempts of political legitimacy that aimed to be tied to the 2011 revolution and the Libyan nation.

One key event for this analysis were the 2012 elections in Libya, as they were the first test at the ballot box for the political wing of the LMB, the JCP. Following their campaign promises, as well as their incorporation into the government after the election, they were also held accountable for subsequent political developments [1] (p. 699). This paper draws on three time periods: The 2011 revolution, the time around the 2012 election and finally the decisive point of 2013 and its repercussions. With regards to those three time periods, the paper will trace in a moderate constructive approach how actions by the LMB were seen as legitimate or illegitimate [35] (p. 29).

This article is aware that the pursued conceptualisation has been informed mostly due to the more recent political history of Libya, and the author's design of the paper. Since legitimacy and identity conceptualisations almost inevitably change, this article captures a specific *Zeitgeist* in Libyan history [36] (p. 20).

Next to Islam being a potential source of legitimacy in the Libyan post-Qaddafi political sphere (due to the described Sunni Muslim Character of the Libyan society), the notion of being considered a truly revolutionary force can also be viewed as providing political actors with credibility [37,38]. As some interviewees described it, a "truly revolutionary force" in the Libyan context means a group that was part of the revolution from the start and continued to be wholly committed to the ideals of the revolution; namely, inclusionary politics and a better future for Libya as a whole after the fall of Qaddafi. Even though this description is vague, the following section will prove how the LMB did not fulfil those expectations. The LMB has not managed to convey this image credibly to the Libyan people and is still considered an outsider by many—hence it is a force to be wary of. While An-Nahda leader Rachid Ghannouchi was greeted with enthusiasm when he returned to Tunisia from exile, the LMB returned into Libya in a more discreet fashion—this different reception also has to do with the different social structures (present and past) that define the Libyan and Tunisian context respectively [39] (p. 145). In addition, the more it got involved in the political structures of the Libyan system after 2011, the more it became part of an increasingly detached political elite that is criticised by many Libyans for pursuing its own agenda and taking advantage of its positions of power in discriminatory ways [37].

This section is structured into three phases. First, the time before the 2012 election when the LMB started engaging in the Libyan revolution and campaigning as a political party; second, the time after

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<sup>8</sup> 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" [23].

the 2012 elections when the LMB effectively became part of the government; and third, the time after the rupture of the government in 2014 until the time of writing (summer 2018). Through these time periods the attempts by the LMB to portray itself as a truly revolutionary force will be traced and assessed. Since armed groups [40] were crucial to the Libyan revolution, seen by many Libyans as heroes who had risked their lives in military confrontations with the Qaddafi regime to bring about change [4] (p. 145), that section includes references and tries to factor them in when beneficial to the analysis more than the previous sections do.

The Libyan protests of 2011 were not initiated first and foremost by Islamists, and definitely not by the LMB; instead a plethora of groups and individuals participated, mostly mobilised along regional and local lines [5] (p. 141). While under the Qaddafi regime, a very limited number of actors held any public relevance next to his obtuse system of formal and informal networks, yet during the 2011 protests, a huge variety of actors emerged to participate in the revolution. Therefore, the rebel forces cannot be seen as having a common identity. Rather, they needed to be seen as a group first and foremost united behind a common goal: Overthrowing the Qaddafi regime. Debates about their identity were secondary and were mainly captured in the conflict over the composition of the National Transitional Council (NTC) [41]—an interim political body—that that would be capable of both steering the transition, as well as communicating with international actors.

As a matter of fact, while organised opposition groups were already playing a minor role in the demonstrations that had erupted both in Egypt and Tunisia, the absence of established non-state forces was blatantly apparent in Libya, and there is no proof that the verbal influence brought to bear by exiled opposition activists played any significant role; by the time the exiles returned, the first, essential developments had already occurred. Since the LMB was mostly defined by exile structures, it needed to play catch up from the moment that the protests in the country erupted; this meant the LMB was miles behind the revolutionary forces that had been protesting and fighting on the ground from day one [37].

Negatively impacting the revolutionary pose the LMB tried to strike was its continued exchange with the Qaddafi regime, started by its entry into Saif al-Islam's "Reform and Repent" Programme. In short, the entanglements coming from that process sowed mistrust about the LMB's motivations during the nascent revolution and were reinforced by the closeness to the regime it displayed in 2011 [4] (p. 156). The LMB did not cut off ties entirely with the Qaddafi regime for various reasons: First, they were conceptually uncomfortable with a revolutionary overthrow of authority, due to their gradualist ideology [42]; second, they had established some sort of intimacy or working relationship with the Qaddafi regime that they thought they might be able to use in their favour to negotiate a deal between the rebel forces and the regime [26]. Some Libyans could understand these calculations by the LMB. One interviewee declared, "Of course it [the LMB] was not going against the regime, because before that [the protests in 2011] they were really going well with the regime, so why would they?" However, that did not mean that the Libyan people let the LMB off the hook. Two developments serve as examples of the alleged charge of cosyng up with the regime. The LMB was the only political force that accepted the constitution offered by the Qaddafi regime in its last days as a final attempt to co-opt the rebels [7]. Secondly, Ali al-Sallabi had been meeting with regime representatives (likely in May 2011 in Egypt) to discuss ways out of the current crisis, which, of course, consisted of compromises that the (at that point quite desperate) Qaddafi regime apparatus would have approved of, such as committing to engage in an inclusive political dialogue and to discuss civil society and freedom of speech [43]. The intention of meeting with the regime cannot be truthfully assessed by an outsider (and there may have been genuine intentions to deter further escalation and misery for the Libyan people). However, there is definitely a question mark hanging over this exchange regarding the exclusion of the liberal forces of the already formed NTC and the possibility that the LMB was, for example, trying to secure some sort of crucial position in any transitional deal [4] (p. 140). Yet for the many Libyans who joined the protests and saw their friends and family dying at the hands of the forces of the Qaddafi regime, the discovery of secret meetings between the brutal authority they were currently fighting

against, and members of a group they had been wary of from the start, reinforced their view of the LMB as an untrustworthy actor, not entirely committed to what they saw as the Libyan cause [44].

The 2011 Libyan revolution was a bloody one, characterised by gruesome battles fought between hastily organised Libyan militias and remnants of the Qaddafi regime propped up by foreign mercenaries. This assessment did not escape the LMB. After it turned on Qaddafi and committed to the revolution, it was ready to contribute according to its capabilities, mainly organising support from allied countries, such as Turkey and Qatar. Among the diverse setup of Libyan militias, prominent MB figures or affiliates could be detected. One of them, Abu Kitef, who was jailed for almost 20 years under Qaddafi, spearheaded the Revolutionary Brigades Coalition in eastern Libya and acquired a prominent position in the NTC [9]. Despite logistical support and informal linkages to certain militias, and its members joining some of the armed groups, the MB never established its own military wing. This is unsurprising, due to its ideology and marked commitment to non-violence, as well as its widely negative standing in the country, which could have immediately evoked the concerns of an Islamist conspiracy taking over the country, had the LMB established its own military wing. Still, this also meant that on the Islamist fighting front the increasingly assertive Salafists, in particular, outflanked the MB and wielded considerable street power [9]. As Belhaj explained: “We left the question open and let individuals decide for themselves. Whoever wants to fight, let them fight and we can help. [ . . . ] We did not set up a brigade as we didn’t have a military mentality” [4] (p. 133).

After installing itself in the political power apparatus, the LMB had no military forces under its leadership that they could indiscriminately rely on when trying to enforce security. Consequently, parts of the Libyan population reproached the LMB for insufficiently protecting them—a basic demand they held towards the ruling entity in their country (of which the LMB was part) [7]. Generally speaking, the militarisation of the revolution meant that from the early days, armed groups influenced political decisions. Calculating strategically where to position themselves in the capital, militias from Misrata and Zintan, as well as other armed groups, vied for power in Tripoli immediately after its fall, and continue this power-play to this day [45] (p. 2). Furthermore, efforts such as the one by the former LIFG [46]<sup>9</sup> leader Abd al-Hakim Belhaj, shortly after the fall of Tripoli [45] (p. 3) to unite the multiple groups under a common authority, proved unsuccessful. With the formation of the government of Abd al-Rahim al-Kib in November 2011, many office holders provided existing militias official status and linked that to salaries or even funded the formation of new militias [47]. Again, LMB members were leading actors in this development; e.g., the deputy of the Misratan interior Omar al-Khadrawi, an LMB figure from Zawiya [45] (p. 4). Overall, the LMB’s links to the armed groups were of an opaque nature that resulted in criticism and scepticism among Libyans [7], which ultimately hurt the LMB.

After the LMB became part of the newly elected Libyan government, its actions reinforced the already existing scepticism among parts of the Libyan population that it was not committed to the revolutionary cause. Instead of adopting a democratic style and henceforth coming to terms with consensus politics, it continued its dismissal of the so-called secular forces and even favoured working with the most radical elements to circumvent the disliked liberal forces, this being a harbinger of the LMB’s pursued zero-sum approach to politics. In contrast to An-Nahda in Tunisia, the LMB seemed to divert from the sort of pragmatism that the MB had started to gain an international reputation for—and that its Tunisian affiliation most prominently displayed [4] (p. 7). The most relevant example is the process surrounding the Political Isolation Law that, even if it was in theory supported by broad parts of the Libyan revolutionaries, turned into an unpopular act because of the degrading political bickering surrounding it [48]. The so-called Isolation Law was the Libyan equivalent to similar processes undertaken in other countries where dictatorships were overturned, such as the de-Baathification in Iraq after 2003. The law aimed to purge the whole state apparatus of remnants of

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<sup>9</sup> 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.



the Qaddafi era. However, this was uniquely difficult in Libya, due to the personality-driven nature of the Qaddafi regime, which meant that the purge needed to be carried out against individuals rather than a party [49] (p. 7).

The escalating nature of the revenge against the regime exacerbated the already delicate challenge of deciding who was considered contaminated. For example, one question was over whether those who had been part of the former regime but who had defected to the revolution should be considered contaminated or not [4]. The LMB was among the strongest proponents of a draconian version of the law, and promoted it as a shield for the revolution. Sowane [50]<sup>10</sup> told the media: “We are honoured as the JCP to be demanding the Political Isolation Law. We are part of the societal consensus on the principle of this law” [4] (p. 163). In addition to allegedly boosting the revolutionary legitimacy of the LMB, the Political Isolation Law also brought with it more practical implications, such as discrediting and removing some of the LMB’s political opponents, mostly from the so-called secular strand, including Jibril, who had held key positions in the Qaddafi regime [4]. In the end, the law was passed with the votes of the LMB and the so-called Loyalty to Martyrs faction. However, the political vote was repeatedly interrupted by military interventions, which culminated in armed protesters infringing on the General National Congress (GNC) to force a vote on the law<sup>11</sup>. Following its implementation, many officials whose “only flaw” was to have held high government positions under Qaddafi were removed from office [51] (p. 163). The wide-reaching scope of the law, as well as the violent developments it prompted at first, provided short-term gains for the LMB, such as an Islamist-dominated GNC, but it ultimately caused the dissipation of the only recently established central government’s authority [2] (p. 179).

Hence—and paradoxically, despite its Machiavellian achievements in consolidating its position in the new political system in Libya—the LMB’s popular support plummeted after 2012, since many Libyans saw the LMB as the main hindrance to actual reconstruction and progress in the country, due to its political bickering that failed to acknowledge adequately the common Libyan desire to leave the past behind. Instead, the LMB displayed a “petty tit for tat” [52] approach. Following the precedent of achieving political gains through physical intimidation, the political forces in Libya adapted accordingly. In May 2014, about one year after the enactment of the controversial political Isolation Law, parts of the self-proclaimed non-Islamist militia, the Libyan National Army (LNA), in coordination with the start of General Khalifa Haftar’s campaign in Benghazi, attacked parliament and declared it dissolved [53] (p. 148)<sup>12</sup>. In reaction, the parliamentary forces asked its affiliated militias for protection. Another election was supposed to solve the impasse, so in June 2014, Libyans elected a new parliament. The LMB was in an unfortunate position: Liberal politicians pointed towards the LMB’s links to extremist groups, and Salafists accused the LMB of compromising Islamic principles. As a result, the LMB fared even worse in the 2014 parliamentary elections than in 2012 [54] (p. 148). Of greater relevance than the election results, however, was the fact that the political sphere had become more and more militarised. Therefore, unfortunately but equally unsurprisingly, post-electoral violence in Libya flared up in 2014, as Islamist militias seized control of Tripoli [45] (p. 4), forcing the

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<sup>10</sup> Mohamed Sowane has been the party’s leader since its creation in 2012. He is from the city of Misrata and was a political prisoner for eight years until 2006 under Qaddafi.

<sup>11</sup> In April 2013, revolutionary hardliners from within and outside the capital began a siege of ministerial buildings lasting several weeks. The ostensible aim of the siege was to force the passage of legislation banning former regime officials from holding public office. But when that law was passed by the GNC—Despite rather than because of the siege—The blockade continued. The siege became about physical control of the ministries themselves, and associated influence on appointments and decisions” [45] (pp. 3, 159).

<sup>12</sup> The law’s proponents ( . . . ) were a coalition that included Salafists, the Brotherhood, ex-members of the LIFG, and leaders of revolutionary towns, chiefly Misrata. Many had spent time in prison, and for them, the ban was necessary justice. They also saw it as a means to push from power their political opponents and to secure access funds. And starting in late April 2013, they used force to tip the debate: Their allied militias laid siege to government buildings, encircling them with armed vehicles and demanding the passage of the law. They warned legislation that a vote against it would be akin to treason.

parliament to flee to eastern Libya, and set up a parallel government structure<sup>13</sup>. With this split of state institutions, and both sides claiming to represent the legitimate aspirations of the Libyan people, the country slid into a full-scale civil war. The Islamists, as well as other groups, feared that the country was about to succumb to counter-revolutionary forces, militarily steered by General Khalifa Haftar and politically guided by the House of Representatives, which prompted major responses. In addition, the toppling of Morsi in 2013 scared the LMB but also the wider Islamist scene [55].

Even though it would be unfair to blame the LMB for the eruption of the Libyan civil war, its causes can still be linked to uncompromising political stances and exclusionary policies, including the Political Isolation Law that the LMB keenly promoted [56]. To put it bluntly, instead of providing security for the Libyan population as part of their work in government, the LMB was seen as provoking its political opponents and triggering violence by using armed forces to their advantage rather than for the public good. Over the course of the following months, the LMB again suffered from the lack of distinction made by broad parts of the Libyan population between them and the more militant Islamist forces that carried out, for example, the “Black Saturday” attacks in Benghazi [56]. Among the Libyan people, the feeling took hold that the country had set off down a more radical path, moving them away from the revolutionary, all-encompassing vision for Libya towards a battle for dominance between radical groups, within which the LMB was regarded as part of the radical Islamist camp [7]. During the 2014 civil war, the already prevailing negative image of the LMB became even more pronounced, as national and international actors began to invoke the common fault line known (and resultingly imported it) from other Middle Eastern countries, such as Egypt, Libya’s powerful neighbour, of Islamists versus non-Islamists fighting for power. One interviewee explained:

“For the last six years [since 2012], one of worst political smears in the country is to call someone a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. It has been a prominent narrative in the media since 2014 but also beforehand, that the Muslim Brotherhood is largely to blame for the collapse of the post-revolutionary authorities and for most of the strife that is occurring today”. [57]

Despite the fact that the violent outbreak in 2014 cannot be attributed to any one single group or even one fault line [52], the narrative of Islamists fighting apparently secular, non-Islamist forces became the dominant discourse and was deliberately invoked by many, most prominently the head of the LNA, Haftar, who framed his military advances as fighting back against Islamist terrorism, lumping together all Islamist groups, including the LMB [44]. Witnessing the violent developments in Libya, and with it the growing presence of the Islamic State in the country, international powers stepped in and pursued a UN-backed peace process, resulting in the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA, also known as the Skhirat accord), signed in December 2015. However, despite having brought some stability, these efforts did not succeed in establishing a united government. The separation of political institutions continues, with the eastern-based House of Representatives (HoR) refusing to recognise the internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) and the Presidential Council (PC) in Tripoli.

The LMB has become part of the western-based authority structures and exerts little influence in the eastern parts of the country [58,59]. Like many other political players, the LMB first opposed the UN-backed process, but by late 2015 domestic pressure seemed to have reached breaking point, so the LMB changed tack to support the LPA and GNA. Following the LPA, recently, the LMB has seemed to promote a more conciliatory tone towards its political opponents than was witnessed in the

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<sup>13</sup> Losses on the political front added to the Misratans and Islamists alarm over the Zintanis military buildup. Across the country, in the June 25 elections for the House of representatives, Misratan, Islamist and revolutionary factions suffered losses to figures affiliated with the NFA. Many of the Islamists now worried that the new parliament would undercut their influence, reverse the Political Isolation Law, and divert funds away from their militias. Some even feared for their lives. The Islamists wanted guarantees and assurances that they would not meet the same fate as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt—Imprisonment or worse [53].

immediate aftermath of the 2011 revolution or its stance regarding the controversial Political Isolation Law. For example, the JCP stood up to some elements it had been partnered with previously, including the Grand Mufti Sadiq al-Ghariani. It condemned his statements that all signatories of the LPA were “non-believers” and rejected his accusations as irresponsible and a possible invitation to “shed the blood” of the figures connected to this peace deal and its resulting institutions. The JCP also rejected the Shaykh’s use of religious fatwas for political gain. Instead it emphasised that the LPA and the GNA were needed for the Libyan people to reconcile, set aside military conflicts and create a state for all Libyans [7].

These statements portray a noticeable shift from its previous appreciation of favourable fatwas by al-Ghariani in the 2012 election campaign. A second indication of the LMB trying to portray itself as a less divisive and more unifying Libyan force are recent social media statements by its leader Mohammed Sowane, praising as martyrs, those killed while fighting under Khalifa Haftar’s military campaign fighting “terrorists” [60]. While these statements have caused irritation and even shocked some Libyans, because Haftar designated the LMB as “terrorists” themselves [61,62], they can also be understood as attempts by Sowane to appeal to broader parts of the Libyan population. Furthermore, with Haftar’s forces gaining more and more ground, and he himself personally achieving international acceptance (France elevated him to the diplomatic stage and Western forces regard him as crucial for Libya’s future), it could be a pragmatic attempt by the LMB to curry favour with Haftar. As the LMB gains more experience in the Libyan political sphere, it seems to be adapting to the behavioural patterns commonly displayed by political groups, such as being more cautious when vulnerable [63] (p. 47). With a political solution and elections still favoured as the way out of Libya’s current power quagmire, the LMB would also have an interest in being seen as trying to unite Libya, rather than divide it, as it has been accused of in the past. To sum up, it is very difficult to say what path the future of the LMB in Libya holds, as it depends on what path the country as a whole will take.

Overall, this section has traced the LMB’s attempts to position itself in the Libyan political sphere by trying to portray itself as a truly revolutionary force in post-Qaddafi Libya. However, the LMB quickly abandoned the inclusive vision propagated during the revolution and got sucked into political power-plays for influence and military control in a political space that exhibited few to no remaining structures, due to Qaddafi’s regime being centred on his personage. It is unfair to single out the LMB, as it was acting within the difficult Libyan context and, as a matter of fact, there has seldom been “normal politics” in Libya in several years. This situation reflects the absence of political culture; instead, various actors have indulged in zero-sum politics, using the available political resources to their own advantage. All political actors relied on crude narratives: The LMB, for example, fearmongered by suggesting some liberal actors were “Azlam Qaddafi” (Qaddafi’s men); their opponents lumped Islamists groups together and, especially after 2013, denounced them as “terrorists” [64] (p. 148).

In summary, the LMB’s unclear position at the beginning of the revolution, its consequent failure to engage in democratic politics of compromise, and its denunciation of the liberal forces culminating in the push for the draconian Political Isolation Law that served only to shatter the country, alienated the LMB from an already suspicious population. These issues also reinforced the image that the LMB, rather than truly being a force of the 2011 revolution, instead had jumped on the bandwagon of this political development to press for its own agenda, an agenda of which many Libyans seem to be wary and regard as not in line with the Libyan national cause [65]. This is also partly due to the LMB’s international entanglements.

#### **4. The Muslim Brotherhood’s Quest for Legitimacy in the Post-Qaddafi Libyan Political Sphere as a “Truly Libyan Actor”**

Next to the dimensions of Islam and the revolution, Libyan political operators can also draw legitimacy if they are seen as credible actors entirely committed to the national cause and not influenced by outside forces. Libyans are particularly wary of outside intervention of any kind [4] (p. 141). For a group like the LMB, which was forced into exile and survived only because of its presence and

activism in foreign countries, it has been naturally difficult to claim credibly that it was not and is not pursuing a foreign agenda and is instead a truly national Libyan actor. The following section outlines how the perceived international dependencies of the LMB have negatively influenced the movement's standing in the country. It focuses on four key aspects: The LMB's connection to the global Muslim Brotherhood movement in general, its alleged ties to the Egyptian MB in particular, the military support it received from international powers, including Qatar and Turkey, and, finally, the MB's suspected influence over the media.

In the early days after the 2011 revolution the LMB was already accused of being connected to the global Muslim Brotherhood movement in general, and were suspected of subordination to the powerful MB movement in neighbouring Egypt, in particular [4] (p. 197). For example, Ali Tarhouni, the head of the National Centrist Party, openly and heavily criticised the LMB in December 2011, degrading them as being "foreigners" and importing a "foreign ideology" to Libya [4] (p. 155). While the first public meeting of the LMB in Libya after the fall of Qaddafi seemed a huge success for the movement itself, with more than 700 people in attendance, the meeting in Benghazi also stressed the movement's link to "something bigger" than just Libya, as it included guest speakers from other MB affiliates, such as An-Nahda and the banned Syrian MB [66]. However, when the meeting is examined in the Libyan context, its international character caused repercussions, since it reinforced many Libyans' conviction that the LMB was mostly staffed by foreigners or Libyans heavily influenced by foreign powers—that, from the perspective of one interviewee. Therefore, the JCP candidates, as well as other LMB figures running as individuals, repeatedly emphasised their independence from international influences and their opposition to foreign interference—with only limited success [9].

At the same time, Mohamed Sowane, the leader of the JCP, also stated the obvious: The JCP was cooperating with their successful counterparts in Egypt, Tunisia and Turkey to "to teach our members the right skills" [4]. While this statement should not come as a surprise to anyone or provoke any controversy—that different political parties of the same movement cooperate—those kinds of seemingly innocent remarks, nonetheless, cause repercussions in the Libyan context. Furthermore, the attempt by the JCP to market itself as independent from the MB in general and the LMB in particular proved to be more difficult in practice than it was envisaged in theory, to the point at which the decision was made to establish a party formally independent of the MB, and open to all with "similar beliefs" [4]. This was complicated by the opaque nature of the LMB, which habitually conceals its activities. Among prominent politicians and Brothers, the current head of the High Council of State Khaled al-Mishri has publicly remarked in a broadcasted interview, that he belongs to the LMB but added the caveat that he does not represent the LMB but only the interests of the High Council of State [67]. This can still be considered bogus, "given the fact that we know how the MB functions, how it really ticks and how it tries to influence the political sphere. I think it is really holding people to be idiots a bit, so I don't see him as being very credible" [44]. Looking at the MB more generally, the belief of secret ties with the West is a recurring theme not only in Egypt, but also in the Middle East more broadly, as it taps into the prevalent vein of suspicion regarding the West's agenda in the Middle East that has long been prominent within Arab nationalist discourse [28] (p. 3). Since the LMB is part of the global MB movement in general and is seen as heavily influenced by its Egyptian counterpart in particular<sup>14</sup>, such beliefs were also projected onto the LMB [57]. After 2011, many Libyans still considered the LMB as a branch of the Egyptian MB, and since they did not want to be ruled by Egypt, they did not want to be ruled by the LMB [68]. One interviewee could not even understand

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<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that the MB's relationship with the West has been crucial from its inception, since the West as an idea as well as reality on the ground in the Middle East was defining for its founder Hasan al-Banna in 1928. The MB conceptualised the West (especially the UK and US) as the critical "other" by which it defined its own "self"; and with the MB growing in influence, the Western powers that exerted primary influence over Egypt and the wider region could not ignore the MB and paid close attention to the movement. Simultaneously that means that changes and continuities in the MB's thinking on its relationship with the West reveal much about the broader evolution of the group [28]. While this interdependence is important, in this current research, I am only focusing on local dimensions and perceptions.

the question of possible foreign influence on the LMB at first, as for him it seemed that was obvious. He responded:

“Who do you call foreign powers or by foreign powers? Because the Muslim Brotherhood is a foreign, international idea. It is supported by foreign powers, like it is supposed to be supported and gets support by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and supported by Erdogan because it’s the same. The idea is to be globalised; this is the whole idea of the Muslim Brotherhood”. [57]

In summary, the international attachment to the global MB movement proved a heavy burden for the political presence of the MB in Libya, a country wary of foreign interference (where strong links to foreign powers can damage an actor’s domestic legitimacy) and a country that underwent decades of fear mongering of the LMB by Qaddafi.

As mentioned in the previous section, the LMB understood the relevance of the armed struggle in Libya and started providing military support mostly channelled from Qatar and Turkey into the country [4] (p. 132). For example, Belhaj is regarded as having emerged as a strong military player, due to Qatar’s help. Yet, because of this, he has also been repeatedly called out for being dependent on Qatar, a foreign power, rather than relying on support inside Libya—again capturing the Libyan suspicion of external interests [5] (p. 150). In general, Libyans were aware of the many foreign powers that intervened directly and indirectly in the country over the course of the 2011 revolution and its aftermath; Qatar was seen as favouring Islamist-leaning fighters during the revolution. This sentiment was perpetuated throughout the 2012 election campaign period with, for example, Jibril’s National Forces Alliance (NFA) exaggerating these links, and thus damaging the JCP’s standing [9] (p. 203). Even if today, some Libyans acknowledge that other countries such as the UAE or Egypt are much more heavily involved in Libya supporting non-MB forces and “you not have Qatari or Turkish airplanes in the Libyan sky” [69], the notion that there “still definitely is support [ . . . ] and the Qataris want Libya to look a certain way” is there [44]. Meanwhile, there is also the belief that the “MB in Libya has an agenda like in Turkey. That they want a state like in Turkey. People don’t see that like a good direction” [57]. That belief has not vanished, and the popular perception is that the LMB is “heavily funded and influenced by the Egyptian MB and is kind of a parallel organisation with Qatari money and Turkish assistance from Erdogan who is seen as himself an extension of the MB” [52]. Another factor many point towards is the number of MB sympathisers and followers that have chosen to flee to Turkey and Qatar to avoid any acts of violence against them [70].

Lastly, the LMB’s close links with Qatar also left most Libyans with the impression that they were in a favourable position regarding media portrayal [7]; much of the material aired on Al Jazeera as the revolution unfolded seemed to have come directly from the movement [4] (p. 132, p. ii). In addition, the LMB was very active in establishing media outlets after the media landscape opened up in 2011; some sources claim that 90 percent of the new newspapers that have started to be issued after the revolution (180 newspapers) are controlled by hard-line Islamists in the midst of reports about extensive support by the International Organisation of the Muslim Brotherhood for the members of the group in Libya [71].

These struggles faced by the LMB and its political affiliate, the JCP naturally, are also discussed internally in the movement and party, with some advocating strict disengagement of the JCP from the LMB, some advocating a renaming and rebranding the JCP to leave behind its MB baggage, and others promoting closer ties [72]. It is difficult to say how these internal disagreements will play out. It is, however, safe to say that the previous handling of the connection between the LMB and JCP has not helped the JCP’s attempt to present itself as a truly national actor. This is due to some of its actions, but also due to the predefined image the Libyan people already had in mind, thanks to Qaddafi’s indoctrination, of the LMB as an outside power of which they should be wary. Libyans are paying a high price because of foreign interference, and therefore, any foreign affiliation is viewed suspiciously. In practice, this also means that Libyan political forces are extremely cautious about cooperation with external actors because of the fear of being accused of betraying their own constituencies. Actors such



as the LMB, which might be considered in an advantageous position due to its foreign connections, in reality end up being regarded as privileged by outside forces, and therefore, somehow “illegitimate” in the eyes of ordinary citizens [73] (p. 199).

## 5. Conclusions

Focusing on the claim of revolutionary and national credentials, this paper assessed two potential ways for the LMB’s pursuit to manifest itself as a political actor in post-revolutionary Libya. Somewhat counterintuitively, Libya as a predominantly Sunni country with a conservative society, did not automatically mean a success story for a conservative Sunni movement like the MB, circumventing the ill-informed opinion that North Africa was “going Islamist” after the Arab uprisings [4] (p. 144). Addressing this puzzle, the article assessed the significant aspects that thwarted the LMB’s trajectory in post-Qaddafi Libya. The LMB did not manage to liberate itself from the historical imprint Qaddafi had imposed on them that was characterised by condemnation, as he feared an Islamist challenge. Furthermore, the paper establishes how credibly the LMB was able to convey its commitment in two sources of legitimacy in current Libya. Lastly, this paper contributed a uniquely Libyan addition to the debate on how political groups establish legitimacy.

The LMB proved capable of infiltrating the political system, influencing political decision-making to an extent where it ended up being the most muscular force in enforcing a draconian version of the Political Isolation Law, with that excluding some of its most relevant competitors from influencing politics. To sum up, this paper has shown that the LMB conducted a zero-sum approach rather than bridging gaps and striving for compromise. Simultaneously, the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood, is hostage to military developments in the country, which means it is operating in a prodigiously challenging environment, as the country is sorely fragmented and political forces remain incapable of controlling the battleground—just as other political forces are as well [4] (p. 179). However, after installing itself in the political power apparatus, the LMB had no military forces under its leadership that they could indiscriminately rely on when trying to enforce security. Consequently, parts of the Libyan population reproached the LMB for insufficiently protecting them—a basic demand they held towards the ruling entity in their country (of which the LMB was part).

Over the course of the last years, the LMB has followed a more hawkish and less compromise-oriented approach to politics than An-Nahda in Tunisia, and while striving to inflate its influence in Libyan politics, cooperated with more radical Islamist groups. At the same time, however, the LMB started publishing more reconciliatory statements while attempting a moderating stance, such as expressing support for the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) [67] or even more noteworthy, attempting to appeal to its fiercest opponents like Haftar; for example, by referring to the LNA fighters that died in recent battles as “martyrs” [74]. Next to the purely political elements, it is still uncertain if the LMB can afford to push for a stronger, more advanced social network resembling its Egyptian entrenchment in society; if successful, this social outreach could bolster the LMB and facilitate popular mobilisation from which it could profit politically [42]. However, as it currently stands, and as a result of its limited embedment into Libyan society, containing its positions of institutional power in the country is vital for the LMB’s survival [44]. At the time of writing, politics in Libya is divided and its future make-up is volatile because it is highly dependent on military moves nationally, and diplomatic developments internationally [44]. Overall, the LMB is a force to reckon with in future Libyan politics, 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 [4] (p. 250).

Lastly, it is important to point out that Libya was under authoritarian rule for over four decades, or more precisely even: Embedded in a totalitarian system that eradicated political culture and nurtured an approach of zero-sum politics. The LMB’s development in the past and present was and is influenced by the environment it operates; therefore, the LMB is also a result of Libya’s preconditions

before 2011, and other political actors 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” [4] (p. 253). The outcome is a growing public conviction that Libya might be better off without political parties<sup>15</sup>, and regionally, carries implications for the MB movement as a whole, regarding the construct that had it survive the last decades; namely, relying on overseas networks indubitably carries negative implications for local branches trying to build their national legitimacy.

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17. Or in Arabic al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn, الإخوان المسلمون

<sup>15</sup> As Amir Kamel elaborates in his chapter on “Post-Gaddafi Libya: Rejecting a political party system”, the mere notion and function of political parties was entirely alien in Libya in 2011 and the developments in the following years that portrayed little responsibility and leadership by political party leaders linked to improvements for the Libyan population has not revamped but rather exacerbated that image [73].

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