

Global Communications

EDITED BY CAROLA RICHTER AND CLAUDIA KOZMAN

Arab Media Systems





<https://www.openbookpublishers.com>

© 2021 Carola Richter and Claudia Kozman. Copyright of individual chapters is maintained by the chapters' authors.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC BY 4.0). This license allows you to share, copy, distribute and transmit the text; to adapt the text and to make commercial use of the text providing attribution is made to the authors (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work). Attribution should include the following information:

Carola Richter and Claudia Kozman (eds), *Arab Media Systems*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0238>

In order to access detailed and updated information on the license, please visit <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0238#copyright>

Further details about CC BY licenses are available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

All external links were active at the time of publication unless otherwise stated and have been archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine at <https://archive.org/web>

Updated digital material and resources associated with this volume are available at <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0238#resources>

Every effort has been made to identify and contact copyright holders and any omission or error will be corrected if notification is made to the publisher.



This project received support from the Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA) that has been funded under the German Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) grant 01DL20003.

This publication was financed in part by the open access fund for monographs and edited volumes of the Freie Universität Berlin.

ISBN Paperback: 9781800640597

ISBN Hardback: 9781800640603

ISBN Digital (PDF): 9781800640610

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 9781800640627

ISBN Digital ebook (mobi): 9781800640634

ISBN XML: 9781800640641

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0238

Cover design by Anna Gatti based on a photo by Duangphorn Wiriya on Unsplash at <https://unsplash.com/photos/KiMpFTuuAk>

15. Libya: From Jamahirization to Post-Revolutionary Chaos

Carola Richter

“From house to house, from apartment to apartment, from alley to alley”, he would “cleanse Libya of dirt and filth.” With this statement, Mu’ammār Al-Qadhafi threatened rebels during the Arab uprisings in a thunderous speech delivered on 22 February 2011 on Libyan state television. As he had so often done, he tried to use ‘his’ medium to explain, justify, and mobilize. The media—and television, in particular—were understood by the self-proclaimed “Brother Leader” to be a direct channel to the masses since he had come to power in 1969.

William Rugh (1987) classified the Libyan media system as a mobilization system. Mobilization media intend to shake people up, make them good citizens, and, at best, educate them. In practice, however, this approach involved disseminating regime propaganda through media, which, in a simple sender-receiver model, the regime assumed to have immediate effects on the audience. This conception of the media as instruments for disseminating ideology to a supposedly receptive audience is still prevalent in the Libyan media system today even after the fall of the Qadhafi regime.

Background

Libya is, in principle, a rich country with the largest oil reserves in Africa. In 2012, its 6.7 million inhabitants yielded a GDP of USD 15,597 per capita. However, this had dropped to below USD 8,000 by 2018.

Libya had already previously faced economic difficulties, particularly during the era of UN-imposed sanctions from 1992 to 2003 that caused a low GDP of USD 4,120 per capita to be recorded in 2002. Import bans on many technical products such as computers also slowed down consumption and modernization of infrastructure until the mid-2000s.

Prior to this period, in the 1970s and 1980s, Qadhafi's modernization policy, which was financed by oil rents, strongly developed the country and brought benefits to citizens such as free basic education for all. Whereas 90% of the population was illiterate at the time of independence in 1951, today, almost all inhabitants can read and write. The population of Libya is young despite significantly declining birth rates: 28% are under 15 years of age.

The country consists of three historically distinct regions, namely Tripolitania with Tripoli as the capital in the west, the Cyrenaica with the metropolis of Benghazi in the east, and the Fezzan, the desert region with the city of Sabha in the south. Most people live in Tripoli and Benghazi as well as in other coastal cities along the Mediterranean Sea. The vastness of the country has always created challenges for media infrastructure. Transporting newspapers to the desert regions has been a major problem—even in the 2000s, they arrived in the cities of the hinterland two to three days after publication. Even national radio and television did not reach many of the country's regions before the arrival of satellite technology.

In such a huge country, there are several factors that influence identity formation. Despite Qadhafi's attempt to impose a revolutionary transformation on society and his focus on "Arabness" (Smith, 2013, p. 176), traditional tribal identities remain strong. Ethnic affiliations, such as the Imazighen (or Berbers) in the west, and the Tuareg in the south, who make up about 10% of the population and maintain their own language, also constitute potential areas of conflict. Until 2011, the media were banned from using Amazigh, the Berber language, but now it is present on local radio stations and in newspapers. Being a native of western Tripolitania or eastern Cyrenaica around Benghazi also plays a major role in identity formation. Since Italian colonial rule, the East has been regarded as a stronghold of resistance against the authorities. In 2011, the fall of Qadhafi was also heralded there. Both traditional tribal loyalties as well as modern political affiliations are partly responsible for

the country's current power struggles and formation of militias (Lacher, 2013).

However, there are no significant religious minorities; 97% of the population are Sunni Muslims. In general, Libyan society can be described as moderately conservative. The dissolution of state structures after 2011 and the resulting migration of Islamist fighters from Syria to Libya, Mali, and Nigeria has led to radicalization among some groups in Libya. For some time, the Islamic State (IS) had strongholds in some regions in Libya.

Under Qadhafi, women were legally equal to men. In everyday life they could pursue a variety of professions but did not have and still do not have the same public presence as men.

Historical Developments

Libya's modern media development can be divided into four major stages, all of which have been characterized by an authoritarian state approach. This style of approach provided a clear orientation of the media within the context of a regime policy: under the brutal colonial rule of the Italians from 1911–1943, the British Mandate from 1943–1951, the rule of conservative King Idris from 1951–1969, and that of Qadhafi from 1969–2011. Even after the fall of Qadhafi, the media have found it difficult to break away from this legacy.

Compared with its Arab neighbors, Libya was a laggard in terms of press development. It was not until 1866 that the first Turkish-Arabic weekly, *Tarabulus Al-Gharb*, appeared as an official organ of the Ottoman Sultan. From then until 1929, only 13 newspapers were published within Libya. With the Treaty of Lausanne, the Ottomans handed over Libya to the Italians in 1912, and before the end of that year, all newspapers were discontinued and replaced by government-owned propaganda papers such as *Barid Barqa*. Even the first developments in radio brought nothing but Italian propaganda for the Libyans. Italian shortwave stations from Rome were transmitted via loudspeakers to many Libyan cities from 1937 onwards (Al-Zilitni, 1981, p. 114). In contrast to other colonized states in the region, Libya underwent no modernization whatsoever during the occupation. On the contrary, Italian colonizers exterminated

one-eighth of the Libyan population in concentration camps between 1922 and 1939.

After an interim period under the British Mandate, Libya gained formal independence through the UN on 24 December 1951. The anti-Italian resistance movement of the Sanussiyya Brotherhood subsequently placed its leader Idris Al-Sanussi on the newly created throne of a federal Libyan kingdom. After the discovery of oil in 1959, a period of cautious modernization began which transformed the media sector. A Ministry of Information and National Leadership was established, which was responsible for all official press and broadcasting. The private and official press coexisted. The spirit of optimism that many Libyans returning from exile in neighboring countries brought with them to their homeland led to a rapid resurgence of the press (Mattes, 1986, p. 42). For Libyan writers, the press represented the only possibility of publication, since book production only began in the late 1950s. As a result, most newspapers were more concerned with literary, cultural, and social problems. For this reason, the press was seen as a "public university" (Al-Zilitni, 1981, p. 104) with a strong educational function. However, Press Law No. 11 of 1959 imposed severe restrictions on the media. The royal house felt pressure from the burgeoning Arab nationalist movement, which emanated from Egypt and grew with the struggles for independence within the still colonized neighboring states (Richter, 2004). Under Idris, the inhabitants of Tripoli were able to receive radio programs from the nearby Wheelus Air Base of the US forces. In 1956, the Americans and British handed over the newly developed radio program *Voice of Libya* to the Ministry of Information. The first national television station, set up in 1968, was also financed to a large extent by the US.

1 September 1969 marked a great turning point in Libya's history. Riding on the wave of anti-colonial sentiment, Mu'ammarr Al-Qadhafi and a group of young military men carried out a bloodless coup against King Idris. Following the example of Egypt's president Nasser, who had turned radio into a revolutionary medium, "the very first act" (Al-Zilitni, 1981, p. 121) after taking over power was to put the radio facilities into the hands of Libyan revolutionaries. Qadhafi's speeches, which often lasted hours, were henceforth broadcast completely live on radio and television. The radio was directly subordinate to the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), and private newspapers were

systematically forced out of the market from February 1970 onwards as state advertisements were withdrawn from their pages. In addition, all foreign language media closed down for lack of an audience after the American and British bases were evacuated and Italian settlers were expelled from the country.

From 1972 onwards, a complete restructuring of the press landscape took place. Competition was seen as a useless function of the media system. After the ban on all private newspapers in October 1973, all media became part of state institutions. The so-called Green Book, a 100-page manifesto written by Qadhafi himself in 1975, drew up a "Third Universal Theory" alongside capitalism and communism, and was henceforth regarded as a kind of state constitution. The media system played a key role in transforming Libya into the "people's mass state" (*jamahiriya*) that Qadhafi had envisaged. As a result of this "Jamahirization", a tripartite media system was installed. It consisted of a one-dimensional press of the respective syndicates, in which doctors, policemen, peasants, etc. had to organize themselves into syndicates, revolutionary corrective media with the *Al-Zahf Al-Akhdar* newspaper as the leading force, and centrally controlled national media. Over the course of this restructuring process, salary payments to writers were stopped as journalism was perceived only as an activity to make money.

However, the result was unsatisfactory for Qadhafi. Therefore, in a "cultural revolution" in 1980, the central press organization was completely abolished, and the revolutionary committees took over the radio and news agency *JANA*. The prisons were filled with intellectuals, including many journalists. This so-called cultural revolution was accompanied by a devastating economic and armament policy and a grueling war with Chad, and by the mid-1980s, these events had almost led Libya into bankruptcy. Therefore, Qadhafi initiated yet another radical change of policy related to domestic and economic liberalization. In March 1988, Qadhafi even announced that the borders would be completely opened and introduced a human rights charter and freedom of the press. The imposition of UN sanctions in 1992 because of Libyan involvement in the airplane attack over Lockerbie led, however, to new economic difficulties, including a newsprint crisis that lasted until the mid-2000s. It was not until 2003 that the sanctions were completely lifted.

Thereafter, and in the course of the attempted enthronement of Mu'ammār's second oldest son, Saif Al-Islam Al-Qadhafi, there was a brief period that saw a kind of pseudo-critical media flourish (Richter, 2013). Saif Al-Islam propagated a reform program called "Libya of Tomorrow" (*libya al-ghad*) in 2006. Although this program remained politically overoptimistic, Saif Al-Islam succeeded in launching two new newspapers (*Oea* in Tripoli and *Quryna* in Benghazi), a radio station, several news websites, a new news agency, and two satellite television channels (*Al-Libiya* and *Al-Shababiya*) and thereby significantly expanded the Libyan media system. These newspapers and programs appeared much more professional than the rest of the media. Foreign press was also suddenly accessible and international press agencies were allowed to open offices. A member of the exiled opposition called this phenomenon "Al-Ghad journalism", highlighting the fact that this was by no means an expression of general liberalization under Qadhafi, but merely a very limited freedom (Al-Mohair, 2009). Criticism of Qadhafi himself was absolutely inadmissible. As a result of increased resentment from the Revolutionary Committees, all of these media organs were reinstated in 2009, and *Al-Libiya* was taken over as the second state television channel. Although this put an end to the pseudo-liberalization, *libya al-ghad* remained a good school for Libyan journalists who went on to successfully establish their own media after the fall of the regime in 2011 (Wollenberg & Pack, 2013, p. 204).

Political System and Legal Framework

The uprising of Qadhafi's opponents, which began on 17 February 2011 in Benghazi and was supported by NATO, became a triumphal procession for rebels, and put an end to Mu'ammār Al-Qadhafi's 42-year rule in August 2011. The political and legal frameworks that had been in place until then were completely suspended.

The Libyan media had experienced 80 years of strong dependence on ruling elites and tight control of all media outlets. Thus, in 2011, during the early phase of the transition period and after rigid control mechanisms had vanished, one could observe a "media stampede" in Benghazi and later in Tripoli. In Benghazi alone—a city with a population of roughly 600,000 people—120 new newspapers, five radio

stations, and five television stations were launched (Wollenberg & Recker, 2012, p. 6). The breakdown of state control over mass media and public communication allowed long-oppressed ethnic minorities, dissidents, and other formally marginalized groups in society to finally voice their opinions. To participate in public debate on the future of their country was an opportunity that many had been longing for and, in the sudden absence of restrictions, this unprecedented freedom allowed media outlets to blossom (Wollenberg & Pack, 2013). Although most of the newly emerging channels eventually failed due to a lack of funding in the years following their establishment, the importance of public articulation in a formerly repressed society became clear.

Still, the new era provided many challenges. The so-called National Transitional Council (NTC) ran all political operations until a regular government under Prime Minister Ali Zaidan was finally formed after the first elections in November 2012. However, the government remained weak in the face of the *de facto* power of the still existing militias, which had legitimized themselves as combat troops against Qadhafi. In the summer of 2014, a war between rival militias plunged Libya into an unresolved leadership crisis that threatened to gradually divide the country into regions under the rule of different groups (Watanabe, 2016).

Since that time, Libya has been both geographically divided and politically fragmented. In the east of Libya, including the city of Benghazi, one main political entity emerged: an alliance called the Libyan National Army (LNA), which included remnants of the old regime and was led by former general Khalifa Haftar. This alliance also comprised the 2014 elected and displaced House of Representatives (HoR) in Tobruk and the interim government in Al-Bayda. In 2014, the LNA launched a military campaign called "Operation Dignity," claiming its mission was to rid Libya of Islamist forces, and succeeded in conquering mainly the eastern cities of the country. In reaction to this campaign, several changing coalitions were set up in the western part of the country, including Islamist forces. The unifying umbrella was their opposition to the LNA, and they formed what came to be known as "Operation Dawn." In particular, the Dawn coalition consisted of dozens of rival networks built on tribal interests and local loyalties (Lacher, 2015). All of these actors were also competing for international support, for example,

from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, which considered Libya as a battleground within which they could enlarge their spheres of influence. Daraghi (2015) concluded that “Libya’s conflict has become more than ideological; it is also about the interest and relative power of different groups—and a fear of losing that power” (p. 50). This fear is also reflected in more recent developments. After the 17 December 2015 Skhirat Agreement was negotiated by the UN, the Government of National Accord (GNA), headed by Fayaz Al-Sarraj, was established in Tripoli to follow up on the intermittent transition process. Observers have argued, however, that instead of unifying the country, the GNA has become the political arm of an alliance of militias that exploits state resources (Lacher, 2018). The *de facto* separation of the state remains in place, with two main players—the LNA in the east and the GNA in the west—but there are also many local militias that exist and function within and between these players.

The resulting political confusion has had a massive impact on the organization of the media sector, which is now completely unregulated and governed by arbitrariness instead of law. Although the NTC had immediately appointed a media commission in 2011 to consider media regulation, the latter was abolished by the end of the year, and a newly established Ministry of Culture was entrusted with this task (Wollenberg & Pack, 2013, p. 201). In May 2012, the NTC attempted to establish a High Media Council (HMC) appointed by the NTC to oversee the media and draw up media policy guidelines. Immediately after the formation of the government, the parliament rejected the idea of the council in November 2012 and installed a Ministry of Information, as in authoritarian times, because, as one member of parliament put it, “Freedom is not equal to chaos—and that is what we have at the moment” (Grant, 2012).

In December 2011, with decree 7/2011, the decision was made to continue to operate state media and to transfer pre-existing staff into new institutions. Starting in May 2012, the government operated three television stations through the state-owned Libyan Radio and Television Network (LRT): *Libya Al-Wataniya TV* (the former *Al-Jamahiriyah TV*) with a 24-hour program, *Libya Al-Rasmiya TV* (the former *Al-Libiyah TV* founded by Saif Al-Islam), and a sports channel. After the arrival of the GNA, all three channels were placed under its control.

Some local terrestrial stations, such as *Misrata TV* or the *Benghazi Broadcasting Network*, had also received state funding until 2014. In addition, the news agency *LANA* (formerly *JANA*) remained a governmental body after the replacement of its executive board. Moreover, a press support committee (CESP) was set up to publish the daily newspaper *Febriayer* and several weekly newspapers and to provide other support for publications (El Issawi, 2013, p. 24).

Several radio and television stations have been licensed since 2011, increasing the number of broadcasting outlets to more than 50 by 2012 alone. Press and online organs were able to publish without a license, and dozens were founded and often disappeared just as quickly (Wollenberg & Recker, 2012). With the outbreak of fighting in mid-2014, many media ceased publishing or changed their political orientation or formats. For example, the popular *Al-Assema TV* in Tripoli was stormed by militias and had to close down completely. After the militias took over power, new channels emerged. These were either instruments of or, at least, loyal to the new rulers, such as *February TV* or *Libya 24* (Fhelboom, 2014). Currently, there is no regulatory body that oversees and governs Libyan media in either the East or West of the country.

Today's situation has resulted in journalism once again becoming an instrument of particular interest groups. Thus far, there has been no move to establish a new press or media law to replace the one from the 1970s. Although the interim constitution of August 2011 guarantees freedom of opinion and the press in Article 14, influential warlords generally define what may be said and written.

In this climate, the media and journalists have become frequent targets of militant attacks. Human Rights Watch counted 91 attacks or threats against journalists from 2012 to November 2014, including 30 cases of kidnapping and eight murders. There were also 26 armed attacks on television and radio stations (Human Rights Watch, 2015, pp. 1–2). At the same time, ever since the factual partition of the country, the media have been forced to take sides or refrain from politics altogether. This has resulted in less violent attacks against journalists because many now practice self-censorship for the sake of protection against reprisals. In fact, even before the war of militias, journalists had begun to form their own professional associations in order to organize their interests and to agree on journalistic ethical standards. In June 2012,

the representatives of the General Media Union (GMU) were elected in Jadu (Legatum Institute, 2012), but due to the fragmentation of the country these efforts fizzled out.

Economy and Ownership Patterns

Media ownership under Qadhafi was clearly regulated, and only public corporations were allowed to publish media outlets. The underlying credo that Libyan people would acquire control over the media remained an ideological construction. In reality, it was a nationalization of the media. Media production was largely financed by the country's oil rents. Libya also currently has the third-largest share (11.2%) in the USD 500 million *ArabSat* satellite system, which is jointly operated by the states of the Arab League, after Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Under Qadhafi, broadcasting was financed entirely by state funds without costs for the population. Until 2007, there was only one television station; nevertheless, Libyan national television and radio employed about 5,000 people, the press 1,200, and the national news agency about 240. Although many of these employees worked in administrative or technical departments, media institutions were overstaffed. Until 2011, the entire press operation of the country had an extremely low combined distribution total of only a couple of thousand copies. As a rule, the authorities and embassies ordered large amounts of quotas, even paid a surcharge on the normal price and then distributed the newspapers to their employees free of charge. In addition to direct state subsidies and advertisements by state companies, these indirect subsidies ensured the survival of print products (Richter, 2004, p. 55). However, as a result of the lack of professionalism and quality of the Libyan media, no real reading culture had yet developed. For this reason alone, it was extremely difficult for new press outlets established after 2011 to find a permanent sales market. Privately financed newspapers still struggle to develop strong business models given the problems associated with print media. Hardly any national daily newspapers exist today; most of the 200 newspapers that still existed in 2012 were local papers with only a small circulation of a few hundred or thousand copies (Wollenberg & Recker, 2012).

In contrast to the dying print media, broadcasting is thriving. A media mapping of 2018 revealed that there are now 14 Libyan television stations and 122 local radio stations throughout Libya in both urban and rural areas, as well as some transmitting from outside Libya (Wollenberg & Richter, 2020). These are significant numbers, given the small size of the population, which is estimated to be around only 6.7 million inhabitants. According to the media mapping, each of the three strong and adversarial camps that dominate Libya's political landscape has their own media wing. One camp is supported by the LNA and its allies in the east of the country. All broadcasters in this sector are fully or partly funded by the respective government authorities. An equally strong camp is supportive of the GNA in the area of Tripolitania, and six broadcasters within this territory are directly funded by the GNA. Finally, there is a variety of media outlets operated or supported by different Islamist movements in Libya, namely the rather moderate Muslim Brotherhood and Jihadist groups such as the Islamic Fighting Group and the Saudi-backed ultraconservative Salafi Madkhali movement (Luck, 2018). With 35 affiliated outlets, Islamist groups control a significant proportion of media outlets with diverse political interests and agendas. The Salafi Madkhali movement operates 17 radio stations throughout the country, which all broadcast Qur'an recitations, sermons, and seminars that are in line with their school of thought.

A substantial number of television channels (6 out of 14) are broadcast from abroad, eight of which receive funding from sources outside Libya. *Libya 24* has been operating from London since 2014, allegedly with funding from Libyans in the UAE. Likewise, the channels *TV218* and *Libya's Channel*, both with headquarters in Amman, purportedly receive funding from sources in the UAE. *Libya's Channel* was founded in Jordan in March 2015 by the brother of the Libyan ambassador to the UAE (Libya Herald, 2015). Libyan benefactors who live abroad provide funding for *Libya Al-Watan*, which has operated from Tunisia since 2017. Another example of this external media production and funding model is *Al-Nabaa*, an outlet affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, which relocated from Tripoli to Istanbul in 2017 and is known to receive funding from the state of Qatar. Moreover, *Libya Al-Ahrar*, which is also closely linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, similarly receives funding

from Qatar, although its headquarters are in Istanbul. In fact, *Libya Al-Ahrar* was founded by long-term Libyan exile Mahmud Shammam on 30 March 2011 in Doha, Qatar before it moved to Istanbul. Many media outlets also switch sides, according to the respective situation. For example, the defunct *Libya Dawliya TV*, which was founded in Tripoli in 2012, had connections to the pro-government Alliance of National Forces until it was “turned around” by the Dawn Coalition in Tripoli and filled with new journalists (Fhelboom, 2014).

The ownership structure and available financial resources of private broadcasters are largely non-transparent, which means that any discussion surrounding the business models of these companies is often only speculative. However, content and ownership in the television sector is characterized by severe polarization.

The situation with the radio sector, on the other hand, is different and goes beyond polarized instrumentalization. There are 122 locally broadcasting radio stations in the country. What appears to be a surprisingly high number of radio stations is, indeed, unusually high compared to neighboring countries. The BBC Media Action of 2014 reported that 47% of the Libyan male and 25% of the female population listen to the radio every day (Dowson-Zeidan, Eaton, & Wespieser, 2014). The radio is therefore as important to Libyans as the Internet, which is used by 32% of the interviewees on a “regular” basis (weekly or daily). However, these numbers definitely lag behind television, which is used by 76% of the population every day (Dowson-Zeidan et al., 2014).

After the collapse of the Qadhafi regime in 2011, local radio stations continued operating, mostly with volunteer workers and activists who could use and maintain the equipment at much lower costs compared with that of centralized TV infrastructure. In terms of the ownership and funding of all local radio stations, 71 of these 122 are still connected to public bodies; 34 are directly related to government institutions, such as ministries, and 37 are related to municipalities and publicly funded local organizations, such as universities. Nevertheless, editorial autonomy of local media entities is fairly high, as most outlets experience minimal control from governmental institutions and tend to follow public opinion on the community level. The remaining stations are operated by private entrepreneurs; 34 are based particularly in the Tripoli area, and 17 are clearly affiliated with the Madkhali Salafists (Wollenberg & Richter, 2020).

Technology and Infrastructure

Qadhafi announced in 2001 that he was an avid Internet surfer and that every Libyan should own a PC and a mobile phone. However, the expansion of digital infrastructure was and continues to be a very slow process, and “the underdeveloped state of the telecommunications network, which suffered from a lack of expertise and competition, was especially significant” (St. John, 2013, p. 95). As sanctions were lifted in 2003, communications technology was slowly upgraded. It was only after the political problems with the US had been resolved that the Libyan authorities were able to obtain the country’s own top-level domain of.ly (Internet Assigned Numbers Authority, 2004). Until 2011, technological infrastructure was operated centrally by Libya Telecom and Technology (LTT) and the mobile phone providers *Libya* and *Al-Madar*, which were under the control of Qadhafi’s oldest son Mohammed. For a long time, Qadhafi saw no reason to block the Internet or even satellite television, although the Internet in particular promoted a hotbed of political opposition. The portals *akhbar-libya.com*, *almanara.org*, and *nfsl-libya.com* were operated by exiles in the US and UK, and these shaped international perspectives on Libya. However, as the increase in networking opportunities was perceived as a threat to the regime, sites owned by the Libyan opposition abroad and all social media sites were blocked from 2010 onwards (Reporters Without Borders, 2011). In March 2011, Qadhafi completely disconnected the Internet and mobile communications from international data traffic. Despite these official restrictions, rebels secured channels to the outside world via proxy servers and satellite telephones.

While only around 14% of Libyans had access to the Internet in 2010, this number jumped to 22% in 2017, which was still very low. However, the situation seems to have changed very rapidly since then. Recent social media statistics, for example, show that 60% of all Libyans use *Facebook* and stream television programs either through media websites such as *TV218* or through *Facebook* pages (Democracy Reporting, 2019).

In respect to communications technology, mobile phones are particularly well distributed, with 92% of the population being connected. They also serve as the main gateway to the Internet. Three state-owned operators, *Libiyana*, *LibyaPhone*, and *Al-Madar* provide

services and mainly cover the country's two big cities and some of the coastal areas. However, due to Libya's ongoing military conflict, Internet connectivity is often disrupted, and outside Tripoli and Benghazi, technological infrastructure is still insufficient.

Challenges

The Qadhafi era has left behind a media structure and culture of journalistic production that is inadequate for today's requirements. After 2011, reforms were started only hesitantly and did not change the premises of the system. In the context of political fragmentation, the media system has fallen back into the old pattern of political instrumentalization. As expected, the legacy of the Qadhafi era and the country's inexperience with any other legal and organizational framework means that the process of redesigning state institutions, including the media, poses an enormous challenge. Questions of media ethics, as well as the institutionalization and regulation of media are still completely unresolved.

For the time being, a culture of mutual accusation prevails in the television sector, which strongly reflects the partition of the country into two opposing political camps. This instrumentalization not only presents a challenge from an ethical point of view, in terms of journalistic autonomy, but might also have significant effects on the population and hinder future efforts for reconciliation after the war ends. At the same time, the public seems to be aware of biased reporting. People are frustrated by the "lack of useful and relevant information on television about issues that matter to them" (Dowson-Zeidan et al., 2014, p. 16), and they mostly trust friends and family as their main sources of information (Dowson-Zeidan et al., 2014, p. 36). Indeed, the UN-led consultations with 7,000 Libyans indicated that the population seems to be tired of political polarization and reported that "[t]he Libyans consulted requested an end to the transition period. They highlighted the need to unify State institutions" (UN Security Council, 2018, p. 2). Therefore, the existing culture of media instrumentalization needs to be overcome.

Another challenge is to provide an independent regulation for the media. As of now, no adequate media laws exist, and the ruling bodies

either do not regulate at all or do so arbitrarily. In most parts of the country, media production is allowed as long as content creators align with the ideological orientation of the ruling entity or stay completely away from politics. This situation has brought about two trends. On the one hand, media production has been largely deterritorialized, and major players and financial support come from abroad—which keeps any regulation of licenses and content out of the hands of a potential national regulator. On the other hand, a considerable number of local initiatives have started their own media production, mainly radio, to serve the local communities. However, they are forced to refrain from political reporting to avoid any trouble.

Outlook

Both institutionally and socially, a new media system has yet to develop. This seems very problematic at the moment as military conflict continues to contribute to the increasing disintegration of state structures. The fact that many local initiatives produce content to serve the community offers a ray of hope, as this could provide a breeding ground for more independent non-instrumentalized journalism in the future. However, at the moment, these initiatives are vulnerable to any changes in the political situation and have no legal protection. Before Libya's media system can be reformed, the country's current political situation needs to be consolidated and the wars between militias need to be brought to an end. Only then will the existing challenges to the media system be overcome.

References

- Al-Mohair, K. (2009, March 6). Two Qadhafi-related websites generate controversy with unusual criticism [in Arabic]. *Al-Jazeera*. <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/archive/archive?ArchiveId=1171188>
- Al-Zilitni, A. M. (1981). *Mass media for literacy in Libya: A feasibility study* (doctoral dissertation). Ohio State University.
- Daraghi, B. (2015). Libya: From euphoria to breakdown. *Adelphi Series*, 452(55), 39–58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19445571.2015.1114755>

- Democracy Reporting. (2019). *Libya social media report*. https://www.democracy-reporting.org/libya-social-media-report/march/pdfs/DRI-LY-DE_SMM-Report_Annex%20I_2019-04-05.pdf
- Dowson-Zeidan, N., Eaton, T., & Wespieser, K. (2014). After the revolution: Libyan and Tunisian media through the people's eyes. *BBC Media Action Research Dissemination Series*. http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/rmhttp/mediaaction/pdf/research/libya_tunisia_media.pdf
- El Issawi, F. (2013). Libya media transition: Heading to the unknown. *London School of Economics*. <http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/Polis/documents/Libya%20Media%20Transition%20Heading%20to%20the%20Unknown%20.pdf>
- Fhelboom, R. (2014, November 25). Journalism under siege. *Correspondents*. <https://correspondents.org/en/2014/11/25/journalism-under-siege/>
- Grant, G. (2012, November 26). Libyan media to be regulated by new Ministry of Information. *Libya Herald*. <http://www.libyaherald.com/2012/11/26/national-congress-votes-to-create-new-ministry-of-information/#axzz2yCPKrZXM>
- Human Rights Watch. (2015). *War on the media: Journalists under attack in Libya*. http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/libya0215_ForUpload.pdf
- Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (2004). *IANA Report on the Redlegation of the.ly TopLevel Domain*. <http://www.iana.org/reports/2005/ly-report-05aug2005.pdf>
- Lacher, W. (2013). Fault lines of the revolution: Political actors, camps and conflicts in the new Libya. *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*. http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2013_RP04_lac.pdf
- . (2018). Tripoli's militia cartel: How ill-conceived stabilisation blocks political progress, and risks renewed war. *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*. https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2018C20_lac.pdf
- Legatum Institute. (2012). *Libya media wiki*. <https://lif.blob.core.windows.net/lif/docs/default-source/default-library/libya-media-wiki---snapshot-of-a-country-in-transition.pdf?sfvrsn=0>
- Libya Herald. (2015, March 3). New privately-owned Libyan TV channel launched from Amman, Jordan. *Libya Herald*. <http://www.libyaherald.com/2015/03/03/new-privately-owned-libyan-tv-channel-launched-from-amman-jordan/#axzz3TPbQ9pd7>
- Mattes, H. (1986). The development of the Libyan press 1969–86 [in German]. *Communications*, 12(3), 41–60.
- Reporters Without Borders. (2011). *Libya: The birth of „free media“ in Eastern Libya*. https://ifex.org/images/libya/2011/06/27/free_media_libya.pdf

- Richter, C. (2004). *The media system in Libya: Actors and developments* [in German]. Hamburg: Deutsches Orient-Institut.
- . (2013). Libyan broadcasting under Al-Qadhafi: The politics of pseudo-liberalization. In T. Guaaybess (Ed.), *National broadcasting and state policy in Arab countries* (pp. 150–65). Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rugh, W. A. (1987). *The Arab press: News media and political process in the Arab world* (2nd ed.). New York: Syracuse University Press.
- Smith, H. (2013). The South. In J. Pack (Ed.), *The 2011 Libyan uprisings and the struggle for the post-Qadhafi future* (pp. 175–89). New York: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137308092_7
- St. John, R. B. (2013). The post-Qadhafi economy. In J. Pack (Ed.), *The 2011 Libyan uprisings and the struggle for the post-Qadhafi future* (pp. 85–111). New York: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137308092_4
- UN Security Council. (2018). *United Nations support mission in Libya: Report of the Secretary-General*. Report no. S/2018/780. <https://undocs.org/en/S/2018/780>
- Watanabe, L. (2016). Libya: Small steps out of the chaos [in German]. *CSS Analysen zur Sicherheitspolitik*, 193. <http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSSAnalyse-193-DE.pdf>
- Wollenberg, A., & Pack, J. (2013). Rebels with a pen: Observations on the newly emerging media landscape in Libya. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 18(2), 191–210. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2013.767197>
- Wollenberg, A., & Recker, S. (Eds.) (2012). *Reinventing the public sphere in Libya: Observations, portraits and commentary on a newly emerging media landscape*. Berlin: MICT.
- Wollenberg, A., & Richter, C. (2020). Political parallelism in transitional media systems: The case of Libya. *International Journal of Communication*, 14, 1173–93.

