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# Theorizing Libyan Feminism: Poetic Representation of Twelve Libyan Muslim Women's Experiences

Samah A. Elbelazi

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THEORIZING LIBYAN FEMINISM: POETIC REPRESENTATION OF TWELVE  
LIBYAN MUSLIM WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirement for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Samah A. Elbelazi

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

May 2017

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Title: Theorizing Libyan Feminism: Poetic Representation of Twelve Libyan Muslim Women's Experiences

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This poetic ethnographic study aims to explore Libyan Muslim women's experiences and aims to theorize Libyan feminism. The ultimate purpose for the dissertation is to facilitate the voice of Libyan women and empower them through their experiences. In the coming chapters, I highlighted the significance of doing this research. First, I introduced the investment in the study. Second, I conducted methodology of history to reconstruct Libyan history through my feminist interpretations of old photos and people's memoirs. Third, I reviewed the theoretical framework of Islamic feminism and discussed extensively the term and its implications in the Muslim world. I explained poetic ethnography as a research methodology that promotes voice and individuality.

When analyzing the data, I came up with four major themes that chronologically explore Libyan women's lived experiences 1) during King's time, 2) before the revolution, 3) during the revolution, and 4) after the revolution. Those themes include subthemes, which provide in-depth analysis for those experiences.

The discussion of the themes show that Libyan women's experiences varied and were impacted by the government of the country. Where in the King's rule the women lived a simple life with a strict education system, during Gaddafi, the women suffered from marginalization and oppression. Their daily experiences were wiped out by his dominance and his monolithic decisions. During and after the revolution, the women

struggled to liberate themselves and struggled to gain more attention in society. The data shows that Libyan women have overcome many challenges, including helping their male siblings in the war against Gaddafi.

In relation to Islamic feminism, I define Libyan feminism as an empowering tool that helps Libyan women to understand their rights and obligations under the framework of Islam. The data shows that women entertain more freedom if the society treats them in a respected way that helps preserve their identities and personal choices based on Islamic teachings.

## DEDICATION

*To every woman in the world*

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*“This voice was choking me among the silence around. This silence prohibited me from making my voice louder. Women are the most important part of the society. Women bear and bring children who grow up and constitute any society. Therefore, women should be educated more than men. Women raise men so they should be knowledgeable to fulfill this responsibility. Women are the source of the social development. Thus, they should be treated with respect”*

Hamida Al-Aneizi (Albait, 1936)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم  
*In the name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful*

## CHAPTER ONE

### PROLOGUE

In the past, I believed that women in Libya were equal to men. They both had similar job positions, both had independent identities, and recently, both went through the same military training that Gaddafi imposed in the high school system. Women in Libya seem to be as liberated as other women in the world. The government does not force veiling, and driving is allowed for both genders. However, the years I spent in the United States altered my understanding of equality, freedom, oppression, and the status of Libyan women in their own country. I realized that under this bright image of emancipation, there was a vast silence about the community and women, in particular. I was silent, too. I used to translate my silence as acceptance to the country's situation because, as a Libyan woman, I was powerless and invisible. My silence reflected what Mазzie (2003) called "veiled silence" and "intentional silence" (pp. 364 -366). By "veiled silence", she was referring to the inability to speak or provide an opinion, and by "intentional silence", she was referring to purposeful silence, where the speaker fears to share an opinion. I was not literally silent (Mазzie, 2003) but I veiled my mind with satisfaction and tolerance. Inside my country, I was one of a million women who might, or might not feel, the same. I have never felt that I was inaudible or invisible. On the contrary, when I came to the United States three years ago, I became aware of my marginalization as a Libyan woman. I felt we,

Libyan women, were isolated from the other world as if we did not exist. For example, I had a hard time in the beginning expressing my opinions in class. I had never learned how to have an independent voice and opinion. I thought I had one; however, in my first time being away from my country, I realized I did not. It took me a long time to own my voice and break my silence.

Furthermore, people from different countries do not know anything about our experiences and our silences. Being a Libyan woman in two different eras of Libyan history, I witnessed a significant lack of academic research about Libyan women. From my first day in the United States, I tried my best to speak loudly so people would know that we do exist. I wrote “Thank you letter to IUP” in the first issue of the *Composition and TESOL Newsletter* (Elbelazi, 2011). When I published that letter, I knew people from different countries would recognize the Libyan voice and the picture of the new Libyan flag that I attached to the letter. That was not my only contribution. I participated in the Composition and TESOL Association as Vice President and Secretary. I was very proud to be known as an active Libyan woman studying Composition and TESOL in the United States. Recently, I established the Muslim Women Association at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. My experience reflects the fact that when Muslim women are given the chance to make a change, they free themselves from any struggle that was originally initiated by men, society or tradition. According to Badran (1988) and Ahmed (1999), this may be a key to understanding women’s lived experiences.

Thus, this dissertation aims to explore Libyan women’s experiences and to give voice to Libyan women by using poetic ethnography (Hanauer, 2012a,

2012b, 2013, 2015a; Richardson, 1993, 1994, 1996, 2000, 2003; Furman, 2007).

On a personal level, the study will enable me to give a voice to the voiceless (Abu\_Sarhan, 2011) by empowering Libyan women, including myself, through our experiences (Belenky, Clinchy, Golberger and Tarule, 1997). Second, on the academic level, the study contributes to the growing body of research about Islamic feminism.

### **My Investment in this Study**

In 2010, in a women's gathering, I invited Arab women from Jordan, Egypt, and Palestine to my old apartment. That day, one of the women told me that she did not expect Libyan women to dress like them (she was referring to Arab women). On that day, I wore black pants and a silver top; it was a very simple, casual outfit. I asked the woman for an explanation, and she replied that she thought we dress like Gaddafi; he used to wear long colorful African dresses. That day, I had to explain about dressing in Libya; I even shared some family pictures to show how women in Libya dress and appear. Although my guests were very surprised by those pictures, I was more astonished with how people might think of us because of Gaddafi.<sup>1</sup>

Another incident was at my friend's house, where one lady asked me whether or not we still live in tents. At that time, I did not feel good about her inquiry. I asked her, "How would you believe that people in the twenty first

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<sup>1</sup> "Libyan Colonel Muammar Gaddafi [1942 – 2011] has been Africa's and the Arab world longest-ruling, most grimly fascinating leader\_ presiding for 42 years over this desert republic [Libya] with vast oil reserves and just 6 million people". Gaddafi took power in the country in 1969. In 1977, he changed the Libyan republic to Aljamahiriya (State of the masses). Gaddafi was killed by the Libyan rebels on October 20, 2011 and this dated the end of his regime (Aljazeera, 2011).

century still live in tents?” She replied that they always used to see Gaddafi sit and talk in tents, not in a regular house. My answer this time was like a lecture about Libya. I said,

No, we live in houses, apartments, and villas, like most people in the world. Libya is not a desert, even though we have a desert region as one goes deeper toward the south, but in the north, we have a large coastal area. We have forests, valleys, mountains, and an oasis. Our country is rich, not only in terms of oil, but in terms of everything else. We have different species of animals and plants. Moreover, Libyan people are very diverse, as Libya was conquered by Romans, Greeks, Ottomans, and Italians; Libyan people originally belonged to Berber, Twariq, Ottomans, or Arabs.

Suddenly, I stopped; I realized that I was lecturing history and geography to those ladies who were listening carefully.

It saddens me that my country, Libya, was summarized by Gaddafi’s image and his behaviors. As Pargeter (2012) stated, “[Gaddafi] was Libya” (p. 2). I felt depressed that all the Libyans’ efforts were underestimated according to his very dominating existence. Being one of those unrecognized women in the globe made me suffer from being not as visible and heard as other women in the world.

These negative social experiences continued as I interacted with people from different countries. Recently, one lady asked me to describe Libyan people in one word. My immediate response was: conservative; people in Libya are conservative. However, this word did not suit the woman when I talked about

Libyan women, in particular. Yes, we are a conservative society, even if half of the women's populations are unveiled, even if we drive, work, and study in mixed gender institutions. For other countries, Libya seems more of a secular community than Islamic, and for the secularist, we are very Islamic. However, in terms of feminism, our society, from my own perspective, is more Islamic than secular. Even though Libyan women have access to opportunities, like driving and studying, there is still a lot to be discovered about women's lived experiences in my country.

All the previous discussion and experiences led me to think deeply about my identity and my lifestyle as a Libyan woman. I thought about how these experiences interacted with the two different political systems—one with Gaddafi before the February 17, 2011 Revolution, and the other—the post-revolution system.

Gaddafi ruled the country for 42 years. He took power after King Idris (1952-1969) in 1969. He was the only president, king, teacher, philosopher, thinker, rebel, Falcon, leader, writer, colonel, doctor, and brother. These were all titles that used to be prefixed to Gaddafi's name. His name was as long as the name of the country in his time. Libya used to be known as “Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya” (Arabic: الجماهيرية العربية الليبية الشعبية الاشتراكية *al-Jamāhīriyyah al-‘Arabiyyah al-Lībiyyah ash-Sha‘biyyah al-Ishtirākīyyah al-‘Uẓmá*) in 1986 before it was renamed “the State of Libya” in 2011 by The General National Congress (GNC) in Libya, according to the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency. Gaddafi was the law and the

constitution of the country. In Libya, there was no constitution that people could follow to determine their rights and their regulations. It was him, alone, who was involved in making decisions related to the country's institutional systems. When I was in high school, Gaddafi forced us to wear soldiers' uniforms instead of regular school uniforms. Moreover, he added military education as a subject to our coursework. As a Libyan teenager at that time in the 1990s, I was trained on different kinds of weapons and war tricks. Besides practice, I used to memorize different war strategies and protections. I do not remember if I took this subject seriously because it was against my feminist features. I felt it was a boy's subject, not a girl's. Like many female teenagers, I was busy with fashion and TV shows, not with war and weapons. Now, after the revolution, the first things that changed in the educational system were removing the Military Education and Political Awareness subjects. According to the Ministry of Education in Libya (2011), both courses were designed to teach Gaddafi's ideology and his regime. Whenever I think back to this time of my life in high school, I realize how powerless and suppressed I was as a Libyan woman. Gaddafi used to decide for us what to wear and what to study; he used to even decide for us what to eat, as my husband has told me. Even if this oppression was practiced over men and women, it was women, only, who suffered from doing a job that supposedly should have been done by men. I remember in one of those military training classes, one girl could not answer the teacher's question during a quiz. This girl was punished. The male teacher asked her to walk on her knees on the tough ground in the very hot weather for around 15 minutes. The girl was screaming, but the male teacher was

shouting for her to continue. After all, when she finished the walk, her pants were torn apart, and her knees were bleeding. I wondered how she could survive the rest of the day. Unfortunately, we could not even complain to the school principal because teachers of Military Education had some privileges that not all teachers had. It was a very painful experience that brought me to this study—an opportunity to give voice to such women. In other words, I want to make them visible and loud enough to be heard.

Although the Libyan women during Gaddafi's time were powerless and invisible, in terms of political decision-making, during the revolution, I saw several women who stood side-by-side the Libyan men. When men were in the front lines in the war zone, women were doing different sorts of jobs. They contacted the national and international presses to explain the situation in Libya. They smuggled the weapons to the rebels and sold their jewelry to provide some financial support for their families (Walker, 2014; Abdul-Latif, Kaplan, & Reiter, 2013). After the revolution, Libyan women actively participated in the 2012 General National Congress (GNC) election. According to interview and survey data from the International Foundation for Electoral System (IFES), 71% of women participated in the voting and election process in July 2012 (Abdul-Latif, 2013). In the past during Gaddafi's autocratic regime, women had never participated in any political event. Gaddafi used to encourage and create a tribal system that gave authority to the tribes who were close to him and his family (Shaw & Mangan, 2014). Within the tribal system, women were defined as dependents, whose decisions had to be permitted by males in the family and the



tribe (Abdul-Latif, 2013).

Although my social experiences had greater contribution to the study, there are other voices that inspired me and encouraged me to keep going. The first and the strongest of all is my advisor's voice. The support and encouragement I had from Dr. David Hanauer enlightened my way and enabled me to voice the mute feminist in myself. Being a Libyan is not only a nationality that I identify myself with; it is more of an identity and a self-responsibility that should respond when women in Libya are misrepresented and under-estimated. The current study for me is more than a dissertation to fulfill my degree requirement; it is a burden that I carry on my shoulders to express and provide access to Libyan Muslim women's experiences. I want my readers to hear the stories from their tellers (Belenky, Clinchy, Golberger, & Tarule, 1997). I want the reader to expose him/herself to the context of those women and understand their suffering and their joy. According to Hanauer (2012b) "[t]he attempt is to provide voice and insight" and create new avenues for sharing personal experience for wider audiences (p. 846).

The second voice was actually multiple; they consisted of voices from all the feminists around the Muslim world. These feminist voices created a broader context for my study and provided me a theoretical lens to implement while working on my dissertation. When I read books and articles about feminism and about Muslim women, I realized that there are two different discussions about feminism in the Muslim world. The first one asserted that most conceptual frameworks encompassed monolithic ideology that encircled men behind all

women's oppression and marginalization (Mernissi, 1975; Moghissi, 1999). For example, in Libya, men eat before women and are served the biggest piece of meat. Unfairly, they are not required to help with house work, washing the dishes, or babysitting their children. Libyan men can beat their sisters and wives. Moreover, Libyan men have the authority to control their sisters', wives', mothers', and daughters' lives. Simply, men can stop women from gaining education or going to work, or even not attending a friend's party. Similarly, Harding's (1987) research revealed that "[m]ale dominance takes many forms" that includes domestic violence, crimes against women, and abuse against women (p. 5). In my opinion, this patriarchal ideology is not the only source of blame (Ahmad, 1992; Afshar, 2008; Badran, 1988, 2001, 2009, 2011; Bahi, 2011; Mernissi, 1975; Moghissi, 1999). The way men are represented as dominant and as controllers of women's lives frustrated me, not because men are not dominated, but because those men are originally raised by women in the first place. This discussion is backed by Schlossberg's (1989) claim about gender responsibility of marginalization. Schlossberg (1989) pointed out that gender was not the only factor that divided "us"; there were other issues, such as age, social class, ethnicity, sexual preferences, religion, and politics that could be responsible for society's understanding of marginality (p. 6). These claims enrich this research by going beyond patriarchy's control over women's rights to open up room for engaging women and their experiences to express their attitudes, agencies, and positionalities without restricting their marginalization and silence to males only.

I want to understand the suffering and the joy Libyan women have and how it is situated within the very unique Libyan feminism.

The second claim involves one direction for the source of Islamic feminism. This refers to the assumption that Islamic feminism appeared as an imitation of Western feminism and was a result of post-colonial societies (Abu-Sarhan, 2011; Badran, 2009). This claim views women as oppressed, weak, passive, and powerless (Abu-Sarhan, 2011; Afshar, 2007; Mir-Hosseini, 2011). On the contrary, Badran (1988) affirmed that Islamic feminism appeared from within the context in which it emerged. For instance, Egyptian feminism appeared in Egypt, resulting from women's oppression and lack of education.

The third voice also consists of multiple voices from feminist scholars in the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). In March 2014, I presented a paper entitled "Libyan woman war experience" at CCCC's Research Network Forum (RNF). The paper examined my war experience as a Libyan Muslim woman interacting with war far from my country (Elbelazi, 2014). These voices, despite the fact that they were feminist voices, did not tolerate my novice feminist voice. In my presentation about war experience, I came across Islamic feminism. I said that I was new to feminism, and my perception of the field was still in the very basic stage. I said what I mentioned about the source of women's oppression and claimed that this oppression could come from any source, such as the society, the culture, and sometimes the religious text, if this text is misrepresented. One voice said, "If you are not a feminist, why would you work on a feminist project? You are interrupting the

field.” For a moment, I did not know what to say. Those feminists silenced my voice, even without hearing my opinion. Feminism is an awareness, a consciousness, and a freedom of choice (Badran, 2009, 2011; hooks, 2000), and what those feminists argued was against feminism. I replied that being a feminist did not mean I had to belong to any category of thinking about women’s oppression. Feminism provided a space for women to talk and share their experiences. Another person told me to include western feminism when discussing Islamic feminism because in her opinion, the big theory belonged to the Westerners, and then Muslims adopted this theory. At the beginning, I was annoyed that we, Muslims, should be placed under the big theory of the Westerners. However, my understanding of Islamic feminism empowered me to respond to her claim. I pointed out that feminism first appeared in France to help gain women’s rights to vote in the 1920s. At approximately the same time, it appeared in Egypt for different reasons. Egyptian feminism emerged to encourage education and school desegregation. Additionally, the context of Islamic feminism was very different from western feminism. As for my study, which is contextualized in Libya, it would be placed under the Islamic feminism, not the western. On my way back from CCCC, I felt I certainly needed to continue working on this project.

The final and the most important voice is my participants’ voice, the Libyan women, the actual voice for the study. Through this research, I desire to facilitate the voice of the Libyan women, the voice that has never been heard before. The voice will be presented in a poetic form, so each woman will

enlighten me to reconstruct her position, agency, and experience by using poetry as research (Brady, 2009; Butler\_Kisber & Stewart, 2009; Faulkner, 2009; Furman, 2004; Furman, 2007; Furman, Langer, Davis, Gallardo, & Kulkarni, 2007; Furman, Lietz, & Langer, 2006; Hanauer, 2010, 2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2015a; Leavy, 2009; Poindexter, 2002; Prenergast, Leggo, & Sameshima, 2009). The voice I am presenting in this study is more than an opinion voice; it is the voice of daily life, the voice of the unrecognized population in the world (Belenky, Clinchy, Golberger & Tarule, 1997).

In this study, I occupy two positions. First, I am an insider as a Libyan Muslim woman. Second, I am an outsider as a researcher who seeks to understand my participants' experiences, struggles, and visions of their daily lives. I want to discover who the Libyan women are and present these experiences by writing poems that make the individuality of each woman more distinctive.

### **Defining Voice and Silence**

The concept of voice is complex (Hanauer, 2015b) and cannot easily be defined because it varies according to different contexts. According to Iida (2011), voice is a slippery term, and it is socially and culturally constructed. Similarly, Ivanič and Camps (2011), considered voice as a “self representation” and “provides additional semiotic resources” (p. 4). Ivanič (1998) maintained that voice is “a socially shaped discourse which a speaker can draw upon, and/or an actual voice in the speaker's individual history, and/or the current speaker's unique combination of these resources” (p. 97). Austin (2009) distinguished between the physical voice which represents the actual utterances and the sounds

of the speaker and the symbolic voice that refers to the viewpoint of the speaker to get attention. On the contrary, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1997) found that “women repeatedly used the metaphor of voice to depict their intellectual and ethical development” (p. 18). On the other hand, Mazzei (2003) considered silence as a form of voice. She described this voice as “sometimes inaudible, sometimes ignored, sometimes misunderstood, but always present” (Mazzei, 2003, p. 355).

Based on these definitions, this study aims to present the voices of Libyan Muslim women, which are emerged from within the Libyan culture, religion and feminism. According to Donaldo Macedo in the introduction of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* this process of constructing “cultural voice” involves pain and hope. (Freire, 2000, p. 12) Therefore, the concept of voice in this study refers to the Libyan Muslim women’s daily life experiences and stories that were not publicly published before this research. It refers to their daily struggles and joys, their reflections on their lives, their intellectual perceptions of their communities, their understandings of their identities as Libyan Muslim women, and their opinions of the unstable state of the country. This voice reveals different stories of survival, beginning with childhood, continuing through education, marriage, and giving birth to new life. It encompasses “discursively constructed” positions that is dynamic and emotive (Denzin, 2014, p. 6).

Silence, on the other hand, similar to voice, has different interpretations, depending on the context where it occurred. Generally speaking, silence in conversation refers to “the pause or break” (Ha & Kim, 2013, p. 583). Morison

and MacLeod (2014) referred to silence as “unspoken”, “unsayable”, and “the absence of spoken text” (p. 695). In a detailed explanation, Mazzei (2003) categorized silence into five categories:

1. Polite Silence: Silence as a form of respect to the elderly or parents. In this form of silence, people choose to be silent, rather than speak rudely.
2. Privileged Silence: Silence that is commonly used with people who believe they have certain privileges and authorities; therefore, they do not need to speak up.
3. Veiled Silence: This silence does not refer to the literal silence but rather to escaping from the answer or the conversation by saying something different.
4. Intentional Silence: Purposeful silence, which people choose because they are afraid to be misjudged or misplace.
5. Unintelligible Silence: Silence that is interpreted according to the context where it occurred because it can carry different interpretations, depending on the person and the situation. For example, in the Arabic culture, silence is considered a form of acceptance and agreement, while in the Western culture, it is a form of disagreement. However, there are cases where Arabic speakers use silence to disagree in a Western context (Elbelazi, 2013).

Denzin (2014) claimed that some people choose silence because they do not feel as if they have valuable information to share. Silence, in the current study, refers

to the absence of women's voices in academia and the oppressive silence that is imposed on women to make their voices inaudible. In that respect, Feri (1985) distinguished between two levels of oppressive silence. The first one is the surface level where the silenced person aware of his/her oppression but they cannot talk about it. The second one is the deeper level of silence where the silenced believe that he or she is born inferior to the oppressor and they are not aware that they have voice and they can speak. Therefore, this study aims to explore this silence and aims to facilitate the voice of Libyan women. Through this work I attempt to help these women to recognize their voices and overcome their silence.

### **Muslim Women and Power**

When revisiting Islamic feminism from the earlier days of Islam, one could find a better powerful status for Muslim women within Islam than before. Khadija, for example, the Prophet's wife, was a successful, wealthy businesswoman, and the Prophet Mohamed (Peace be upon Him) worked for her before they got married (Karmi, 1996; Yamani, 1996; Franks, 2005; Hussain, 1984). Khadija's story confirms that despite the fact she was the Prophet's (PBUH) wife, her marriage and her status in the society did not prevent her from running her own business and still be a Muslim woman. Moreover, the Prophet Mohamed's (PBUH) last wife, Aisha, was the youngest among his wives when they got married; she lived for 40 years after his death. Aisha retold all of the "Hadith", which the Prophet Mohamed (Peace be upon him) had told her. Moreover, she recalled all of his actions at home. All the strong, authoritative, and



powerful men took and learned those “Hadiths” from Aisha (Cervantes-Altamirano, 2013; El-Nimr, 1996; Hussain, 1984). Afshar (2004) wrote, “Aisha was a close companion of the Prophet and without a doubt she remains one of the most reliable sources of hadith that is corner-stone of Sharia law for many Islamic schools of Jurisprudence” (p. 422). These two examples from the Prophet’s family assures that Islam was never meant to oppress or silence women and overlook their power.

Besides the Prophet’s wives, in the early days of Islam, there are many examples of influential Muslim women that were not widely mentioned in history such as Asma bent Abu Baker, Somyia Om Amar, Rufaida among many other names. Those women, at that time, worked side-by-side with men. They even used to go with the men during the wars. Women were the same as men; they worked as doctors, teachers, and soldiers. Therefore, the suppression and marginalization that secular feminists would draw on did not exist along with Islam. With a better understanding for the religion, Libyan women can gain their rights and comprehend their obligation. As a Muslim woman I see women in the old days of Islam were more powerful than women today. Back in those days, both men and women followed the teaching of Islam that was directly delivered from the Prophet’s and his companion. These days, the religious text (Quran and Hadith) is interpreted by men to serve their ideologies (Wadud, 1999, 2006). Along with men’s interpretation of the religion, the current discourse in media view Muslim women as oppressed and powerless if they do not hold political positions or leadership positions. However, I believe that the power of women

should not only be restricted to the political side, women could be very powerful mothers who raise a well-educated strong generation. Women's power could be through their work as teachers, doctors, nurses or engineers to name just few. This research presents different views of Libyan women's power over time.

### **Statement of Research Questions**

The current study aims to answer two main research questions. The first question explores Libyan Muslim women's experiences. This question has two goals. The first goal is to facilitate the voice of Libyan Muslim women. The second goal is to help make Libyan Muslim women's experiences accessible to wider readers (Hanauer, 2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2015a). The second question defines Libyan feminism in the Libyan context. Since most research in feminism covers Muslim women's issues around the globe (Afshar, 2008; Badran, 1988, 2001, 2005, 2009, 2011; Cooke, 2000, 2001, 2010; ElGuindi, 1999, 2005; Frenca, 1998; Mir-Hosseini, 1996, 2011; Moghissi, 1999), this research is the first to focus on Libyan Muslim women. As such, the research questions are rephrased as follows:

Q1. What are Libyan Muslim women's lived experiences before, during, and after the February 17, 2011 revolution?

Q2. What is feminism within the Libyan context?

### **Theoretical Framework: Islamic Feminism**

*Feminist theory provides the freedom to not fear personal experiences, subjectivity, and emotional involvement (Haggerty, 2011, p. 24)*

As previously mentioned, this study was inspired by different voices, including my suppressed voice. I believe since my country is going through a transitional stage towards liberation and democracy, Libyan women's voices contribute to various stages of this change. Gradually, these inaudible voices should be heard. However, in academia, Libyan Muslim women and their experiences have never been subjects of any qualitative research (Pargeter, 2005). Therefore, the study is rooted within the framework of Islamic feminism about voice, silence, marginalization, and oppression (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Traule, 1997; Moghissi, 1999, Mernissi, 1975; Schlossberg, 1989). Implementing this lens allows me to understand Libyan women and allows me to "embrace the emotional responses that come from reviewing my past as well as present" as a Libyan woman (Haggerty, 2011, p. 25). Furthermore, Islamic feminism creates a context for my study since the study is about Muslim women in a Muslim country.

Feminism in the Middle East is more than a century old (Badran, 2005). It first emerged in the nineteenth century as a feminist movement associated with Islam and concerned with Muslim women's rights (Badran, 1999, 2001, 2005, 2009; Mir-Hosseini, 2011; ElGuind, 2005; Bahlul, 1999). The beginning was in Egypt in the 1920s and spread to the whole Muslim world. At that time, Libya was an Italian colony, and the role of women in society was completely dismissed (John, 2008; 2013). Libyan men were fighting against the Italians, and there were no records of Libyan women, in particular. All the stories I have gathered about women in Libya were those I found in people's memoirs on social media

websites, such as Facebook. The very few people who described Libyan women in the 1920s focused on the poverty of the country, which contributed to women experiencing fewer rights, including their rights to education and health care. Women, at that time, used to wear the Libyan traditional costumes, and they were busy making cheese, dry fruits, and vegetables because they did not have enough financial support to buy their needs from the Italian stores. Women also had no access to schools or educational institutes. Education during the Italian colony was limited to the Italians and those who spoke Italian. Therefore, during the Islamic feminism renaissance in the Muslim world, Libyan women suffered from oppression and isolation from the world. The Arabic language was prohibited in schools, and Libyan people were second-class people in their own country (Pargeter, 2012). However, three decades later after Libya received its independence in 1952, women in Libya initiated their first women's association, namely Libyan Women's Renaissance Association in Benghazi in 1954. Feminism in Libya started in similar circumstances as in Egypt. In Egypt women generated their own feminism theory as a result of women's rights dismissal not as an imitation for the western feminism as their opponents had argued (Badran, 1988; Ahmad, 1999). In Libya, women, such as Hamida Tarkhan, who was known as Hamida Al-Aneizi, and her followers organized a feminist agenda that concerned women's rights to education and decision-making—the same rights granted to Libyan men. In this respect, Badran (1988) pointed out, “[Islamic feminism] grew out of their own changing lives, their own needs, and their own developing consciousness and analysis. Feminism was not created for women by

men” (p. 12). In response to this statement, I highlight that the Islamic feminism lens enables the current study to empower Libyan women through their voices. Such a study is highly “embedded in a larger context of feminist theory about voice and silence” (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Traule, 1997, p. 19).

Islamic feminism, on the other hand, promotes voice and uncovers women’s issues in different ways, depending on how women perceive it within the given context (Badran, 2009; Cooke, 2000; Ahmad, 1999). I believe that having the word Islamic before feminism makes it religious feminism. For this reason, many feminists, such as Moghissi (1999), considered it oxymoronic and disconnected because the Muslim society is structured in a way that places men on top of the society. Also, men were interpreting the Quran verses in a way that showed women as passive and powerless (Mernissi, 1975). Even though I agree with Moghissi’s (1975) hierarchal description of the society, I consider Islamic feminism as a starting point for women to claim their rights from within the framework of Islam. According to Mernissi (1975), in Muslim societies, men viewed themselves as strong enough to choose “what is good in western civilization and discard what is bad, while women are unable to choose correctly” (p. 101). Mernissi (1975) assumed that men were referring to the Quranic verse that described men as being superior to women. The verse says (4:34):

*Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard. But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance - [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them. But if*

الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ  
وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ فَإِلَّا فَتًا فَلِلنِّسَاءِ فِي الْغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ وَاللَّي تَخَافُونَ شُرُوهُنَّ  
فَعِظُوهُنَّ فَإِنْ أَطَعْنَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا  
كَبِيرًا

*they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted and Grand*

As a woman, I do not see any inferiority being addressed in the Quran against women. Instead, I see how the Quran placed me under the responsibility of a man, especially in relation to finances. I see the patriarchy in Islam as protection, not oppression. Moreover, where in the second part of the verse the Quran addressed, “strike them”, here the interpreters defined it in different ways. “Strike them” in Arabic, ‘idribuhunna’ (اضربوهن), could imply different meanings, including beating, separating, turning away, leaving, and going away (Cervantes-Altamirano, 2013). However, many translators and interpreters took the first meaning of the word, which was ‘beating’, and generalized it to show one side of women’s oppression (Cervantes-Altamirano, 2013; Wadud, 1999, 2006). I chose this example to show that even if Islamic feminism seemed incoherent for many secularists (Moghissi, 1999; Mernissi, 1975), it empowered Muslim women to use the religious text to protect themselves and gain their rights. Therefore, this dissertation opens a space for women’s experiences and helps to place women within the theoretical framework of Islamic feminism, according to their own interpretations and understandings of the Quranic verses and Islamic conceptual framework. This argument supports Badran’s (2009) definition of Islamic feminism. In her book *Feminism in Islam*, Badran (2009) defined Islamic feminism as “a feminist discourse expressly articulated within an Islamic paradigm and behaviors and activism inspired by it are enacted in Islam's name” (p. 49). Other scholars defined it as an interchangeable identity that sought different meanings according to the context where it emerged (Cooke, 2000).

Despite the fact that Muslim women share the same religion, there is always an inconsistency of how they are represented in the research (Frenea, 1998).

The ongoing discussion about defining Islamic feminism led researchers and scholars to divide it into two types: secular and Islamic feminism. Secular feminism was similar to post-colonial feminism, where women were influenced by the colonial ideology and the occupier lifestyle. The main claim for secularists was separating the religion from the government's institutional laws. In other words, the country's laws should refer to legal institutional responsibilities (Badran 2011, p. 79). Consequently, another kind of feminism, called Islamic feminism, appeared to defend women's positions within Islam. Although Islamic feminism arose in similar circumstances as secular feminism, it initially appeared to serve women's issues under the Islamic framework. In doing so, Islamic feminists used the religious texts, such as the Quran and the Hadith, to maintain that Muslim women had better positions if these texts were interpreted correctly. Being a Libyan woman, I can vividly see the two types of feminism interacting in Libyan society. The diversity of the Libyan populations includes people who live in big cities and those who live in rural areas. The division of secular and Islamic feminism creates space that embraces the women's experiences, regardless of their cultural, traditional, religious, and tribal beliefs. In other words, having the two versions of the same theory enables me to understand the lived experiences within two perceptions under the same framework. Moreover, this division frees women from the monolithic ideology that implies one source of oppression, such as patriarchal control.

## **The Statement of Problem**

*“The first step to building the country is through women. She is not the hero, but she is the action!” Woman from Zawia (VLW report)*

My country, Libya, has a long history that stretches back to 11<sup>th</sup> century BC, when it was colonized by Greek and Roman Emperors (John, 2008, 2012). From that time, Libya has been shaped by different cultures. Libyan people had to move from one occupation to another. After the Greeks and Romans came the Ottomans in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and more recently, the Italians in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Libya was announced as an independent country for the first time (John, 2008, 2012; Pargeter, 2012). However, a new colony appeared when Moamer Al-Gaddafi initiated his September Coup in 1969. Even though the country went through many challenges and uprisings, there was little, if nothing, mentioned in the world of academia about the lived experiences of Libyan Muslim women and the role of Libyan women.

Libyan Muslim women have been invisible in feminist research, and their voices have been underrepresented. According to Bugaighis (2014), “[w]omen in Libya had almost no political history during Qaddafi’s regime” (p. 108). This study is the first one, to my knowledge, that brings life to the Libyan women’s voices and makes it recognized and loud enough to be heard. The voice, here, does not metaphorically mean the individual’s point of view only. This metaphor refers to different sides of women’s experiences, including their daily life and their daily progress (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Traule, 1997). Moreover,



the voice reflects their individual identity, which contributes to their family life and to their country, as a whole.

### **Research Methodology**

Belenky's et al. (1997) and Harding's (1987) claim that silence and marginalization were occupying great space in feminism theory, along with Leavy's (2009) assumption that poetic inquiry enhanced "subjugated knowledge and the experience of those who are disenfranchised", reinforced me to use poetic representation to empower Libyan women voice and make it accessible to wider readers (p. 74). The given study is built on Hanauer's research on war experiences (2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2015) and similar works by Richardson (1993, 1994, 1996, 1997). Poetic inquiry, despite its recent history, could exclusively situate itself in art-based research (Furman, 2004, 2006, 2007; Hanauer, 2010; Langer & Furman, 2004; Richardson, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1997, 2003a, 2003b). Additionally, poetic representation has been widely used in humanities and social sciences (see the work of Hanauer, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2015a; Richardson, 1993, 1994, 1996; Poindexter, 2002 to name a few). In the coming section, I briefly explore arts-based research and poetic inquiry and their relation to the study.

### **Art-Based Research**

The aim of the current study is to deepen and enrich our understanding of Libyan women's experiences. Additionally, the purpose of the study is to provide insights on the Libyan context through the voice of the women. In this respect, Park (2006) stated, such a study "[provides] an eye opening that de-silenced [the women'] voices and unearthed the invisibility of their life history narratives in the

literature” (p. 14). Therefore, I decided to use a kind of research that promotes individuality and gives insights on personal experiences (Hanauer, 2010, 2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2015a). Art-based research, with its artistic and aesthetic qualities, enhances emotions and raises awareness to oppressed and marginalized voices (Cahnmann- Tylor & Siegesmund, 2008; Eisner, 1976; Finely, 2005; Forinash & Austin, 2005; Gouzousis & Grauer, 2006; Hanauer, 2010; Huss & Cwikel, 2005; Leavy, 2009; Leitch, 2006; Mullen, 2003; Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzousis, & Grauer, 2006; Walsh, Ruterford, & Crough, 2013). Art-based research has a recent progressive history in educational research that goes back to the 1970s and includes the work of a few researchers, such as Eisner (1976), Greene (1975), Grumet (1978), and Vallance (1977) (Sinner et al., 2006). Lately, in the 1990s, arts-based research was used as a research methodology in education to include narrative writing, autobiography, visual arts, poetry, music, creative fiction, and non-fiction, to name just a few (Sinner et al., 2006; Leavy, 2009). In the 2000s, arts-based research was used in broader academic fields, including medicine (Lazarus & Rosslyn, 2003), science (Scotte, 2006), and engineering (Penny, 2000), among others (Sinner et al., 2006).

Arts-based research explores personal experiences and feelings by using “non discursive means”, such as poetry, music, and dance (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2009). Therefore, it is defined as a research method that uses aesthetic features to understand human feelings and experiences (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Forinash & Austin, 2005).

For the current study, arts-based research enables me to construct and reconstruct the social phenomena to create theory. According to Rolling (2013), the purpose of arts-based research was “theory building” (p. 1). He defined theory as “a representation of experience so that others may also acknowledge and understand” (p.1). In relation to feminist research, arts-based research, as stated by Rolling (2013), enabled the researcher to theorize the human lived experience. Moreover, it facilitated the feminist researcher (Finely, 2005) by giving voice to disenfranchised women (Walsh, Rutherford, & Crough, 2013; Huss & Cwikel, 2005; Leavy, 2009). Art-based research helps the reader to see the social phenomenon from different angles, that cannot be seen by other kinds of research (Barone & Eisner, 2012).

### **Poetry as Research**

Despite the recent history of poetic inquiry, poetry as research emerged successfully and brightly in arts-based research (Brady, 2009; Butler\_Kisber & Stewart, 2009; Faulkner, 2009; Furman, 2004; Furman, Lietz, & Langer, 2006; Furman, Langer, Davis, Gallardo & Kulkarni, 2007; Furman, 2007; Hanauer, 2010; Leavy, 2009; Prenergast, Leggo, & Sameshima, 2009). Poetic inquiry nourished in the 1990s in the work of Richardson (1992, 1993). Building on her studies, other researchers used poetry in their research (see the work of Furman, 2004, 2006, 2007; Hanauer, 2010, 2012, 2013; Prendergast et al., 2009; Furman et al., 2007). Prendergast (2009) pointed out that poetic inquiry was “an umbrella that covers multiple terminologies” (p. xxi). It encompassed terms, such as research poem (Furman et al., 2006; Langer et al., 2004), data as poem

(Richardson, 1993), ethnography lyric poems (Richardson, 1994, 1999), poetry as research, poetic ethnography (Hanauer, 2010), research poetry (Poindexter, 2002; Veries, 2007), poetry as data (Furman, 2004), and auto-biographic poetry (Park, 2013), to name a few. Drawing on that, in the current study, I used poetic ethnography because it refers to the construction of the poems from the participants' narrative (Hanauer, 2010; Richardson, 2003), while poetic inquiry refers to the participants' reflection on their experience by writing poems. Therefore, in the former, the researcher constructs the poem, and in the latter, the participant writes the poems.

Poetry as research has been used throughout interdisciplinary areas, such as in fields of sociology (Richardson, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1999), social work (Furman, Leitz, & Langer, 2006; Poindexter, 2002; Furman, Coyne, & Negi, 2008), identity studies (Langer & Furman, 2004; Furman, Langer, Davis, Gallardo, & Kulkarni, 2007; Hanauer, 2010); nursing (Hunter, 2002; Raingruber, 2009), war studies (Hanauer, 2012, 2013, 2015a; Bassett, 2012), music (Vries, 2007), and therapeutic psychology (Furman, 2007; Furman, 2004).

Since the current study is the first one that studies the experience of Libyan Muslim women, the individual stories of those women are significantly valued (Hanauer, 2010, 2013; Park, 2006; Zhang, 2011) and require a particular method to represent them. Poetic ethnography, according to the review of its recent literature, seems to be the most appropriate research on lived experiences. First, it works as a self-discovery and exploration tool (Furman, 2004, 2007; Hanauer, 2004, 2010, 2012, 2013; Park, 2013) that enables the researcher to

understand the lived experiences, on the one hand (Furman, 2004, 2007; Furman, 2004; Furman, Langer, Davis, Gallardo, & Kulkarni, 2007; Hanauer, 2004, 2010, 2012, 2013; Langer & Park, 2013), and to uncover hidden incidents and make them accessible to wider audiences, on the other (Furman, 2004, 2007; Furman & Langer, 2007; Furman, Langer, Davis, Gallardo, & Kulkarni, 2007; Hanauer, 2010, 2012, 2013; Langer & Furman, 2004; Leavy, 2009; Richardson, 1993, 1994). Second, generating poetry from narrative incorporates three layers of epistemological interpretations. First, on the psychological level, poetic representation is considered as an effective self-therapeutic tool (Furman, 2004, 2007; Furman, Lietz, & Langer, 2006) that helps the researcher and the participants to understand the interpretation of the experiences and how they are presented through their poems. Second, on the linguistics level, writing poetry resounds in the mind by using effective language. Imagery language helps the reader to recreate the context (Furman, 2004). Additionally, poems, as a compressed form of a long narrative, are powerful and allow the reader to focus on the particular phenomenon (Richardson, 1993; Langer & Furman, 2004; Vries, 2007). Hanauer (2003) maintained that poetry “provides its readers with specific insights into individualized, personal human experience” (p. 69). Third, ontologically, poems are honest and accurate because they represent the poets’ emotional state (Furman, 2004, 2007; Hanauer, 2010; Poindexter, 2002; Richardson, 1993, 1994). Finally, poetic ethnography enables the reader to imagine and relive the experience of the participant (Dark, 2009; Luce-Kapler, 2009).

### **Justifying Poetry in Social Sciences Research**

Cahnmann Tylor (2003, 2009) argued that few researchers, despite their passion for poetry, still hesitated to conduct poetry-based research. One reason was because poetry was not science. However, regarding the discussion about the common features of arts and science, Barone and Eisner (2012) believed that the empirical research that was conducted by scientific approach rely on human experiences. The same scientific approach was utilized by art-based research as well. Eisner (1997) suggested that instead of considering arts-based research an opponent to scientific research, one should consider the latter as an extended kind of knowledge. In other words, it should be considered as another way of looking and knowing. Similarly, McNiff (1998) claimed that art and science were overlapping and complementary types of research.

Nevertheless, on the other hand, Hanauer (2010) explained why some researchers believed that poetry-based research was not scientific. Based on the studies he examined, poetry based research was not a true representation and was not detachable as scientific research (Hanauer, 2010). Poetry was considered as a fictional representation for the experience. However, according to Hanauer, poetic work (Richardson, 1993, 1994; Furman, 2004, Langer & Furman, 2004, Hanauer, 2012, 2013, 2015a) was considered a true representation of the lived experience, as the poems were derived from the participants' narratives, not from fictional interpretations. Hanauer (2010) claimed:

Poetry can be a true representation of the real world if the  
'world' that is being presented is one of the individual

understanding the experience. If the data source is valid and the analysis evidence-based and explicitly described, the result should be justifiable knowledge. Poetry writing as developed here, would seem to meet this criterion. (p. 134)

Richardson (1994) also stated that there was nothing truer than the individuals' lived experiences represented by their own words and phrases. The other reason for not considering poetry as scientific research because it was not detachable, which means that poetry lost its meaning when it was reported (Hanauer, 2010). However, recalling the work of Richardson (1993, 1994; Langer & Furman, 2004), one could argue that the compressed form of knowledge, which is the poetic representation, is powerful because it allows the reader to focus on "the essence of the work" (Langer & Furman, 2004, para, 9).

The third criticism for research poetry, as stated by Hanauer (2010), was universality. In that respect, the knowledge received from poetry was not generalizable and very particular to the individual. However, poetic representation, as an evolving mode in arts-based research, did not aim to generalize the experience and did not aim to be objective when presenting it (Furman, 2004, 2007). Poetry based studies aimed to understand the lived experience and raise awareness about some social issues in society (Eisner, 1997). The last criticism was the emotive feature of poetry, which stood in contrast to the cognitive knowledge of scientific research. Nonetheless, Alexander (2003) believed that constructing an arts-based research involved the "whole thinking-feeling person", which did not separate the cognitive process from the emotional

state (p. 5). Additionally, the emotive feature of the poetry enabled the reader to access the experience by reliving the same feeling of the participants. Finally, Poindexter (2002) suggested that poetry should be judged on its aesthetic quality, not its scientific qualities, and these aesthetic qualities referred to different meanings, including the figurative language and emotive phrases of the poems. Poindexter's (2002) statement reflects the impact of the beauty of the language on the readers' emotive state. As such, the poetic language triggers readers' feelings and makes them relive the individual state of each participant.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The poetic inquiry study aims to first, explore the lived experiences of Libyan Muslim women before, during and after February 17, 2011 revolution. Second, since Libyan women have not been a subject of any studies in the past, the current study aims to “un-silencing the silence” (Park, 2006) as a way to provide Libyan Muslim women a set of tools to empower themselves via their experiences and through their voices. According to Mir- Hosseini (2011) “we know little of the personal narratives and trajectories of the so-called Islamic feminists, whose scholarship and activism have been the subject of academic or journalistic narratives” (p. 68). We need to know from those women “what were their inner thoughts, the experiences that shaped their feminist consciousness, their hesitations, their fears, their silences?” (Mir- Hosseini, 2011, p. 68). Therefore, the dissertation tends to understand and get insights into Libyan Muslim women's understanding and perception of Islamic feminism and how their understanding contributes to their lives and their society. Moreover, it makes



their experiences accessible to the readers worldwide. Finally, this study adds to the existing body of literature on an under-represented, disenfranchised a group of women in visible but invisible parts of the world.

### **Significance of the Study**

There are two levels of significance for this study—one on the personal level—the other on the academic level. Although it is difficult to separate the two, in this research, I position myself as an insider (Libyan woman) and an outsider (researcher). On a personal level, being a Libyan Muslim woman living in a very critical transitional stage of my country time, I believe that through this research, I overcome my silence and provide a tool to Libyan women to free their voices and make their experiences widely open to the world who knew little, if nothing, about us. According to Turner\_Rahman (2009), such a current study aims at “bridging the gap between feminist theory and praxis and build[s] a new narrative on women’s empowerment that takes into account culture, context, and history” (p. 2).

On an academic level, theoretically, the study presents new research about Libyan Muslim women’s experiences that enhances the existing body of research about feminism. From those muted voices of Libyan Muslim women, the study aims to theorize a new perspective and understanding of women’s voices, not only to be heard and recognized in Libya, but to be recognized around the globe. Methodologically, poetry as research promotes voice, self-discovery, and identity recognition (Hanauer, 2010). Pedagogically, the study of Libyan women’s experiences contributes to many aspects in language teaching, in particular, and to

Libyan education, in general. Those experiences can enrich teaching writing by giving teachers other tools to empower students' voices by sharing and exploring their experiences. Moreover, teaching programs can use this research to build new teaching policies and curricula that raise awareness of the role women can play in society. Atkinson (1998) suggested that people's experiences "offers template that can be applied in many disciplinary settings or to fulfill many research needs, from sociological to anthropological to linguistics to literacy" (p. 2). Last but not least, since the research highlights the recent history of Libya, it can be a great source to read and find out about the unrecognized history of Libya.

### **Organization of the Dissertation Chapters**

In this Chapter, I highlighted the significance of the study and my motivation for conducting the first Libyan feminist research. I started by narrating my story as a Libyan Muslim woman in the United States. I also briefly described the methodology of the study and the reasons for using poetic renditions for Libyan Muslim women's experiences. Chapter two is divided into two sections: in the first section, I explore the context of the study and present Libya through my feminist readings of people's old photos and memoirs. In this section, I reconstruct the history of Libya to expose the reader to the context of the study. The writing of the Libyan history shows a serious lack of research about Libyan women through different times. Since Greek and Roman times, the history of Libya recorded the victory and failure of conquerors without reporting any relevant information about Libyan women. The historical construction provided evidence that Libyan women remained invisible through time.

In the second section, I reviewed the history of Islamic feminism and the difficulties behind agreeing on the term's definition. The urgent need of situating Libyan feminism within the discourse of Islamic feminism led me to present the nature of Islamic feminism, which was apparently different from western feminism, post-colonial feminism, and transnational feminism. This section asserted the absence of Libyan Muslim women's experience in feminist research. Moreover, it provided an extensive discussion about placing Libyan feminism within the framework of Islamic feminism.

In Chapter three, I explained the methodology of the study and how poetic inquiry enabled me to truly represent Libyan women's experiences. This chapter explored the nature of arts-based research and poetic representation of human experiences. I explained the three stages of poetry research, as stated by Hanauer (2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2015a).

In Chapter four, five, six and seven I presented the results of the study. I organized the women's answers into four major themes. These themes were, 1) Libyan women's experiences during King Idris's time, 2) Libyan women's experiences during Gaddafi's time, 3) Libyan women's experiences during the revolution, and 4) Libyan women's experiences after the revolution. Then I dedicated each of the Chapters to present those experiences by using poetic ethnography.

In Chapter eight, I discussed the findings of the study in relation to the theory of Islamic feminism and the history of Libya. Moreover, I summarized my answers of the research questions.

In Chapter nine, I wrote my reflection on the study and what does this study mean to me as a Libyan Muslim woman. In this chapter I discussed the pedagogical implications of the lived experiences of Libyan Muslim women in relation to the feminist and critical pedagogy.

## CHAPTER TWO

### INTRODUCTION

*What if, instead of telling doctoral students, 'Look for a gap in the research, we said, 'Look for a story that needs to be told.' If we said, 'Look for stories,' that's what people would find.*

*Pagnucci, 2004*

As I explained in the previous chapter, the main goal for this study is to facilitate the voice of Libyan Muslim women and shed light on their experiences. Also, the study tends to place Libyan women's experiences within the framework of Islamic feminism. Therefore, in this chapter, I have two aims. First, I explore the context of the study by writing about Libyan history and how women were represented in Libya in different eras of transitions. Second, I review the recent scholarship relevant to Islamic feminism to show the lack of research on Libyan feminism and to better understand the theoretical framework of Islamic feminism. Prior to my two aims, I begin the chapter by describing the methods of collecting the literature about Libya and about Islamic feminism.

#### **Literature Review Methods**

##### **Section One: Methodology of History**

The literature review is divided into two sections. The first section discusses the Libyan context. This section is very unique because it stands as a historical study in itself. It is not a traditional literature review because the literature about Libyan Muslim women is very scarce. Nevertheless, this part of the dissertation enriches the study in two ways; first, it provides brief historical

remarks about the country. According to Bugaighis (2011), the suppression of Libyan history through time requires Libyans to construct a historical account for the country. Second, it traces the Libyan women's movement through history. Therefore, I designed a methodology for constructing the history of Libya and the status of women in each era. One of the challenges I faced was organizing the information in systematic order (Dougherty and Nawrotzki, 2013). The historical information I found was in different formats that required very specific organization and checking. I used separate methods to collect, analyze, and discuss data. The data also was very exceptional. I collected the data for this section from different sources. I used different history books and reports written by Westerners (John, 2008, 2012; Pargeter, 2005, 2012; Hilsum, 2012; Human Rights Watch, 2013). These books and articles were written in English. Also, I included some international journals that wrote about Libyan women, and I highlighted the most significant information those journals provided. The other significant source I used was social media websites, such as Facebook, and personal blogs. People on these websites were posting memoirs and pictures of the past of Libya. The online data consisted of 90 photos of Libya, 44 people's memoirs, and 37 photo descriptions. Most of these memoirs were stories about the past, starting from the 1930s, and some stories covered the period of the 1920s and backwards. Generally, the stories were written in Arabic, then I translated them to English. According to Clark (2009), using memoirs and diaries of ordinary people can be of great value in "how they lived and thought" (p. 13). In this respect, I would highlight that according to Clark (2009), using people's

memoires started as early as the 1980s when the historian, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, found the diary of Martha Ballard, a midwife who kept a diary between 1785 to 1812. Those diaries offered insights about the daily life in Northern New England; the diaries also addressed women's roles, health, and medicine during that time (Clark, 2009). Using pictures in research provides “a significant source of information about [the] social world, including cultural aspects of social life; economic and political structures, [and] identity issues at the global, national and individual levels” (Leavy, 2009, p. 218). Furthermore, Leavy (2009) pointed out that interpreting visual data, such as photos, made a bridge between the personal stories and the captured image.

The final source I used was telephone calls with my family back home in Libya. First, I sent emails and Viber messages to my mother and mother-in-law with very specific questions about Libya in the 1940s and afterwards. My mother and mother-in-law were not born during that time, but they still remember some of the stories they knew from their mothers and grandmothers.

Table 1

*List of Photos and Memoirs from Social Media Websites*

Facebook pages and groups	Number of photos	Memoir	
		People stories	Photo description
<b>The history of Tripoli and the Tripolitania families with pictures (Before the invasion of Gypsy) (2012).</b>	25	17	8
تاريخ طرابلس والعائلات الطرابلسية بالصور (قبل غزو العجر لها)			

<p>The page offers several memoirs from people from different places in Libya. The goal of the page is to maintain records of the Libyan families and state stories and pictures of the invisible past.</p>			
<p><b>The Tripolitania gathering (2012)</b>  اللّمة الطرابلسية</p> <p>The page spotlights the Libyan traditions and the Libyan families' old pictures. The aim of the page is to share old family pictures and highlight the Libyan culture in the old days.</p>	3	1	1
<p><b>Tripoli in its better days (2012)</b>  طرابلس ايام زهاها</p> <p>This page includes the old pictures of Tripoli, along with a few personal stories.</p>	4	1	3
<p><b>The old and rare pictures of Libya (2013)</b>  صور ليبيا القديمة والنادرة</p> <p>The page includes pictures of Libya throughout history. The aim of the page is to show the new generation how the country survived through history.</p>	4	0	3
<p><b>Together, we respect the humanity and equality between women and men in Libya. (2011)</b>  معا من اجل احترام الانسانية ومساواة المرأة بالرجل في ليبيا</p> <p>This page is the first secular Libyan page that speaks for equality between women and men, regardless of the religious point of view. I would say that I do not agree with most of the content in the page because, for me, women's liberation and rights has to be granted and protected by the religion; it is not outside the religious circle. I use this page because it contains several pictures and memoirs of the pioneering Libyan women in the past. The page stresses that women in the past had more freedom than today because currently, many people use religion to suppress women.</p>	12	5	6
<p><b>Heritage of Tripoli from the book (ten years in the court of Tripoli) (2012)</b>  تراث طرابلس من كتاب (عشر سنوات في بلاط طرابلس)</p>	4	3	2



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This page reflects an analysis of the book Ten years in the court of Tripoli (Add year here). The book is written by Richard Tolley and translated to Arabic by Omar Aldiwari. It contains detailed descriptions about the lifestyle of Libyan people and refers to the Muslim, Jewish, and Turkish tradition during the Ottoman Empire. The book is published 23 years after all the materials were collected during the Garamanly family regime. The book was translated to the French and Arabic languages in 1819.

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<b>The Libyan past page (2012)</b> صفحة الماضي الليبي	35	15	14
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The page offers insights about the Libyan past and includes pictures and memoirs from people from different cities.

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<b>The Four Pillars (2011)</b> الأربع عرصات	3	2	0
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The name of the page reflects the four roads in Tripoli Old City, which represents the crossroads where Libyan people from different cities meet and socialize. In other words, the page concerns Libyan people's experiences in all the Libyan cities.

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## Criteria for Photos and Memoirs Collection

### Photos.

1. The photos should represent any city in Libya.
2. The photos should capture a particular time or interest.
3. The photos should reflect the economical, political, social, or cultural issue.

### Memoirs.

1. The memoirs should include a story or a comment about a particular time or event.

2. The memoir could include people's experiences or could include a reflection about a time, a place, or a group of people.

After data collection, I first placed the pictures and the memoirs in time order (e.g., 1930s to present day). I organized them in folders; each contained the prospected data, such as the 1930s folder, the 1940s folder, and so on. Second, I generated themes and subthemes from those pictures and memoirs. For example, a few themes included the following: Italian occupation, King Idris's time, and post revolution era. Subthemes included rape in the revolution, education during the Italian Colony, and equality. Dougherty and Nawrotzki (2013) pointed out that writing history takes different formats; it can be chronological, thematic, or alphabetical (p. 45). For the purpose of this dissertation, I chose to present the data in a chronological format.

### **Reliability and Validity**

For reliability and validity of these memoirs and events, I called some of my friends and family to confirm the incidents. First, I called my mother and my mother-in-law because both ladies have lived during King Idris's time and remember some of the events from the Italian time. Then, I asked two Libyan friends to look at the pictures and read the memoirs and re-check the themes I generated.

In my opinion, presenting the historical photos and people's memoirs is a study in itself that delivers the history of Libya from people's unique experiences through my feminist lens. I did not need an IRB for the data collection because most of the data was available online on public websites.

## Section Two: Islamic Feminism Framework

The second section reviews the theoretical framework for Islamic feminism. The data I gathered originated from scholarly articles from peer-reviewed journals. To find these articles, I used keywords, such as Islamic feminism, Muslim feminism, Muslim women's experiences, and Muslim women's rights. Most of the work I collected discussed the theory; however, none of the articles or the books conducted qualitative research on Libyan Muslim women's experiences. In other words, Libyan women have not been mentioned in any of these articles or books. Most of the work was done on Muslim women in Egypt, Morocco, Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey (Badran, 1988, 2001, 2005, 2009, 2011; Mernissi, 1987; Moghisi, 1999). When collecting this data, I faced serious challenges. Since I have never been exposed to feminism as an academic discipline, I had difficulty in finding the correct information about my work. That is to say, feminism as a theory, included different opinions and complexities; the invisibility of Libyan women within this theory made it more complex and challenging to locate a foundation for my Libyan feminism (Badran, 2011). Therefore, keywords, such as Libyan women or women in Libya, did not show any qualitative research results. The only recent study I found was a quantitative study about the status of Libyan women (Abdul Latif, 2013).

Although the two sections are presented separately, both the context of the study (Libya) and the theory (Islamic feminism) are highly related when reviewing the literature on Libyan women. Both sections lead to the same

conclusion: there is a vast absence of research on Libyan women in their own country, in academia, and in theory.

### **Libya: Historical Overview**

*Libya is a country that wears its history on its sleeve. Not only can visitors to the country ample along colonnaded, Italian-built streets, but they can also marvel at ancient Greek temples, breathtaking Roman archaeological sites and exquisite Ottoman mosques and houses (Pargeter, 2012, p. 14)*

The previous quote from Pargeter's *Libya: The rise and fall of Qaddafi* gave a very brief, accurate picture of the outer image of Libya, which was represented by most non-Libyan historians. The country has gone from being one colony to another. Historians described the country and its history in several ways. Pargeter (2012) called it the "land of the conquered" (p. 10). John (2012) claimed that the Libyan history was "shrouded with mystery" (p. 2). Lobban and Dalton (2014) referred to it as the "land of contrasts" (p. 1). Wright (2012) considered the history of Libya as a "blank space" (p. 1). Metz (1987) mentioned that fascist Italy referred to Libya as "Italy's Fourth Shore" (Para. 1). Finally, the Libyan historian, Bugaighis (2011), stated that the history of Libya was suppressed by the colonial observation.

What I noticed from these history books and claims was that Libyan history was constructed through a colonial lens. Libyan men and women were barely seen in those records. The historical reports discussed the colonial eras without giving direct attention to the Libyans under these eras. Bugaighis (2011) argued that one of the reasons for the absence of the Libyans in the historical

records was due to the unavailability of newsletters and books that were written and published by the Libyans. Most books and newsletter were written in Italian and English. Therefore, Libyan history was mostly written from a colonial perspective.

Similarly, Wright (2012) stated that during his years in Libya, he could not find references about Libyan history. I think, as a Libyan, I interpret this unsatisfactory absence for Libyan history in two ways. First, Libyan history was mainly narrated and constructed by non-Libyan historians, who rely on non-Libyan sources for their historical data. Second, Gaddafi marginalized the Libyan history. That is to say, during my life and my school years in Libya, I have never studied any relevant information about Libyan history. The history books during Gaddafi focused on his Coup and the other conflicts in the world, such as the Iraq/Kuwait conflict and the Palestine/Israel conflict. As young students, we learned more about the conflicts in the world than we learned about our country's past conflicts. Currently, after all these years, I could not find any history of Libya written by Arabs and Libyans in English. For me, this seems like the English data about my country's history lacks information about the Libyans and their daily experiences within these conflicts and occupations. Thus, I think my dissertation should offer brief insights on the old and current history of Libya in English, and it should be generated from Libyan people's memoirs and captured throughout different eras.

## Early History

The very early history of Libya tackles the coming of the Greek tribes to the northern-east coastal areas in 630 BC. The Greek tribes settled in the east of Libya (Pargeter, 2012; John, 2008, 2012). In 632 BC, the first Greek city, Cyrene, (Shahat, East of Libya) was built, and it is still recognized for its archaeological artistic design. Wright (2012) mentioned that the Greeks were followed by the Romans, who chose to settle in the western areas of Libya, such as Leptis Magna, Sabratha, and Oea. These three cities were known as Tripoli (from the Greek word *tri polis* – three cities) (Pargeter, 2012, p. 15). Pargeter (2012), Metz (1987), and John (2008, 2012) pointed out that the Romans expanded their empires to include the Greek city, Cyrene, and united the west with the east. However, this empire did not survive the Byzantine attack, and the country became the Byzantine Empire.

The south of Libya was under the Tuareg tribes (الطوارق), known as Garamantes. John (2008, 2012), Pargeter (2012), Wright (2012), Bugaighis (2011), Lobban and Dalton (2014), Falola, Morgan, and Oyenyi (2012), and Metz (1987) mentioned that the original inhabitants of Libya were Berbers, known as Libu tribes (الليبو), and this was the origin of the name of Libya. The Greek applied the name of Libya to mostly northern Africa, and the name was adopted by the Ottomans and the Italians later (John, 2008, 2012; Pargeter, 2012; Wright, 2012; Bugaighis, 2011; Lobban & Dalton, 2014; Falola, Morgan, & Oyenyi, 2012; Metz, 1987).

As seen in the previous historical statements, all the historical data recited and glorified the history of the colony, and there was not enough information about the original inhabitants. As I read this history, the Berbers, who, by many evidences were the original Libyans, were dismissed by the dominant discourse of the colony in the past and by Gaddafi's under-representation of Libyan history in the present. As a Libyan, I know that the Berbers during Gaddafi's time were marginalized, and they did not enjoy the same political rights as Arabs. The Berber heritage was not respected, and the government did not support their language and their traditions. I have never read any historical information about the Berbers. This, for me, reflects two aspects; first, the history that has been written by the foreigners did not pay attention to Libyans as valued residents in their country. In fact, Libyans were presented in history as oppressed and powerless, despite their continuous struggle against the colonizers. Second, Gaddafi hid the Libyan history and stressed only his heroic deeds.

After the Byzantines, Libya was colonized by the Ottomans in 1551-1911. Vandewalle (2012) stated that during the period between the Byzantines and the Ottomans, Libya witnessed different kinds of conquests. According to Metz (1987), the country was invaded by the Arabs in 663 BC following the death of the Prophet Mohamed (PBUH). Arabs carried Islam to the area, and Libya was recognized as a Muslim country. Until today, the old mosques of the Prophet's companions survive. The Arab expansions included Fatimids, Hilalians, and Hafsids, to name just a few. Although Islam is still the main religion of Libya, other religions, such as Christianity and Judaism, were recorded throughout

history. Fendel (2011) claimed that Judaism was one of the very old religions found in Libya before World War I. However, in the 1930s, Fascist Italians cooperating with German troops acted negatively against Libyan Jews. They were not given the same rights as Muslims and Christians. According to Fendel (2011), in the 1940s, many Jews left for Palestine, and less than 4% of the Jews stayed in Libya. In fact, they left during Gaddafi's time. In 2003, the last Libyan Jew, Rina Debach, age 80, left the country (Fendel, 2011).

Christianity was also one of the oldest religions in Libya. Lobban and Dalton (2014) reported that Christianity was carried to Libya in 500 AD by the Byzantines. Christianity gradually disappeared after the arrival of Islam to the region. In modern history, Christianity is represented mostly by non-Libyans. According to John (2008, 2012), Christianity in Libya was associated with the Italian Colony, and the Christians were the Italians who left Italy to live in Libya. In my opinion, despite the diversity of the religion that settled in Libya, Islam was widely spread and could be established as the only religion of the country, due to the vast number of its followers. In 2010, the World Trade Press report on Libya (2010) claimed that there is less than 1% of Christians and Jews in Libya. Again, these historical accounts did not mention any information about the Libyan's living experience. I believe that the non-Arab historian studied the history from one angle, which was the colonial perspective.

### **Ottoman Empire (1551 – 1911)**

John (2008, 2012) and Metz (1987), in their construction of the history of Libya, stated that the Ottoman Empire ruled the country from 1551 to the First



World War in 1911. According to Heritage of Tripoli Facebook page (2012) despite this invasion, there was little known about the lifestyle of the Libya people. The Ottomans extended their empire to include the main three provinces of Libya (Cyrenaica in the east, Tripolitania in the west, and Fezzan in the south). Heritage of Tripoli Facebook page (2012) mentioned that Ottomans built the mosques, helped in increasing the Islamic areas in Libya, and were a powerful empire that forced taxes on all the foreign ships from Europe and the United States. One of the memoirs in Facebook group: The history of Tripoli and the Tripolitania families (2012), The Four Pillars Facebook page (2011), and John (2008, 2012) reported that in 1803, Thomas Jefferson [1801 -1809] sent the famous ship, the Philadelphia, to the shores of Tripoli. The ship was captured by the Ottoman Garamanli family, and the mast of the ship is still standing over the Saraya Alhamra (The Red Palace) in the Martyrs Square in downtown Tripoli. This incident with the Philadelphia ship is mentioned in the United States Marine Corps Hymn in the second verse “to the shores of Tripoli” “من قاعات مونتيزوما إلى ”شواطئ طرابلس نحن نحارب معارك بلادنا في الجو والأرض والبحر”. Again, all these stories reflected that the history writers were not realistic with Libyan citizens and particularly, women. The stories reported either the praise of the Empire or the victory of the Emperors. There was not any evidence or information about Libyan women and their experiences. As a Libyan woman, I do not know what happened during the old times and how Libyan women survived the different eras of occupations.

When the Ottoman Empire lost their power in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it eased the Italian colony to the country. According to Vandewalle (2012), the Italian government considered the Libyan coastal cities as the Italian fourth shore, and they aimed to unify the Libyan coastal cities under the government of Italy.



*Figure 1. Map of Libya Shows the Three Provinces.*

### **Italian Colony (1911 - 1951)**

The very early history of Libya showed the status of unrest of the country. Each conqueror had its impact on the people and their lifestyle. For example, during the Italian occupation, the Italian government built the Bank of Rome, which was considered one of the biggest money investments in Europe. According to John (2012) and Pargeter (2012), the bank of Rome, along with the other educational and political institutions, placed the Libyan citizens at the bottom of society. Libyan people were considered as second class people in their own country. The old and rare pictures of Libya Facebook page (2013) pointed out that when the Italians took the Libyan farms, they hired Libyan people to work them. Subsequently, the conflict between the Libyans and the Italians lasted for more than 20 years. Here, I would mention the famous Libyan rebel, Omar Al-

mokhtar, who fought the Italians for 20 years; the Italian government later hung him in public space. However, according to the Libyan historian, Bugaighis (2011), there was not any data written by the Libyans during the 31 years of Italian occupation, due to the banning of Arabic language usages in educational and political institutions. This kind of treatment from the conqueror reflected how Libyans, Berbers, Twariq, and Arabs were marginalized and oppressed.

This marginalization was escalated by killings and fleeing; thus, women suffered on many levels. According to Azzuz (2014), during the Italian era, “women carried a large burden of caring for the family, yet worked in the farms” (p. 150). They were taking care of their children while working to get money to feed them. Stewart (2011) mentioned, in his historical reports on Libya, that Italians occupying Libya, along with German and Russian powers, practiced different kinds of oppression against the Libyan citizens. First, they killed many Libyans, especially those who fought them. Second, the Italian Governor, Italo Balbo, brought great waves of Italian colonizers, including 20,000 Italian farmers, to colonize the Libyan villages and hired the original citizens to work for them. The majority of the memoirs stressed that the Italians in Libya left an impact on Libyan society. Until now, our grandmothers speak Italian, but very few Italian words are still used by the new generation (The history of Tripoli and the Tripolitania families, 2012; The Tripolitania gathering, 2012; Tripoli in its better days, 2012; The old and rare pictures of Libya, 2013; Together we respect the humanity and equality between women and men in Libya, 2011; The Libyan past page, 2012). According to Lobban and Dalton (2014), Libyan people “have been

exposed to various foreign tongues over the years”, and only Arabic and Berber languages are still useable in Libya. Lobban and Dalton (2014) also stressed that this linguistic diversity affected Libyan citizens in several settings, including at the education level and the class level. By saying that, Lobban and Dalton (2014) meant that people who spoke more than one language would have better jobs and, therefore, would be living in a higher-class position. I would argue that although many people might consider it as a drawback of the colony, I claim that having different languages can improve the society by exposing its residents to the different cultures and to various forms of information.

The Italian Colony not only impacted language, but it also impacted the way people dressed. Where in Islam the veil was a mandatory act, very few Libyan women wore it (Lobban & Dalton, 2014). My mom witnessed the era of King Idris [1951 – 1969] and told me that religious awareness was not as widely spread in the country, despite the fact that Libya is a Muslim country. The society at that time was a secular society, and very few people practiced religious duties and obligations. However, with the clear absence of data about women’s experiences at that time, it is very difficult to draw a conclusion about how people lived through different circumstances.

When women in the wider Muslim world moved towards their rights and freedom, Libyan women were barely noticeable, even in their own country (Badran, 1988). From the stories I read and the photos I collected, I believe that women were treated as men’s property. They did not have any rights to education or institutional work. They did not have any voice or opinion (El- Basyouni,

2013). Women lived in seclusion, as Keith (1965) reported. Since, as I stated earlier, the colony oppressed the citizens, women, in particular, were oppressed by both the colony and their male siblings. According to Pargeter (2012), John (2008, 2012), Albarani (2007), and El-Basyouni (2013), the Italian schools were filled with the Italians and those who spoke Italian. Also, Metz (1987) claimed that Mussolini called the Libyans “Muslim Italians.” Here, I would argue that the oppression of the colony did not include the Libyan’s properties, job positions, and education only; it extended to their national identities, by placing them as followers of the Italians, instead of keeping their own national Libyan identity.

Despite the negative impact of the Italian Colony in Libya, Metz (1987) reported various results. According to the report, Italians improved the country’s infrastructure, transportation, and technology. Even today, the Italian buildings are still surviving. Memoirs on Facebook pages reported different reflections on those buildings. Some people considered those buildings as a sign of colony that told a story of oppression and injustice. By saying that, the memoirs stated that the Italians used to live in wealth, while Libyans lived in tents. On the contrary, other memoirs revealed positively on those buildings. People claimed that having such types of Italian heritage told a story of glory and victory; apparently, giving the Italian buildings back to the Libyans was a success (The history of Tripoli and the Tripolitania families, 2012; The Tripolitania gathering’ 2012; Tripoli in its better days, 2012; The old and rare pictures of Libya, 2013; The Libyan past page, 2012). Personally, I agree with both arguments. Nonetheless, I look positively at those buildings, and I always saw them as beautiful and inspiring. Inside the walls

of those buildings, multiple stories have been told. These stories narrate oppression and glory.

As I highlighted earlier, I believe that language had a positive impact on the colony. Libyan people were able to speak Italian, German, English, and Russian because of the direct contact with those occupiers in the colonized areas. To this end, I believe that linguistic and infrastructure elements assisted in developing the country during King Idris's time.

### **Independence: Kingdom Era (1952 – 1969)**

In 1951, the Italians left Libya, and the country received its independence on December 24, 1951 and was recognized for the first time as an independent country, where the three provinces were unified under one kingdom. Historians recorded that even the three provinces were united under one country's national identity, but the long time separation from the colony made each province own a different culture and tradition (Pargeter, 2012; John, 2008, 2012; Vandewalle, 2012; Wright, 2012). In my opinion, such a lengthy separation encouraged the tribal system that we still have these days, even after the 2011 revolution. Libyans are more loyal to their tribes than to their country. It surprises me that during the revolution, all Libyans were fighting under one entity and for one goal; however, after the death of Gaddafi, Libyans, themselves, worked to officially divide the country into the three provinces (Cyrenaica'Barqa', Tripolitania, and Fezzan). When the revolution was over, it created a civil war, which is still killing a lot of innocent people today.

During King Idris's time, the three provinces were just a memory from the colony. Before the independence, each of these provinces were colonized by a different colony. Barqa in the East was under the British colony, Tripoli in the West was under the Italian and British colony, and Fazan in the South was under the French military. In this respect, I would highlight that by the time of King Idris, Libyans became more visible, and their deeds and experiences were more noticeable. However, historians continued to focus on the king's internal and external politics more than the Libyans. History noted the relationship between Libya and the world without paying enough attention to the daily survival of the Libyan citizens. No research was reported about their experiences as individuals in their own society. In this dissertation, despite the fact that my ultimate goal is not to recreate the history of Libya, I assume that my data highlighted unrevealed experiences about people's experiences over time. Moreover, this study gives access to Libyans and non-Libyans to read the stories that have never been told before.

From an economic point of view, Pargeter (2012) maintained that when King Idris took power in 1952, Libya was "ranked as the poorest nation in the world" (p. 36). However, the poverty did not last for a long time (Vandewalle, 2012). Oil was discovered a decade later, and production of oil made the country one of the richest in the world, in terms of oil production. According to the memoirs on Facebook, King Idris improved the country in many ways. First, he developed transportation by building railways and provided free transportation to school kids. Second, he encouraged the Libyans to invest their money in all sorts

of businesses, such as hotels, stores, and professional schools. Third, he built well-equipped hospitals and clinics. Fourth, he improved infrastructure by building new highways and houses. After the independence, King Idris's government changed the name of the streets that used to be recognized under Italian names. (history of Tripoli and the Tripolitania families, 2012; The Tripolitania gathering' 2012; Tripoli in its better days, 2012; The old and rare pictures of Libya, 2013; Together we respect the humanity and equality between women and men in Libya, 2011; The Libyan past page, 2012). For example, Omar Almokhar Street used to be known as Corso Sicilia, and Mohamed Elmeghrif Street used to be known as Via de Corso (Adham, 2012, p. 119). This shift from poverty to wealth had its effect on women in the society. One post on Facebook argued that the poverty and rigorous tradition made women unrecognized citizens in their country; families could not afford to pay for their daughters' education, and they forced their girls to marry at a very young ages (Together we respect the humanity and equality between women and men in Libya, 2011). Once, my grandmother told me about a little girl playing on a farm when she was taken to her own wedding. This child was my grandmother's relative. The girl was crying and did not know that she was taken from playtime to a life as a housewife. The story shocked me; girls, in my time, have to finish their education before they can be engaged. Such a story reveals how some women were seen and treated in the 1950s in some parts of Libya. As a Libyan, I know that people did not ask a woman's opinion about marriage because it was a family decision, and the young bride was the last to know. According to Flonal,



Morgan and Oyeniya (2012), marriage was not a relationship between a man and woman, but a relationship between families and tribes. Flonal et al. (2012) pointed out that one reason for the early marriage was “to prevent loss of virginity and the associated dishonor and shame” (p. 96). Keith (1965) also wrote that Libyan women were getting married at a very young age and described the young woman as a child-wife. Those young women were only allowed to visit their parents’ house one year after marriage or after they gave birth to the first baby. Furthermore, Keith (1965) revealed that Libyan women used to have many children, around nine children from one woman; she also stated that those women were not educated, and they did not know how to deal with kids if they were sick. Therefore, many babies died during the 1950s. In another story about the babies, Keith (1965) wrote, “At least half of the women had babies suckling at their breasts, and all had children clinging to them” (pp. 82-83). Despite the fact that the king provided the country with all the financial resources, he could not offer a higher status to the women under the family and traditional control. The family had stronger control on women than the government. I am not blaming the king himself, because I know how he respected women’s rights, including their political rights, such as the right to vote, but I am blaming the country’s system at that time for not doing anything to protect such little girls. The letter I found from the USA Ambassador in Libya to the State Department in the United States revealed that King Idris and his wife had noticeable steps in improving women’s rights in Libya (see appendix A). Furthermore, according to the Libyan

Constitution of 1951, Article 10 stated that all Libyans, men and women, should be equally treated. In fact, it went on to state the following:

Libyans shall be equal before the law. They shall enjoy equal civil and political rights, shall have the same opportunities, and be subject to the same public duties and obligations, without distinction of religion, belief, race, language, wealth, kinship or political or social opinions. (article 10/59)

Azzuz (2014) mentioned that despite these laws, the constitution failed to “establish a balance for a strong judiciary or include provisions for the management of elections” (p. 151). Nevertheless, Libyan women could enjoy equal opportunities for education and healthcare, and they had the right to vote.

In the following section, I survey the biography of the first Libyan feminist who was the leader of Libyan feminism, even if it was not called Libyan feminism at that time.

### **The First Libyan Feminist: Hamida Al-Aneizi (1892 – 1982)**

Because of the mistreatment of women mistreatment and the rights dismissal, a group of educated Libyan women moved towards women’s liberation. Hamida Tarkhan [1892 – 1982] was one pioneering women at that time. Mrs. Alaneiz (this last name is for her husband) witnessed four different eras of Libyan history. She was born in 1892 during the Ottoman Colony, and she was sent to Turkey to finish her education at a teacher’s college. In 1915, when she came back to Libya, the country was colonized by the Italians. According to

El- Basyouni (2013), Mrs. Alaneizi did not like the fact that Libyan women were oppressed, and they did not have the right to get education. This oppression was coming either from their male siblings or from the Italian government, who closed the Turkish and Arabic schools. In the 1920s, Libyan men were fighting against the Italian colony. She decided to fight too, but in her own way. Albarani (2007), the author of Mrs. Alaneizi's memoirs, wrote in 1917 that Mrs. Al-Aneizi turned her house into a girls' school, where she taught reading and writing; she also helped her students memorize the *Quran*. Most of the girls in her school were orphans, whose parents died in the previous war between the Ottomans and the Italians. According to Al-Basyouni (2013), in her memoir, Mrs. Alaneizi wrote that she was taken to court because she was secretly teaching girls in her house. I believe that such a remark shows the oppression of the colony against Libyan women.

By the end of the 1920s, Mrs. Alaneizi opened the first girl's school in Benghazi. The school included 48 girls, and the girls were taught history, geography, and embroidery. Alaneizi mentioned that she used to smuggle Arabic reading books from Egypt to teach those girls (Al-Basyouni, 2013). The girls' school graduated the first educated women, whose names are still memorable until today. Khadija aljahmi, Hamida ben Amer, Fatima Galboun, and Fariha Tarkhan were among the first educated Libyan women who graduated from the girls' school in the 1930s.

In 1954, two years after the independence, Mrs. Alaneizi and her students initiated the first Libyan Women's Renaissance Association in Benghazi. The

Association aimed to help poor families; it also aimed to educate girls while raising awareness about women's issues. Mainly, the association attempted to liberate Libyan women from the control of culture and tradition. In 1963, King Idris (1951 – 1969) approved the women's right to vote through the Libyan constitution.

The memoir of Mrs. Alaneizi shows how Libyan women were oppressed and marginalized due to the colony and male dominance. Her story is one of the examples that is supported by Badran's argument about silence and freedom. Badran (1988, 2011) argued that when Muslim women receive their freedom, they challenge themselves and their cultures to break the silence and fight for their rights. Mrs. Alaneizi fought for her freedom through education and reading. Such an example can be a clue for the emergence of Islamic feminism in Libya back in the 1950s, even if it was not called Islamic feminism at that time. The Libyan Women Renaissance Association called for women's rights that Islam granted for them. Such progress in women's rights in Libya in the 1950s was very enlightening. Mrs. Alanezi was the first Libyan educated woman who overcame her silence and challenged the country's circumstances to improve the Libyan women's status. Her story is very remarkable because despite the number of Libyan women, very few are recognized. Mrs. Alaneizi did not write her speech and her articles to women only; she talked to men and women at the same time. She had the courage to speak directly to men and asked them to allow their daughters and sisters to earn an education; she also asked men to let the women

and their lives seek job employment. Mrs. Alaneizi (February, 1936) wrote in *Majalat albait (The house magazine)*:

My dear Libya daughters,

This voice was choking me among the silence around.

This silence prohibited me from making my voice louder.

Women are the most important part of the society. Women bear and bring children who grow up and constitute any society.

Therefore, women should be educated more than men. Women raise men so they should be knowledgeable to fulfill this responsibility. Women are the source of the social development. Thus, they should be treated with respect.

Here I would address my speech to all Libyan girls. I am inviting you (Libyan girls) to study and read to widen your knowledge. Science and Art are the treasures that never fade away.

I want to inform all fathers to think wisely about their daughters' future. Do not discriminate against their rights of education. Your daughters are the source of life in this time, do not oppress them and make their life immortal darkness and sadness. And my dear daughters avoid laziness and join schools for knowledge and education. Go forward and let's walk side by side to men. (as cited in Al-Basyouni, 2013 and Albarani, 2007; Trans).

## إلى بناتي الليبيات العزيزات

(هذا صوت كاد يخفني من مدة بعيدة أردت أن أزق به ولكن السكوت القائم حولي كان يمنعني من رفع الصوت، المرأة هي الشطر الأهم في إنتاج الذرية، فينبغي أن تكون معلوماتها أكثر من الشطر الآخر فهي قوام الهيئة الاجتماعية وعماد تقدم الأمم، وبكلمة واحدة هي أول وآخر مربى للإنسان، بهذه الاعتبارات يجب أن ننظر إلى المرأة، بل بهذا التقدير والاعتماد على النفس يجب أن تنتظر المرأة إلى نفسها فتعمل لتحقيق ما تتطلبه من الإصلاح والرقى، لذلك أوجه كلمتي اليوم إلى كل بنات ليبيا داعية إياهن للإقبال على دور العلم لتوسيع دائرة معارفهن، فالعلوم والآداب هي الثروة التي لا تنفذ وتبقى أبد الدهر. وأنتم أيها الآباء أناشدكم الله تدبروا في مستقبل بناتكم فلا تكونوا من المتعصبين الذين يحولون دون تعليم بناتهم، فيقضون بحرمانهن من أهم أسباب الحياة في هذا العصر ويحكمون عليهن بالتعاسة والشقاء الأبدى. وأنتن أيتها البنات العزيزات انفضن عنكن غبار الكسل والخمول، واقبلن على دور التعليم، فإلى الأمام أيتها النساء، لنسر إلى جانب الرجال خطوة خطوة).

مجلة البيت في فبراير (1936)

On the other hand, in Tripoli, many women were able to go to Italian schools. My mother and aunts were a few of the women who attended schools and continued their education. Women in Tripoli were very liberated. Most of them dressed like the Italian women, wore perfume and make up in public, and married at older ages. Although such construction of the history seems very confusing, even to me while doing it, I feel that Libyan women received different treatment according to where they lived. I see that women in bigger cities, like Tripoli and Benghazi, had better access to education and schooling. From the photos I collected, I found many Libyan women working in different kinds of jobs, such as

being teachers, nurses, school principals and hostesses. However, very few stories are told about them during that time. Although the Italian Colony oppressed the rights of both Libyan men and women, what I noticed from the photos and the memoirs is that Libyan women were more liberated, in terms of their clothing. However, since I could not find any relevant story about that time, I am looking to gain more insight about the history of Libya and the status of the Libyan women from my data. Thus, this study will bring life to those memoirs and make the voices of the women heard to all people in the world, including myself. This part of the literature about my country is another motive for the study. The literature shows a very serious lack of research about Libyan women. I found myself struggling to find any relevant information about their stories, their experiences, and their lives. It saddens me that a woman, like Hamida Alaneizi, passed away, and her story is not widely accessible to the world. People like her, who invested their time to educate Libyan women, should have their stories be more visible, than in just a collected memoir. In my opinion, Mrs. Alaneizi spent all her life sending a message to the Libyan women and men; however, her story remains invisible. My dissertation brings to life her story and makes it accessible to the world.

### **Gaddafi Coup (1969 – 2011)**

According to Pargeter (2005) and Azzuz (2014), Colonel Moamer Al-Gaddafi, known as Gaddafi, took power in September 1969 after a bloodless coup. From the very first years of his coup, Gaddafi implemented many changes in the country. In 1969, he changed the country's flag to make Libya the only

country's flag with green. In the 1970s, he changed the country's name from Libya to Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (State of Masses), which was based on his political ideology and his *Green book*, which was published in 1975. Although I was not born at that time, I was one of the students who studied and memorized the *Green book* in the 1990s. I always find myself condemning King Idris's silence against the Coup. I have never believed that this so called bloodless coup was the result of the bravery of Gadhafi, but the weakness of the King's political system. As I read through the history, I found out that Libya had strong military forces that were built to protect the country. However, when the country was attacked, I did not see any mention of those forces. I was wondering what power Gadhafi had to change everything in the country while everyone remained silent.

In the 1990s, Libya was completely isolated from the world. The airports were closed, and the only way to travel was through driving to Tunisia or Egypt. This embargo was a result of getting Libyan citizens involved in bombing flight Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie in Scotland in December 1988 (Aljazeera English, 2014). As a Libyan citizen, I still remember how much Libyans suffered from this embargo. We were not only isolated from the world in terms of traveling, but we suffered from the absence of many resources and services, which were not available in the country. Everything was expensive, and the monthly income barely satisfied the family needs. This isolation put more pressure on the Libyan families. Gaddafi dragged the country into a political and national crisis that was only paid for by the Libyan citizens.



According to Kaplan (2012) in his observation about Libyan history, when Gaddafi ruled the country, he found it following one constitution. However, Gaddafi encouraged the tribal system, which placed power and authority in the hands of a few tribes in the country. According to Gaddafi (1976), “A tribe is a family which has grown as a result of procreation. It follows that a tribe is an enlarged family. Similarly, a nation is a tribe, which has grown through procreation. The nation, then, is an enlarged tribe” (p. 22). What Gaddafi’s statement reflects to me is the contradiction in his own ideology. Gadhafi was always perceived as أمين القومية العربية (Amin Alqwmia Alarbia), the Secretary of Arab Nationalism, the person who came to unite all Arabs under one flag and one nationality. He, himself, was the one who wrote in *the Green book* about the tribal system. It is difficult to see one country united under small tribes; each of these tribes wanted to have the authority and wealth. Unfortunately, this division between the tribes is what we see in Libya today after the revolution, which was originally built on Gaddafi’s ideology and the colonial perspectives in the 1900s.

Libyan legislation was drafted from his declarations and announcements. As such, political parties were dismissed and considered as a form of dictatorship (Article 71, 1972; Gaddafi, 1976). For example, in 2008, when I was a Graduate Assistant in the English department back in Libya, Gaddafi came to the university and met the students and listened to their concerns. The students complained about not being admitted to certain departments because these departments required a higher GPA. Immediately, Gaddafi announced that from that day on, all students should enroll in whatever college they desired. This was an ill-

conceived announcement that created chaos in my department, as well as around other colleges. We were in the middle of the semester. We did not have enough rooms and teachers to teach those newly enrolled students. Also, most of the current professors had other plans for their summer vacation. Unfortunately, those professors had to teach in the summer without receiving any extra payment. Moreover, the low academic level of the students required us Graduate Assistants to help professors more with their job. Such an example was one of the incidents when Gaddafi forced his decisions on all the Libyan people without taking into consideration any drawbacks of these decisions. When I was in elementary school, he decided that we should have two days off of school. The first day was no school day and the second was to teach the young kids his political ideology and his *Green book*. As a child, I was very happy to have these days away from the very condensed classes. I believe Gaddafi was trying to brainwash us to believe only in him and his political thoughts at a young age. When I think back to those stories, I still believe that he was a person who kept contradicting himself. Gaddafi banned the political parties because they were a form of dictatorship, and he was the dictator who controlled our lives and forced his decisions on everything in the country, even education, healthcare, and childcare.

### **Libyan Women During Gaddafi's Time**

The status of Libyan women during Gaddafi's time was controversial and unstable. During the 42 years of his rule, Gaddafi tried to show the world that he respected women's rights by including ideologies about gender equality and women's rights in his *Green book* (Bugaighis, 2014; World Trade Press, 2010).

Moreover, he used Libyan females as his body guards and imposed militarily training on both women and men to prove that in Libya, there is no difference between Libyan women and men. However, according Azzuz (2014), Libyan women became more active during Gaddafi's time than the Kingdom time. In fact, "Despite this improvement, Libyan women were discriminated" against in relation to their political rights and decision-making (Azzuz, 2014, p. 152). Even if they held political positions, women's decisions were not influential. Considering the status of women in Libya, a recent report from women's rights in Middle East shows a very noticeable lack of research about Libyan women and their experiences (Pargeter, 2005). Furthermore, it reported a noticeable gap between the government's legal system and the position of women in Libya. In fact, the report claimed the following:

Since coming to power, Qadhafi has repeatedly claimed to have improved the status of women by introducing legislation aimed at eliminating discrimination, by attempting to improve women's access to education and employment, and by encouraging women to participate in Libya's political, social, and economic life. However, in reality, women have not made many inroads into what is still essentially a male-dominated society, and they continue to suffer gender-based discrimination. (Pargeter, 2005, para 4)

Such a claim shows the patriarchal control over Libyan women's rights. Moreover, patriarchal interpretation of the religion, tribal culture, and family

traditions are seen as being responsible for Libyan women's marginalization (Pargeter, 2005). This interpretation explains Schlossberg's (1989) argument about the source of women's marginalization. Pargeter (2005) suggested that not only men were to be blamed for the women's oppression, but culture, society, and tradition could be blamed, too. In my opinion, in Libyan society, the culture is circled around men and ordered to place women outside the circle of independence. In the coming section, I discuss the only report I found about the status of Libyan women during Gaddafi's time. The report was written by Alison Pargeter, who is known as a specialist in Libyan history and women's issues at the United Nations. The report was conducted in 2005, six years before the February 17, 2011 revolution, and it covered issues, such as equality, independence, personal freedom, and domestic violence. These issues are the main faces of feminism, which touch on women's rights and status in the given society.

### **Equality**

Libyan men and women are commonly viewed as equals, according to the Libyan legislation that was declared by Gaddafi (Flonal, Morgan, & Oyeniyi, 2012). For example, in his *Green book*, Gaddafi stated that men and women are both human beings, and, therefore, they are equals. Gaddafi (1976) mentioned that the only difference between men and women is the biological functions of each gender, in that women can bear children while men cannot (p. 25). According to Gaddafi, because of these biological differences, both males and females have different roles in their society. Therefore, any discrimination against

women is considered a form of oppression and injustice. Reflecting on Gaddafi's statements about women, Pargeter (2005) considered the distinctive biological function of women and men placed both genders in unequal positions. In my opinion, I do not see supporting claims for women in Gaddafi's statement. He did not add to the existing facts of the nature of human beings. In one of his discriminating statements about women, he claimed, "children should be raised by their mothers" (Gaddafi, 1976, p. 26). By saying this, he excluded the men (fathers) from this operation and put all the responsibility on women, only because they are biologically female. By this declaration, Gaddafi contradicted himself again in his *Green book* presumption on gender equality. Moreover, it put more pressure on women and freed men from any housework responsibilities, including raising children.

Nevertheless, Gaddafi allowed women to participate in "General People's Congresses and Committees (equivalent to the parliament and associated bodies), [and allowed women to] defend their country, enjoy [their] independent financial status, and assume leadership positions" (Pargeter, 2005, Para, 8). However, the patriarchal domination and cultural norms did not encourage women to participate in these meetings. A few of the reasons were the fact that these committees discussed Gaddafi's political ideology and the conservative nature of the society that did not welcome the open discussion between women and non-relative men. Despite the fact that in Libyan law, women enjoy the same independent rights as men, I would argue that the culture and the tradition of the society that was originally created by the tribes had a greater impact on the status

of women. Where on the one hand the tribe might provide protection for women, it puts a pressure on women for not being free to choose what to follow.

Other sides of equality are seen with the nationality issue. While women are perceived as equal to men in Libya, Libyan men can transfer their nationality if they are married to non-Libyan wives. On the contrary, Libyan women cannot transfer their nationality to their non-Libyan husbands. Such a law places a suppression on Libyan women's rights to marriage. For example, this means that Libyan women are not encouraged to marry non-Libyan men, and if they get married to non-Libyans, then their children are treated as foreigners, even if they spend all their lives in Libya.

In regards to adultery, the situation is also different. Although men and women are treated equally in cases of murder and robbery, men receive different treatment for some crimes. According to Article 375 in the Libyan legislation, men receive a reduced punishment for adultery. The law gives an excuse for men to kill their females' siblings in cases of adultery, while such a criminal code is not applied to women. Honor killing and prison for women are not common in Libya because tribes and families consider it a shame for their heritage (Pargeter, 2005). This ideology of discrimination always concerns me. In Libya, being a woman requires a lot of courage when facing family traditions and tribal cultures, regardless of the country's law. Even if the law stands with the women in issues like rape and adultery, as a Libyan woman, I know society will not forgive and forget such crimes. I will always be mistaken, no matter how innocent I am, because I am a woman. In our Libyan families, boys can have as many girlfriends

as they wish, while the girls might be killed or imprisoned at home if their family just suspects that they have a boyfriend. Such an ideology should be changed because in Islam, both men and women have similar punishments in cases of adultery, for example, but the men only punish a girl if such a crime happens, even if she is not the one to be blamed. In the *Quran*, Allah says:

*{The [unmarried] woman or [unmarried] man found guilty of sexual intercourse - lash each one of them with a hundred lashes, and do not be taken by pity for them in the religion of Allah, if you should believe in Allah and the Last Day. And let a group of the believers witness their punishment} (24:2)*

Sahih International

الزَّانِيَةُ وَالزَّانِي فَاجْلِدُوا كُلَّ وَاحِدٍ مِّنْهُمَا مِائَةَ جَلْدَةٍ وَلَا تَأْخُذْكُم بِهِمَا رَأْفَةٌ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَلْيَشْهَدْ عَذَابُهُمَا طَائِفَةٌ مِّنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

Apparently, the verse states that both males and females should receive similar punishments when it comes to adultery. If we read the verse more closely, we find that Allah states men first. Therefore, the religion should not be blamed for such discrimination against women.

### **Independence and Personal Freedom**

According to the Libyan law under Gaddafi's regime, men and women were independents and had some degree of freedom of choice. For example, they could buy houses, farms, and even open stores. However, both men and women suffered from different kinds of restrictions. If both genders ran a big business, then they were at risk of the government questioning the source of their money. Also, any organization had to be under the control of Gaddafi's regime. Any

organization should be built on his political ideology and serve his thoughts (Pargeter, 2005). Nevertheless, women seemed to suffer more than men in Libya, where their personal freedom was concerned. For example, although Libyan women could buy their own house and car, usually these properties were registered under the men's names. Such a tradition reflects how Libyan society views women as inferior to men. A different kind of restriction was shown in the work place. Since coming to power, Gaddafi encouraged women's work, but males in the family usually chose what jobs women did. The common jobs were in education, nursing, and cooking (Pargeter, 2005; Abdu-Latif, 2013). Flonal, Morgan, and Oyeniyi (2012) mentioned that even if the Libyan women were educated and wealthy, they were still under the control of their husbands and their male siblings. Furthermore, Abdu-Latif (2013) reported that fewer women claimed that they did not have the ultimate freedom to spend their salaries; usually, their husbands took this money from them.

Pargeter (2005) pointed out that Libyan women had the freedom to move in Libya at any time during the day and night. However, women should ask the men's permission to leave their houses, even if they were going to their parent's house. Moreover, women's driving and moving in the evening was not preferred and may cause many problems to women, as society did not accept such behaviors. Also, if an unfortunate incident happened to the women, then the women would only be blamed. Before I got married, I remember that my dad would tell my mom to be home before 9:00 PM if we were going to visit a friend or go shopping. This habitual rule was gradually illuminated as my brothers were



getting older and could provide male company to us. The same thing was applied to travel. Although there was not a law in Libya that prohibited women from driving or travelling alone, the patriarchal nature of the society did not allow women to travel unless they had male company.

On the other hand, the Hijab (the hair cover) was not compulsory in Libya. There was no particular law that forced women to veil. Nonetheless, society usually looked down at women who did not veil, and not veiling made the women accessible to sexual and speech harassment. In the past, during King Idris's time, it was very rare to find veiled women. Most women did not wear the hijab. During Gaddafi's time, the hijab was widely worn. This is a very interesting fact that I came across while performing research. I assume that during King Idris's time, there was not enough Islamic awareness. Libyan women were very influenced by the Italian citizens. This impact was vividly seen in the old pictures of the Libyan people. It was very difficult to tell whether the ones in the picture were Libyans or Italians (The history of Tripoli and the Tripolitania families with pictures 'Before the invasion of Gypsy', 2012; The Tripolitania gathering, 2012; Tripoli in its better days, 2012; The old and rare pictures of Libya, 2013; Together we respect the humanity and equality between women and men in Libya, 2011; The Libyan past page, 2012). However, during Gaddafi's time, with the wide spread of technology, women were frequently shown on television wearing hijabs. My mother told me that in the past, they did not know that wearing perfume in public was a sin, and wearing a hijab was restricted to old women only, if they were knowledgeable enough about the religion. What I would argue here is that it

was not Gaddafi who encouraged hijabs by any means. Actually, I remember how Gaddafi fought against it. According to the United States Department of State's reports on international religious freedom in 2012 (2013), Gaddafi did not respect religion, and the freedom of religion was very restricted in Libya. Alhijab as a religious act is one of the examples that Gaddafi could not force to stop but continued fighting against. Flonal, Morgan, and Oyenyi (2012) considered the hijab as a religious act and fashion accessory in current Libya. Libyan women wore the hijab to satisfy religious and social suppression, and, at the same time, they followed modernized fashion, such as wearing tight jeans and tight-fitting shirts (p. 107). At the same time, several Libyan women chose to cover their faces and whole bodies with dark colors in long dresses. This assumption reflects the interaction between secular feminism and Islamic feminism in Libya.

### **Domestic Violence**

Article 63 of the penal code specified that punishment of domestic violence occurred only if there was an injury to the women. Pargeter (2005) stated that there was not a particular law for rape crimes and domestic violence. Such crimes were usually solved within the family under the tribes. In the case of rape, usually the woman was hit and punished; she was forced to marry the man who raped her to save her family's honor. Moreover, beating wives and sisters was not considered an improper performance. Libyan society did not abolish hitting female siblings; on the contrary, such behavior was very welcomed in many families, especially with the absence of women's rights organization in Libya. For example, if a girl had a boyfriend, and her family learned about him, mostly

the girl would be hit strongly and imprisoned in the house under the supervision of the male siblings. However, as I stated earlier, if the boy had a girlfriend, the family would not do any harm to the boy because he was a boy. In Islam, both genders are not allowed to have boyfriends or girlfriends outside the marriage circle, but the patriarchal dominated society interpreted the *Quran* in a way that worked for them and their needs, which helped to put women under their control. In my opinion, the patriarchal interpretations of the *Quran*, coupled with women's ignorance of their religion, reinforce the oppression of women. Even if religion was taught in school as one of the subjects, the curriculum focused more on old stories in the *Quran* and on Islamic general norms without dealing enough with women's issues. Therefore, I believe if women are educated enough on their religion, they will raise good men that never oppress women under the name of Islam. For this reason, the on-going discussion about men as the source of oppression concerns me because men were y raised by women. Therefore, women should gain knowledge and education that frees them from any patriarchal negative ideology. Maybe this generation, who already experienced oppression, will challenge the norms in Libyan society.

To this end, the previous report about Libya women in 2005 showed a great gap between the country's legal system and the status of Libyan women. Where on the one hand the law tried to offer justice to women in many cases, the tribal traditions forced the women to follow their tribes' rule instead of the country's law. Moreover, the way Gaddafi seemed to improve the status of women since coming to power in 1969 was contradictory. Gaddafi, himself,

insulted women when he hired them as his personal bodyguards to protect him and accompany him in all his travels (Elbelazi, 2012). Finally, Pargeter (2005) stated that this report demonstrated a great lack of research about Libyan women's experiences. In Libya, men's voices were louder than women's. Therefore, there was not any information about women's responses to these laws and the patriarchal society. Such statements enrich this study by providing evidence about the absence of Libyan women from research.

### **Libya During the Revolution**

Although the revolution started on February 15, 2011, this historic moment was presaged by earlier events. In 1996, Gaddafi decided to kill 1,200 Libyan prisoners in the Abu Salim Jail without notifying their families; this event is known as "the massacre of Abu Salim prison" (Olimat, 2014, p. 9). People asked several times to see their relatives, but the regime never allowed them to visit prisoners. According to the Human Rights Watch report (2006), the prisoners were secretly killed on June 28, 1996, and their families were informed about their deaths in 2000 and 2001. This incident created anger among the families of the prisoners and their relatives. Those families were not allowed to have the prisoners' bodies so that they could bury them. Every year on February 15, the families protest against the regime, asking to learn what happened to the prisoners. Every year, the regime keeps silent and tries to give money to the families, but money is not a substitute for the beloved ones' families. I highlight this incident so as to inform the reader about the reasons for the February revolution and why it was initiated on this particular date. Furthermore, I have

highlighted this incident in order to provide more examples related to the oppression and dictatorship of Gaddafi.

A decade later, when the revolution took place in Tunisia and Egypt, it created a good environment for Libyan people to protest against the regime and initiate their Libyan revolution. The Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions are good examples of a successful revolution. Both dictators, Ben Ali in Tunisia, and Mubarak in Egypt, were removed from the presidency. Thus, they provided inspiration for Libyans that Gaddafi might likewise be removed. Both the Tunisian and Egyptian regimes ruled their countries for decades, the same as Gaddafi. Therefore, the peaceful protest on February 15, 2011 in Benghazi quickly moved all Libyans in all of Libya to join the Arab Spring rail. The revolution lasted for nine months and ended with the death of Gaddafi on October 20, 2011.

The revolution was like a civil war. Gaddafi and his forces used different kinds of weapons to kill the Libyan people. The Libyan people were divided into two groups, with one group being pro-Gaddafi and the other anti-Gaddafi. Both groups were fighting for two different claims. The pro-Gaddafi group wanted him to stay in power and remain the president of the country. In order to do so, they were fighting alongside him and protected him. The other group was the Libyan rebels (Altuwar/الثوار), and their main goal was to remove Gaddafi from the country and arrest all of his family and company workers. Libyan men (Altuwar) and women were united to face his heavy missiles. I believe that when the Libyan rebels decided to get rid of Gaddafi and his regime, part of that freedom was

liberation from the patriarchal ideology. Instead, women stood by the men's side. They cooked for the soldiers, sent food, protested, washed clothes, and more importantly, they contacted the international media and sent reports about the situation in Libya (Abdul-Latif, Kablan, & Reiter, 2013).

During the revolution, despite the huge role women played in removing the autocratic regime, Libyan women suffered in many ways. First, several women lost their husbands, fathers, and brothers in the war. They were left without any male support in the very male dominant society. Second, many women suffered from rape crimes in different regions in the country. The most well-known story is Eman Al-Obeidi's story. Al-Obeidi, after being raped by 15 men in Tripoli, showed up in the hotel where the journalists were living (CNN report, 2011; Askin, 2011; Kirkpatrick, 2011; Sotloff, 2011). Al-Obeidi's story was not the only one, but she was the only one who had the courage to break the silence and speak very loudly for all the world to hear. According to the CNN report (2011), the journalist could not verify the story, but the injury Al-Obeidi showed them proved what happened to her. According to Askin (2011), rape has been historically considered a tool of war that helps to apply oppression. Nonetheless, Al-Obeidi was accused of being a liar, and many people chose not to believe her because of the conservative nature of the Libyan society (Kirkpatrick, 2011a, 2011b). I would argue that the conservative nature of the society reflects the oppression and injustice Libyan women went through. When women, like Al-Obeidi, tried to speak for her rights, many people attacked her and considered her a prostitute because she revealed what is considered a taboo in Libya

(Kirkpatrick, 2011a, 2011b). Six years after the revolution, many activists are still questioning the truth behind Al-Obeidi's story. In this research, I mention her story in order to show evidence of Gaddafi's use of rape as a war tool.

My dissertation focuses on the silent women who did not have the courage to speak up about their experiences. Women during the revolution were victims and oppressed. They were war victims, (Harter, 2011; Askin, 2011) and they were oppressed by Gaddafi's forces when they used rape against the women. They were also oppressed by society because some families killed their girls and women after they became pregnant from the rape under an honor killing excuse (Harter, 2011). Such experiences and terrorizing continued after the revolution, so women are still silent. The world barely hears Libyan women's voices and learns about their lives and their dreams. The fact that there is no empirical research about Libyan women led many journals to extrapolate findings from observations about the status of women in Libya during their visit to Libya as I further state (Pargeter, 2005; Abdu-Latif, 2013; Abdul-Latif, Kablan, and Reiter, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2013).

Before the revolution, there was not any news or articles about Libyan women. One reason for this could be the conservative nature of the society that did not allow their females to appear in the public sphere. Another reason for the absence of news or articles about Libya women could have been due to Gaddafi's powerful existence, which did not permit anyone to share any experience about living in Libya without his permission (Pargeter, 2005). The very few interviews that I found on TV about Libyan women focused on soldier girls who praised

Gaddafi and worked under his military umbrella. During and after the revolution, the newspapers and journals from around the world actively engaged in studying the position of Libyan women and their rights (Kirkpatrick, 2011a, 2011b; Harter, 2011; Stephen, Kalashinkova, & Smith, 2011; Walker, 2014; Munawar, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2013). The lack of basic information about Libyan women led many agencies and press organizations to send several reporters to conduct interviews and observations on Libyan women and their every day life. As a Libyan woman, I understand the difficulty of getting information from and about Libyan women. The isolation of the country for many years from the outer world and the conservative, religious society made the job of those reporters difficult. Through this dissertation, I will give access to the voices of Libyan women and their experiences in an academic and professional way that keeps their identity unrecognized. This ethical process of gaining information promotes individuality and builds trustworthiness between the participants and myself.

### **Libya Post Revolution**

The rebels killed Gaddafi on October 20, and the National Transition Council (NTC) announced that the era of dictatorship was over. As soon as the revolution began on February 17, 2011, the international press focused on Libyan rebels, in general, and Gaddafi, in particular. On every television channel, people saw Gaddafi, his forces, and the rebels. There was not enough attention on the civilians until the day Eman Al-Obeidi appeared at the Rixos Hotel in Tripoli on March 26, 2011, one month after the revolution (CNN report, 2011; Askin, 2011; Kirkpatrick, 2011a, 2011b). After revealing her rape story, I noticed that the



international press recognized the existence of Libyan civilians and particularly, Libyan women. Al-Obeidi's story illustrated the oppressive nature of the society, especially when the Libyan waiters and waitresses in the hotel tried to silence her so that no one could hear her story.

In 2011, the majority of journals such as CNN, BBC, New York Times, wrote about Eman Al-obeidi and rape as a tool of oppression in wars (Askin, 2011; Kirkpatrick, 2011a, 2011b; Alshaichi, 2011; Sotloff, 2011). The story opened the door widely for many news reporters and political activists to closely observe Libyan women. According to Reuters and the Human Rights Watch (2013), Iman Al-Obeidi was not the only one that had been raped. Other women had similar experiences, but those women were veiled under the society's traditions, and their families did not allow them to engage in any conversation about their rape stories (Human Rights Watch, 2013).

In 2012, most of the articles in New York Times, Al monitor and Aljazeera covered the first election for the Libyan Parliament. Reports showed that 600 women were nominated for the election, and only 33 were elected (Munawar 2013; Walker, 2014; Giacomo, 2012). This shift in women's political rights and status did not grant any improvements in the lives of Libyan women. For example, the Human Rights Watch (2013) reported that on election posters, females' faces were wiped out and were marked with black paint. I can interpret this action in many ways. First, Libyan men did not see women as an equivalent to them. Second, Libyan women were still considered as men's property and were expected to be kept home to serve men and raise children. Third, the new wave of

Islamists that carried the revolution started to oppress women under the name of Islam.

Munawar (2013) stated that during the revolution, while the world was focusing on oil and gas production in Libya, there was little attention on women's rights. Mekhennet (2011) pointed out that one of the Libyan ladies she interviewed asserted that it was not logical to blame one man for all of women's suffering. All Libya men were involved in the mistreatment of women because of their patriarchal misinterpretation of the *Quran* and their inherited family tradition. Walker (2014) interviewed a Libyan lady who conducted an experiment about Libyan women on her Facebook page. The lady asked her friends to share their understandings and analysis of the role of Libyan women in the new Libya after Gaddafi. The answers to her questions indicated a lack of rights for women in Libya. People who responded to her open-ended question claimed that Libyan women should stay home and raise well-educated men (Walker, 2014). Although I do not see any problem with women staying home and raising children, what struck me in this data was how society perceived women as passive and powerless, stating that their best place was home. The patriarchal traditions of society, traceable from 1911 and the Italian Colony, still treat women as property, expecting women to serve men's needs. This assumption completely contradicts the Prophet Mohamed's (PBUH) orders, which is to help wives and take care of them.

It was reported in the Hadith that Prophet Mohamed (PBUH) said, "the best of you is the best to his wife" (El-Nimr, 1996, p. 97), in that Prophet

Mohamed (PBUH) asked men to treat women with respect (Elbelazi, 2014). As a Muslim woman, I believe that Islam granted women all the rights they needed. It granted them the right to education, to marriage, to working in and/or outside the house, and to rearing children. However, the misinterpretation of the *Quran*, along with family tradition, put women in a critical state that made them misinterpret the *Quran* and Sunnah. Here I would love to refer to some of the memoirs in (Together we respect the humanity and equality between women and men in Libya Facebook page, 2011), the memoir focused on how Islam marginalized women and gave priorities and privileges to men over them. I did not agree with most of their claims because the *Quran*, if interpreted correctly, would award rights and respect to women more than any human legislation and laws (Wadud, 1999; Barlas, 2002).

Nevertheless, it saddens me that Libyan women are still invisible, despite all their efforts. Our work inside and outside our homes is not appreciated by society. Regardless of the work we do, we are still women, perceived as weak, helpless dependents and caregivers for children. It also saddens me that our voice is not heard and our experiences are not recognized. According to the Human Rights Watch report (2013), there was noticeable discrimination against Libyan women in their daily lives and at their workplace. The reports indicated that Libyan women could not move freely in their country because of security concerns. Such findings agreed with Pargeter's (2005) report about the status of Libyan women. Although the observation was conducted six years prior to the revolution, post-revolution Libya did not show any improvement.

Interestingly, during Gaddafi's time, men could not marry a second wife without getting permission from the first wife (Pargeter, 2005). After the revolution, the president of the Transitional Council, Mustafa Abduljalil, announced that this law was cancelled, and men could marry up to four wives without getting permission from any of those wives (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Such an announcement created tremendous worries among women's rights activists and secular feminists. Polygamy is legal and permitted by the religion under certain conditions and circumstances. However, the way Abduljalil mentioned it gave me a feeling that, we, women, were very cheap and were the deserved prizes to the rebels. As a Muslim woman, I understand that Islam organized this process of multiple marriages. First, it is not obligatory that every man has to marry four wives; certainly, one is enough. Second, treating all wives equally is usually difficult if not impossible. Third, there are few rare situations where men are allowed to have more than one wife. The most common reason for a second marriage is the desire of having children if the first wife cannot have any (Wadud, 1999; El-Nimr, 1996). In this respect, Wadud (1999) maintained that the case of having another wife because the men want children is not mentioned in the *Quran*; however, "the desire of having children is natural" (p. 84).

Such claims from the president of the NTC makes the position of Libyan women more alarmingly invisible. Unfortunately, I could not find any responses from women about this claim. The more men remain in power, there will be fewer opportunities for women to speak out about their experiences. I feel that the revolution, instead of bringing more freedom and rights to women, created more

opportunities for men to oppress women. There are a few women's organizations in Libya after the revolution, and these organizations discuss the role of women in their family and how to be a good wife and mother. Personally, I see these organizations as an extended part for the family role. they reinforce the women's role as a servant for men's needs. Currently, with the civil war in Tripoli and Benghazi, I do not see any actions from those organizations and institutions. I can see that women's political roles are dismissed and neglected. I would firmly assert that women's rights are still lacking in Libya, despite the women's associations, because these associations either lead their stakeholders to fame or serve the society's wider image of oppressed women. Abdu-Latif's survey about the status of Libyan women (2013) reported that Libyan women and men continue to give priority for men in political work and in general workspace. Reflecting on this, these survey results show that Libyan women still do not see themselves as equal to men at their workplace, and the survey results suggest that women lack confidence in themselves when competing with men for political positions. The positions that Libyan women took in the survey surprised me when in the same survey, it confirmed that Libyan women are very well educated and are significantly 14 % of women with higher degrees more than men who ranked as 3% only compared to them. (Abdulatif, 2013). This also reflects that the home culture exceeds the school and education culture. Home and family tradition greatly influences the women's lives. This study will make the women's voices heard, the voices that have been oppressed and silenced. The obvious lack of information about Libyan women makes this dissertation very valuable,

significant, and personally empowering.

### **Final Remarks**

In the previous section, I highlighted the history of Libya to show the status of Libyan women through time. Through a feminist lens, I explored the history of Libya and provided evidence for the absence of research about Libyan women's experiences. Since the Greeks and the Romans, the historians focused on the colonizers and their victory to colonize the country. I assumed that history was also written from a male point of view, and it glorified the Emperors, Sultans, and governments, but not the Libyan women. However, those historical memoirs and surveys about the current status of Libyan women did not indicate any significant improvement in the position of women in their own country. Through time, women were dependents and powerless. The society restricted their needs and their movements. Although some activists suggested that women had more social rights during Gaddafi's time, Libyan women had more political rights after Gaddafi (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Nevertheless, both political systems did not help women to get in a better position where they might be treated well by their male siblings.

The absence of Libyan women from the academic studies is highly noticeable, not only in the Libyan and international societies, but their absence is also obvious in the big theory of Islamic feminism. Therefore, in the following section, I discuss the theory of Islamic feminism and point to the lack of Libyan feminism within this theory in order to highlight the significance of situating Libyan feminism within the Islamic feminism framework.

## **Islamic Feminism: Overview**

Feminism in the Middle East is a considerably new theory (Badran, 2005). It first arose in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a women's movement connected with Islam and concerned with Muslim women's rights (Badran, 1999, 2001, 2005, 2009; Mir-Hosseini, 2011; ElGuind, 2005; Bahlul, 1999). It first appeared in Egypt in the 1920s (Badran, 2001, 2005, 2009; ElGuindi, 1999, 2005), and it was identified by its opponents as western and anti-Islamic, which impacted by the colonial eras. I would argue that during the emergence of Islamic feminism, Libyan women were barely recognized. Libya was colonized by Italy. However, responding to the impact of the colonial time, I would claim that despite the fact that there were no records about Libyan women, a few Libyan women, such as Hamida Al-Aneizi, who have established a women's movement association that called for women's rights for education in the 1920s. I believe that Al-Aneizi and her followers were the first Islamic feminists, even if they were not called feminists at that time. In the current study, I focus on Libyan women's experiences, which have never been researched or examined by any qualitative research methods.

In the next sections, I thoroughly explain the term Islamic feminism and how it is associated with the status of women and their rights around the Muslim world. The review of Islamic feminism showed an obvious lack of research about Libyan Muslim women's experiences. Personally, I assume that this absence of Libyan women in research was rooted in two assumptions. First, according to Bogaighis (2012), during the Italian occupation, the Arabic language was prohibited, and there were no newsletters or magazines in Arabic that described

the lives of Libyans. All the historical records focused on the colonialism and its progress in the region without paying attention to the Libyan residents. Therefore, Libyan Muslim women were not documented, and their life experiences were marginalized under the oppression of the colony. Second, during Gaddafi's time, the Human Rights Watch reported, along with other reports about Libyan women, that Libyan women were not independent in their decisions and in their living status (Pargeter, 2005; Abdul-Latif, 2013). Therefore, male permission was required for women to speak; males would not give permission for women to speak up in such an autocratic regime. Moreover, if women decided to speak and share their experiences, their words had to be filtered to fit in to the society's traditions and Gaddafi's political ideology. In other words, as a Libyan woman, if my family allowed me to speak in public and express my opinions, these opinions had to include praise to Gaddafi's Coup accomplishments. Additionally, I would have to cite quotes from his *Green Book*. Therefore, Islamic feminism, as a term, was not present in Libya, because Islamic feminism calls for women's liberation within the framework of Islam, and in Libya, the liberation had to be associated with Gaddafi's political ideology, not Islam. My claim responds to Abu-Lughod's (1999) assertion that Islamic feminism was problematic in some countries because it was controlled by the country's political system.

Islamic feminism is a complex phenomenon that includes many connotations and refers to different interpretations (Abu-Sarhan, 2011, Badran, 2001, 2005, 2009; Badran and Cooke, 2004; Bahi, 2011; Bahlul, 2009; Cervantes-Altamirano, 2013; Fawcett, 2013, Franks, 2005, Mir-Hosseini, 2011, Turner –



Rahman, 2009). For many scholars and activists, Islamic feminism is oxymoronic (Badran, 2009; Fernea, 1998; Moghissi, 1999;) and an uneasy term (Bahi, 2011). In other words, one cannot be Islamic and feminist at the same time (Bahlul, 2000). Some researchers, such as Ramirez (2012), preferred to call it “Third World feminism and non-western feminism”, referring to Muslim women in the Middle East (p. 108). People, like Fareda Hussain (1984), considered it an alien ideology, where it emerged as a result of a male dominated interpretation of the *Quran*. I would agree with Badran (2009) when she wrote “[t]here has been much misunderstanding, misrepresentations, and mischief concerning Islamic feminism” (p. 242). I believe that Islamic feminism is a unique term that is interpreted differently regarding where it emerged. I do not support the argument that associates Islamic feminism with western feminism. However, I do not ignore the fact that the women’s movement was affected by colonial traditions. For example, in Libya, as I stated in the previous section, Italian occupation impacted the country in several ways. Libyan women used to dress like Italian women in big cities, like Tripoli and Benghazi. In that time, most Libyan women wore the Libyan big white scarf, called farashia, which covers all of the woman’s body. Keith (1965) described farashia as a long white sheet that covered the women, leaving only one eye so women could see where to step. She also highlighted that “sheeted females”, who rode buses, donkey carts, or bicycles, were the lower class women, because the upper class women were not allowed to walk around in public (p. 82). After the colony, many women, especially those who went to school, dressed in western style. I would argue that the colony did not generate

Islamic feminism, but its impact was obvious on women's statements about feminism. Islamic feminism is very individual and distinctive and reflects Muslim women's personalities in different parts of the world.

Cooke (2001) wrote that "Islamic feminism was not a coherent identity, but rather a contingent, contextually determined strategic self-positioning" that bridged the gap between religion and gender hierarchy (p. 59). The complexity of defining and understanding the term Islamic feminism is rooted in many aspects, as I will explicate. First, I would argue that Islamic feminism means different concepts to different people, depending on where they live and the nature of their religious and cultural background. In that argument, Cooke (2001) and, similarly, Edwin (2011) highlighted that Islamic feminism was contextualized and conditioned by individual intellectual acts and positions. For Badran (1988, 2000), Islamic feminism did not represent one nation or belong to a particular community. Similarly, Mir-Hosseini (2011) pointed out that "[b]oth Islam and feminism are contested concepts that mean different things to different people in different contexts" (p.67). I assume that Islamic feminism, instead of being an ideology to believe in, is an identity for many Muslim women activists. In fact, Badran (1988) examined this concept from an identity perspective. She maintained that women perceived Islamic feminism as part of their identity, which was explicitly affected by their cultural orientation. Thus, there would be multiple identities, such as an Egyptian feminist identity, a Syrian feminist identity, and a Moroccan feminist identity (2005).

Second, there are numerous kinds of understandings for the word feminism. In a broader context, the term feminism covers distinguishable ideologies, such as liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, psychological feminism, and existential feminism (Abu Sarhan, 2011; Bahlul, 2000; Yamani, 1996). However, some scholars, such as Bahlul (2000) and Badran (1988), argued that all these existing ideologies did not mean that Islam had no room for feminism in feminist theory. Badran (2001, 2005, 2009) believed that Islamic feminism emerged and developed independently from within Muslim women's voices everywhere. Likewise, Hosseini's (2011) article argued about the misconceptions that were carried by the term Islamic feminism. She believed that "[feminism] includes a general concern with women's issues, an awareness that women suffer discrimination at work, in the home and in the society because of their gender, and action aimed at improving their lives and changing the situation" (p. 68). These assumptions suggested that Islamic feminism involved different conversations about Muslim women's issues around the world, including Libya. Epistemologically, "it is a knowledge project in the sense that it sheds lights in the law, including laws that take their legitimacy from religion, enabling us to challenge, from within, the patriarchy that is institutionalized in legal tradition" (p. 68). Correspondingly, Seedat (2013) pointed out that Islamic and feminist implied multiple meanings that affected the perception of the term Islamic feminism in different contexts. In my opinion, these interpretations open different directions that empower women's voices in the Muslim world. Libyan women,

being part of the Muslim women's community, fit perfectly in the theory. Thus, they should have a unique Libyan feminism that promotes voice and individuality.

The third issue behind the complexity of understanding the term Islamic feminism is the word 'Islamic'. This concept is usually associated with Islamism and Islamists who work under the political religious parties and are considered as fundamentalists and radicals (Afshar, 2008). However, Islamic literally means "return to sharia" (Mir-Hosseini, 2011, p. 68), which, for me, raises another problem. In other words, the oppression we currently see in the Muslim world results from following the sharia (Islamic law). Here I am not criticizing the sharia law but stressing what I see from misuse of sharia and women's abuse under Islam. Furthermore, I would add that the term Islamic emerged from the word Islam; that, itself, refers to contextualized positions. In this respect, Islam is the religion that is adopted by people in different parts of the world. It is not only for Arabs, as not all Arab countries are comprised of Muslims. In some countries, such as Egypt and Lebanon, Christianity exists as a religion, besides Islam. In Palestine, there is Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Moreover, Abu Sarhan (2009) maintained that in Islam, itself, there are four *mathahib* (branches), such as Elmaliki, Alwahabi, Alshafie, and Alahnbaliiy, and those branches include minor distinctions within the conceptual framework of Islamic studies. Also, there is Islam as *Sunnah*, which implies following and imitating the Prophet Mohamed's (PBUH) sayings and deeds. This is also *Shia* Islam, which refers to the followers of Ali Ben Abi Talib, the Prophet Mohamed's cousin. The convergence between culture and *mathahib* (branches of Islamic law) makes the term Islamic a little

complicated because most Arab countries are governed by traditional and cultural rules, besides Islamic law. Finally, Bahlul (2000) summarized the complexity by stating that people throughout history have defined Islam according to where they come from, even though all Muslims share the same religious duties.

### **Islamic Feminism: The Oxymoron**

There is a common belief among some westerners and some activists that ‘Islam’ and ‘feminism’ are contradictory and disconnected (Blore, 2010; Badran, 2005, 2009; 2011; Cervantes-Altamirano, 2010; Fernea, 1998; Moghissi, 1999). In other words, one cannot be Islamic and feminist at the same time (Bahlul, 2000). Franks (2005) argued, “there has been conflict between the two [Islam and feminism] apparently opposed ideological positions” (p. 200). Some activists consider Islamic feminism an oxymoron. Others tend to shorten the term into the “f word” when referring to feminism, as perceived in most Muslim communities, which, apparently, implies a less favored position (Fawcett, 2013). Yet, many feminists refused to be named feminists even if their work was within the scope of feminism (Franks, 2005; Cooke, 2000; Wadud, 1999; Barlas, 2002). For instance, Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas rejected being called feminists because they both discussed their work on gender and women from the point of view of faith, not feminism (Wadud, 1999; Barala, 2002; Seedat, 2013). Wadud’s resistance presumed a distinction between feminist thought and female experience (Seedat, 2013). She wrote in *Quran and women* that “reading of [the] Quran is from within the female experience and without the stereotypes which have been the framework for many of the male interpretation” (Wadud, 1999, p. 3). Barlas

(2002), on the other hand, thought she should be named a believing woman instead of a feminist because her work was different from that of Mernissi, a Moroccan secular feminist (Mernissi, 1975; Seedat, 2013, p. 419). Other Muslim women refused the term because it had connotations with Western liberal and secular thoughts (Badran, 2005, 2009; Gray, 2013; Feldman, 2001).

Personally, I do not see myself different from those scholars because I resisted being a feminist at first. I used to understand feminism as a movement that seeks to liberate women from family tradition, culture, and religion. For me, coming from a conservative family, such liberation is a taboo. I believe that we, Muslim women, have more freedom if we follow the *Quran* and Sunna. Islam never meant to oppress or be unjust to us. The feminism I see these days focuses on women as an object and as a property. The feminists' biological features of the women are not respected. I see women work in every place and do the same jobs that men are doing because those women want to be equal to men. Therefore, feminism that takes women away from following their religion, their cultural traditions, and/or their unique feminism does not represent me. However, reading through the theory, I discovered that Islamic feminism is not a foreign ideology that seeks an ultimate liberation that does not respect women's choices. It attempts to raise awareness on women's issues within the scope of Islam and a conservative tradition.

Historically, the word feminism consists of two parts: 'femme', which refers to the French word 'women', and the suffix, 'ism', which refers to a political position. This word was used to encompass those activists who defended

women's political rights between the 1880s and 1970s (McCann and Kim, 2003). Although the term Islamic feminism gained some attention in the 1990s (Mir-Hosseini, 2011; Badran, 1988, 1999, 2005, 2009, 2011; Cooke, 2000; Bahlul, 2000), most of the academic journals rejected either the 'Islamic' part or the 'feminist' part (Mir-Hosseini, 2011). That is to say, if the journalists came from a religious background, and they wanted to write about women's rights, they had to write about Muslim women without mentioning the term feminism. However, if the journalists came from a secular background, they addressed the women's rights within the scope of feminist discourse, as perceived by the western. By this, they were rejecting the Islamic part, even if they were Muslims and lived in the Muslim communities (Mir-Hosseini, 2011). For example, Zeinab Alghazali, the Egyptian activist, refused the term equality as understood and perceived by the west. She believed that women were living a very feminist lifestyle that was represented in marriage and motherhood. In other words, the best feminist job that women could do was being a good wife and mom (Mir-Hosseini, 2011; Cooke, 2001). Similarly, Heba Rauf Ezzat and Nadia Yassin, who belonged to the Islamic discourse, reported related stories. Both women argued against gaining women's rights through equality, as understood by the west, but advocated such changes through the Quranic regulations (Cooke, 2001). In my opinion, those Islamic feminists did not assist women's positions in the country. In their claims, they associated women's rights in Islam to imprisoning women at home in order to serve the family. Here I would assert that I personally believe that the best job women can do is to raise good children, because this is the only job that cannot be

substituted by other employers. I do not admire the way many Islamic feminists are perceiving women as dependent and powerless, believing that their best place is in the home. I believe that women should be given the option to choose. They should be educated mothers and powerful housewives. I do not think that the society survives with men only. In work positions, we need both men and women to fulfill different responsibilities.

Mir-Hosseini (2011) realized that what makes the term Islamic feminism even more complex and oxymoronic is that

Islamic feminists did not speak one voice. The position they took was local, diverse, multiple, and evolving. They all sought gender justice and equality for women, but they did not always agree on what constituted 'justice' or 'equality' or the best ways of attaining them (p.71).

Consequently, considering the Islamic component as problematic when relating to feminism, Hala Afshar, the Iranian feminist, further discussed the notion of Islam within feminism, especially after September 11, 2001 (9/11), when Muslims were identified as terrorists and evil (Afshar, 2008). In her article, Afshar (2008) explored the Islamophobia that arose after 9/11. She defined Islamophobia as fear of Islam. According to Smith and Muir (2004), Islamophobia defined Islam as valueless and Muslims as uncivilized. Muslim women, being part of this phenomenon of Islamophobia, were viewed as slaves in an unmerciful patriarchal society and were considered terrorists and uneducated. As a result of these misrepresented views, Muslim women were highly attacked and targeted in the



media and in the public sphere (Afshar, 2004). According to Afshar (2004) after 9/11, there was an estimate of 3.8 attacks a day on Muslim women, compared to men. In fact, Muslim women, who wore the *hijab* (veiling), were perceived by some Westerners as oppressed, and “possibly dangerous” (Afshar, 2008, p. 411; Frenea, 1998; Massoumi, 2010).

On the contrary, Cooke (2001) pointed out that instead of considering Islamic feminism as oxymoronic, one should highlight their status, which postcolonial Muslim women obtain while having multiple merging identities and positions. She stated:

The term Islamic feminism invites us to consider what it means to have a double commitment: to a faith position on the one hand, and to women’s rights both inside and outside the home on the other. The label Islamic feminist brings together two epithets whose juxtaposition describes the emergence of a new, complex self-positioning that celebrate multiple belongings. To call oneself an Islamic feminist is not to describe a fixed identity but to create a new, contingent subject position.

(Cooke, 2001, p. 93)

Cooke (2000) added, obviously, “[Islamic feminists] are linking their religion, political and individual identities” (p. 94). Margot Badran seemed to agree with Cooke’s argument. In this respect, Badran maintained that women, indeed, could be Muslim and feminist. She did not see any reason as to why these two terms were contradictory. In her claim, Badran (1988,

2005, 2009) argued that feminism within the Muslim communities was indigenous and not a product of Western feminism (Khan, 2011). I join these voices as well. I do not think Islamic feminism is an oxymoron because I do not believe that Islam restricts women's lives.

Syed (2004) reviewed the feminists' issues within the scope of Islamic discourse. He believed that women's rights were a controversial and very complex social phenomenon in all societies, not only in the Muslim world. Some educators argued that Islamic feminism was not truly Islamic because it disagreed with what was already known in the *Quran*; also, feminist thoughts could not flourish with the existence of religion (Bahlul, 2000, p. 62). Likewise, some Moroccan feminists, as stated by Gray (2013), insisted separating religion from gender rights, as they believed that it was impossible to gain these rights under Islam. Gray (2013) argued that according to those Moroccan feminists,

all monotheistic religions are patriarchal and have been used as the basis of male domination: God is male, Biblical prophet and those mentioned in the Quran are mostly male, Prophet Mohamed is male, the Messiah [Jesus] is male, and the exegesis has been a male domain for centuries" (pp. 75-76).

Similarly, Moghissi (1999) asserted that Islam is based on a "gender hierarchy" and, therefore, "cannot be adopted as the framework for struggle for gender democracy and women's equality with men" (Moghissi, 1999, p. 126; Bahi, 2011, p. 142).

From this perspective, however, scholars, such as ElGuindi (1999) and

Badran (1988), stressed the fact that women's rights in the Muslim world cannot be achieved by the Liberal ideology of Western feminism, because these ideologies were based on western values that could not be applicable to the Muslim and Eastern societies. To comment on this issue, feminism should be contextualized in its given community of practice in order to empower women (ElGuindi, 1999) and should not to be understood as oxymoronic because it is Islamic based. Islam has never banned women or girls from receiving an education or going to school; however, the cultural and tribal tradition did, so Islam is blamed for some extremes ideologies (Bugaighis, 2014).

The two groups of feminists ultimately divided feminism into two kinds: Islamic feminism and secular feminism. As a Libyan woman, I see both types of feminists interacting and converging in Libya. Therefore, I decided to explore both terms in detail in the next section.

### **Secular Feminism versus Islamic Feminism**

The controversial discussion about whether Islamic feminism was considered as oxymoronic or not generated two types of feminism: secular feminism and Islamic feminism (Badran, 2005, 2009). The former emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century by urban middle class women in the Middle East (Badran, 2004, 2009; Roded, 2012) while the latter emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the same area. The rise of secular feminism was associated with two phenomena: the first one was the wide spread of technology and the arrival of the printing press, and the second was the spread of education and literacy among Muslim women (Badran, 2005, p. 7; Bahi, 2011, Ahmed, 1992). In that, information technology and

education helped Middle Eastern women to read beyond the religious texts and helped them gain access to the unseen world (Badran, 2005, 2009; Bahi, 2011). According to Franks (2005), the Internet and online networking facilitated the access for Islamic education for both Muslim women by birth and those who converted to Islam.

The main claim for secularists was separating the religion from the state system. In other words, the country's law should refer to legal institutional responsibilities (Badran 2011, p. 79). Like in Morocco, secular feminists in Egypt and in the Muslim world believed that "the state during secularization took it upon itself to protect the religion, not only Islam but all the religions" (Badran, 2011, p. 79). Those women were calling for equality and living as freely as men in the society. Epistemologically, secular feminists were studying the religious texts in order to find a solution for women's suppression in Islam (Moghissi, 1999).

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, another type of feminism appeared. It has been identified as Islamic feminism or Muslim feminism. Cooke (2000) defined Islamic feminism as "[the] feminism that takes its legitimacy from Islam" (p. 71). According to Badran (2005), Islamic feminism was the feminism that built and relied on the *Quran*. Similar to secular feminism, Islamic feminism resulted from the spread of technology and literacy. Women of all ages could access different kinds of technology, including online technology and networking communication (Badran, 2005; Marcotte, 2010; Bahi, 2011). Interestingly, historians and observers discovered that secular feminism appeared in what

Badran (2005) called “[the] religion era” (p. 10), while Islamic feminism appeared when the secularization (*Almania in Arabic*- العلمانية) was taking place in the Muslim societies. However, as Jad (2011) stated, “secularism for Islamists is a colonial imposition and for secularist is a central to universal humanism” (p. 177). I argue that this inconsistent shift is a natural progress in the discourse of feminism in the Muslim world. On the one hand, secular feminism appeared as imitation to the western discourse to call for women’s rights and equality, Islamic feminism should in result appear to defend the religious beliefs that were mistakenly perceived by either the Westerners or the secularists on the other hand. For example, secular feminists believed in full equality among people of both genders. However, as Badran (2005) and Bahi (2011) asserted, Islamic feminists believed in the equality that was promoted and explained by the *Quran* and other religious texts.

Situating oneself as an Islamic feminist required Quranic based knowledge about the Prophet Mohamed’s (PBUH) wives and the prominent women during that time (Cooke, 2001). Moreover, it required particular skills in interpreting and investigating verses of the *Quran* (*Ijtihad*: the act of interpreting the *Quran*) (Wadud, 1999; Barals, 2002; Ahmed, 1999; Cooke, 2001; Franks, 2005).

To this end, after the previous discussion about the complexity of Islamic feminism and its two types, in the next section, I summarize those arguments to define Islamic feminism from different perspectives.

## **What is Islamic Feminism?**

Feminists, educators, and scholars defined Islamic feminism in different ways, depending on how they perceived it within the given context. Since Islamic feminism is indigenous, as Badran (1988, 2001, 2009) stated, it is defined according to the women's status in society. Badran (2009) defined Islamic feminism as "a feminist discourse expressly articulated within an Islamic paradigm and behaviors and activism inspired by it are enacted in Islam's name" (p. 49). In other places, she claimed, "Islamic feminism advocates women's rights, gender equality, and social justice using Islamic discourse as its paramount discourse" (Badran, 2002, Para. 12). Merriam Cooke defined Islamic feminism as a broader term; she sought to identify feminism as an interchangeable, yet universal, term that was not bound to one culture or religion. Cooke (2000) stated, "[Feminism] is no more Arab than it is American, no more Mediterranean than it is Northern European. Feminism seeks justice wherever it can find it. It is this definition that I am using" (p. 92). Fawcett (2013), on the other hand, preferred to separate the universality of the *Quran* and the specialty of feminism. She maintained, "an Islamic feminism is arguably an inherently culturally competent one, since Islam in general is a deeply diverse tradition and allows for flexibility depending on contextual realities, so long as core Islamic ethics are not violated" (Fawcett, 2013, para. 8). Therefore, in Fawcett's opinion, the main task of Islamic feminists was segregating culture from religion. Thus, Fawcett (2013) ended up

defining Islamic feminism as “a global movement” (para. 16), in which women relied on the *Quran* and the Sunnah in defending their equality compared to men.

Other researchers, such as Marcotte (2010), defined Islamic feminism in terms of women’s suffrage— an “analytical category that can equally be applied to women who struggle for greater social or political roles for women within Islam” (p. 133). Theoretically, Moghadam (2001) pointed out that “feminism is a theory and practice that criticizes social and gender inequalities, seeks to transform knowledge, and aims to empower women. Women and not religion should be at the center of that theory and practice” (p. 45). Furthermore, McCann and Kim (2003) defined feminist theory as a method that enabled feminists to use knowledge to improve women’s lives. From a secular perspective, Moghissi (1999) defined Islamic feminism as an oxymoronic term. She wrote, “the term, nevertheless, is used increasingly to identify the beliefs and activities of Muslim women who are trying to improve the lot of their sex within the confines of their faith” (Moghissi, 199, p. 134). hooks (2000) defined feminism as a movement “to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (p. 47).

In her book *In search of Islamic feminism*, Elizabeth Frenea conducted research in order to define Islamic feminism in different parts of the Muslim and non-Muslim world. Starting from Austin, Texas, she traveled to Uzbekistan, Morocco, Kuwait, Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Palestine/Israel, aiming to find a universal definition for Islamic feminism (1998). At the end of her journey, she came up with various definitions. In Kuwait, for example, “Islamic feminism was synonymous with America, with fast food. Feminism indeed

crosses boundaries these days; it has become transnational, like fast food, and like music, films, blue jeans, the idea of democracy” (Frenea, 1998, p. 414). In Palestine, Palestinian women saw Islamic feminism as an empowering term that provided strength for women to survive the war. In Iraq, Iraqi Muslim women defined Islamic feminism based on family values and called it family feminism, which is to say that feminism in Iraq approaches women’s issues as shared duties between men and women in the family (e.g., maternity leave and childcare) (Frenea, 1998, p. 415). In Egypt, feminists struggled for gender equality that does not have to be Islamic based because some of the feminists in the region were Christians. In Morocco, Islamic feminism strived to protect the rights of women in the family law; these rights included divorce, child custody, and marriage. Broadly speaking, Fernea (1998) summarized her journey while seeking a definition:

Feminism then has many faces in Middle East. The women question is central everywhere, and women are active in all the countries that I visited. They are regrouping and utilizing a variety of methods to achieve goals of gender parity, dignity, public power, goals that have been challenged by the ruling patriarchal traditions. Many are rejecting the Western feminist label, while at the same time employing some of the ideas, some of the same strategies as Western feminists. For some, religion is a given in the feminist/womanist movement, the path to



equality; of these women, a minority do indeed call themselves Islamic feminists. (pp. 421-422)

As stated above, Islamic feminism can be defined and understood accordingly. For instance, women in Kuwait understand it differently from women in Morocco. Obviously, the absence of Libyan feminism from Islamic feminism theory is vivid. Until today, there is not any empirical or theoretical research inquiring about Libyan feminism. Therefore, my dissertation attempts to give voice to Libyan women and empower them through their experiences. Libyan feminism can be uniquely placed in the framework of Islamic feminism. The previously mentioned definitions were not the same in many ways, but they all agree to improve the status of Muslim women. Moreover, Islamic feminism provided a framework for all the different Muslim women's voices.

### **My Libyan Feminism: Identity Reconstruction**

As a Libyan woman, I define Libyan feminism in terms of women's rights within the Islamic regulations. For example, where veiling is considered oppression for women's freedom for some activists (Mernissi, 1975), I do not see any freedom taken away by wearing it. Every religion has its own regulations and rules; following these rules does not exclude or marginalize women. However, the main criticism of Islamic feminism is the belief of some secular feminists that Islam is restricting women's liberation. This perceived restriction of freedom is highly connected to men, not religion. Instead of blaming the religion, one should blame men who misinterpret the religious texts (Wadud, 1999; Ahmad, 1992). In chapter one, I argued that men should not be the first to be criticized for women's

failure or oppression, because men were raised and educated by women.

Therefore, one must make a distinction between religion, culture, men, and women. Libyan feminism, in my opinion, embraces the four categories: religion, culture, men and women. It raises consciousness about each category's role because the four are inseparable. Libyan feminism promotes voice and encourages personal choice. It also respects society's culture.

In a Muslim country, like Libya, the constitution is generated according to Islamic rules and legal laws. Therefore, Libyan women should have a role to play and an opinion to consider while drafting the constitution. The society cannot be ruled from a male perspective only or by religion only; women also should be involved in the process, which is to say that Libyan women should have a voice in their country. The voice reflects Libyan feminism, which calls for an un-silencing of Libyan women; it also calls for empowering Libyan women through their voices and their experiences. Moreover, Libyan feminism raises awareness towards women's issues in society, such as education, health, and family care. Libyan women should know that Islam has given them all the freedom that grants them a respectful life, but men are taking this freedom away. Libyan men are raised in a way that devalues women and looks at women as powerless servants for their needs. In contrast, Libyan women are raised to serve men; they are expected to clean the house, cook the food, raise the children, and be silent. If

women dare to speak or negotiate, then they are considered disrespectful and are expected to be punished and beaten.

I am writing now from my perspective as a Libyan Muslim woman who has lived and has been raised in Libya and interacted with Libyan men and women in the Libyan society. I am not aiming to generalize my negative perception of how Libyan men are raised, but I want my voice to be heard and such experiences to be presented. I see my Libyan feminism as a starting point, which is concerned with Libyan women's experiences. I introduce this term for the first time in this dissertation. Such a step is a great start for Libyan women to be noticed and their experiences made accessible in the English speaking communities worldwide. I hope Libyan feminism enters into all the Libyan houses and is presented to the Libyan families. It should be presented to women before men. Libyan women are not aware of their rights, including their rights to accept or refuse an offer. They are imitators of their mothers and grandmothers, who were from different generations and were raised in different ways. I am not expecting the change to come from men, and I am not expecting men to give voice to women. Libyan women should struggle for themselves and their rights. They should know that Allah created us as equals to help each other, not to serve men. My Libyan feminism is awake now and aims to give voice to the silent women.

### **Final Remarks**

In the previous section, I investigated Islamic feminism and the complexity of defining it. First, I provided a historical and academic background

of the term and how it was presented in Muslim societies. Second, I explored the oxymoronic feature of Islamic feminism and how the term was discussed through the literature. Third, I explained two common types of Islamic feminism to show that having the two types of Islamic feminism facilitated my work when theorizing Libyan feminism. Fourth, I discussed various definitions of Islamic feminism, which were written by several feminists. Finally, I concluded the section by providing a definition for Libyan feminism, based on the historical background of the country and the framework of Islamic feminism. In the coming chapter, I explain the methodology of collecting and analyzing data for this research.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Opening Remarks

*Poetic representation of narrative life experiences has the ability to make someone else's experience accessible and it is the closeness to lived experiences with all its paradoxes, details, pain, joy and contradictions (Hanauer, 2015a).*

The poetic ethnography study explores Libyan Muslim women's experiences, gives a voice to Libyan women, and theorizes Libyan feminism. As such, it is significant to revisit the research questions:

Q1. What are Libyan Muslim women's lived experiences before, during, and after the February 17, 2011 revolution?

Q2. What is feminism within the Libyan context?

In response to the research questions, I employ the same poetic ethnography methodology of Hanauer (2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2015) and, similarly, Richardson (1993, 1994, 1996, 1997, 2003). In my dissertation, I recruited ten Libyan Muslim women who agree to participate in the study and share their lived experiences. The methodology is divided into three stages. The first stage is called narrative eliciting, where I conducted face-to-face and phone structured and semi-structured interviews with participants. The interview narratives enable me to gain "an insight into the hidden conceptual and emotional world of the individual" (Hanauer, 2003, p. 78). The second stage is called transcription, thematic organization, and poetic rendition. In this stage, I transcribed the interviews, then I organized the narratives into themes. Finally, I generated poems according to

these themes. While generating the poems, I used the same words, phrases, and sentences of the participants and excluded all insignificant words that did not help the flow of the narratives and did not add any valuable meanings to the poems. The third stage is called member checking and revision. After writing the poems, I returned them to the participants in order to check for accuracy of their thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Hanauer, 2015).

### **Methodology Background: Exploring Art-based Research**

Arts-based research is an evolving paradigm of research that situates itself as an extended mode of qualitative research, which integrates aesthetic qualities and artistic practices (Hanauer, 2010; Leavy, 2009; Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegemund, 2008; McNiff, 1998; Walsh, Rutherford, & Crough, 2013; Austin & Forinash, 2005; Cahnmann, 2003, 2009; Furman, Liertz, & Langer, 2006). Barone and Eisner (2012) argued that arts-based research was not a substitute for qualitative or quantitative research; rather, it was another way of seeing and knowing the social phenomenon. Other researchers, such as Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzousis, and Grauer, (2006) believed that arts-based research contributed to other kinds of research by its creative ways of knowing and researching (p. 1237). In the current study, I decided to choose poetic inquiry as a research method and data representation in order to promote the voice and individuality of Libyan Muslim women's stories. In this respect, understanding voice in poetic representation needs to be carefully explained. Prendergast (2009) stated that voice in poetic inquiry fit into one of the following three categories: (1) *Vox theoria*: literature voiced poems; these poems were usually critical or political and

were written as a reflection on the “work of literature/theory in a discipline or field”; (2) Vox autobiographia/autoethnographia: Researcher-voiced poems, these poems were generated from filed notes, journal entries, or autobiography/auto-ethnography narratives. These poems were written by the researcher to reflect on his/her lived experiences (see Richardson, 1999; Furman, 2004; Park, 2013). (3) Vox Participare: Participant-voiced poems, these poems were created from interview transcripts that included the participant’s words, only without adding any word that was not recorded in the interview (see Hanauer, 2012, 2013, 2015a; Poindexter, 2002; Langer & Furman, 2004). The current study falls in the third category, where the researcher elicits narratives from the interviews. Therefore, it adds to the existing literature of participant-voiced poems.

As noted earlier, despite the recent history of poetic inquiry, poetry as research emerged successfully and brightly in arts-based research. It has been used throughout interdisciplinary areas within the field of sociology (Richardson, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1999), social work (Furman, Leitz, & Langer, 2006; Poindexter, 2002; Furman, Coyne, & Negi, 2008), identity studies (Langer & Furman, 2004; Furman, Langer, Davis, Gallardo, & Kulkarni, 2007; Hanauer, 2010); nursing (Hunter, 2002; Raingruber, 2009), war studies (Hanauer, 2012, 2013, 2015a; Bassett, 2012), music (Vries, 2007), and therapeutic psychology (Furman, 2007; Furman, 2004). Nevertheless, the use of art-based research as a form of newly developed research on human experiences is questionable. In the following section, I explicate a few reasons for conducting art-based research and, particularly, poetic ethnography in my dissertation.

The first reason was the aesthetic quality of the art research (Barone and Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2009). They believed that the figurative language and the artistic tools employed in the research made it unique and different from other kinds of research. According to Leavy (2009), the aesthetic qualities of the arts-based research were a very powerful component of the artwork, which “grab[s] people’s attention” (p. 12). Building on that, this dissertation uses poetic ethnography as a research method to provide a better example of the uniqueness of individual lived experiences of Libyan Muslim women. Barone and Eisner (2012) claimed that only artists, including art-based researchers, could create new worlds through the effective utility of aesthetic features.

Second, forms of art, particularly poetry, can have a powerful, interactive effect on human emotion. Topics, such as homelessness, disability, illness, and/or homesickness, are better transformed and represented through artistic practices to effectively and emotionally interact with human feelings (Leavy, 2009).

### **Researcher Positionality**

When writing this dissertation, I found myself working from two perspectives: that of the insider and the outsider. First, being a Libyan Muslim woman places me in the context of an insider. The fact that I am Libyan and lived in Libya all my life facilitates an understanding for the context of the study. Furthermore, I have better access to other Libyan women’s stories. Second, I consider myself an outsider, as I am a researcher, who seeks to make Libyan women’s voices heard and visible. I am also the writer who “brings the world of others into our texts” (Denzin, 2014, p. 6). Nevertheless, being an insider (Libyan



woman) in the first place helps me interact and fulfill my role as an outsider (researcher). In fact, Leggo (2008) comments on the ways in which a researcher may act in the following statement:

As a researcher I am a poet or maker. I do not stand outside experience and observe experience like a video camera recording an objective reality. Instead I seek to enter lived experiences with an imaginative openness to the people and activities and dynamics at work and play. I seek to make a story in collaborative dialogues with others, always aware that the story is one of many stories, one many versions of the story. (p. 90)

Broadly speaking, the arts-based researchers cannot isolate themselves from the subjects' experience. Instead, they should be deeply engaged in those experiences in order to theorize certain social phenomena.

### **Recruiting the Participants**

According to Creswell (2013) “[participants] must be individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon being explored and can articulate their lived experiences” (p. 150). I recruited 12 Libyan Muslim women, who were within the 27-75 age group. I chose this age range in order to get different responses from the women who lived in different eras and have gone through dissimilar experiences in the same country. This age difference also helped me see how the women's experiences were different based on the historical era they lived in. There were no particular criteria, such as education level or career position. I

excluded Libyan women who have a Libyan nationality and have never been in Libya. I believe that those women have different experiences according to where they spend their lives. I was looking for Libyan women who were willing to share their everyday lived experiences about their life before, during, and after the February 17, 2011 revolution. The participation was voluntary; women could choose to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. Out of the 12 participants, only one decided to remove many parts of her interview because she did not want me to put me or herself in any critical situation. This lady criticized the current government, and she was afraid that in the future, the government could read her words.

I used a snowball sampling technique and relied on personal contacts in order to find participants. Due to the conservative nature of the Libyan Muslim society and the difficulty of gaining access to Libyan women (Human Rights Watch, 2013; World Trade Press, 2010), I worked with family members, friends, and neighbors in Western Pennsylvania. Since Libya is moving toward a massive change in political, social, and cultural association, it is difficult for Libyan women, who do not know me, to agree and participate in the study. According to the Human Rights Watch report (2013),

Libyan women generally have inferior access to information, they experience higher rates of illiteracy than men ... they have restricted mobility ... Furthermore, they live in a society where men's control over women's decision-making is entrenched and

which prioritizes women's role as that of mothers and wives (pp. 12-13).

Adding to this, the World Trade Press (2010) report on Libyan women revealed, “[Libyan] women ha[ve] to obey the rules set by the patriarchal head of the family. [They] cannot report any mistreatment to anyone outside the family for fear of being considered disloyal and cut off from the family” (2010, p. 22). Moreover, the civil war that is now taking place in the country will make women more hesitant in sharing their experiences. Therefore, to start data collection, I contacted my close family members and friends, and they spread the word to my extended family and friends. I contacted 15 women, but only 12 women responded to my texts or emails. All the interviews were conducted in Arabic, except one, which was conducted in English. I asked each participant what language she preferred, and the majority chose Arabic. Two women began speaking in English, but they soon switched to speaking in Arabic. I also asked my participants to choose the interview time and location based on their own convenience.

Table 2

*Demographic Information of the Participants*

<i>Name of the participants</i>	<i>Age group</i>
<b>1) Aysha</b>	(60-75)
<b>2) Bahiga</b>	(65-75)
<b>3) Bushra</b>	(30-40)
<b>4) Farah</b>	(40-50)
<b>5) Fatima</b>	(55-65)
<b>6) Rana</b>	(40-50)
<b>7) Rasha</b>	(40-50)
<b>8) Rimas</b>	(20-30)
<b>9) Sania</b>	(25-35)
<b>10) Wasan</b>	(30-37)
<b>11) Yasmeen</b>	(25-30)
<b>12) Zainab</b>	(35-45)

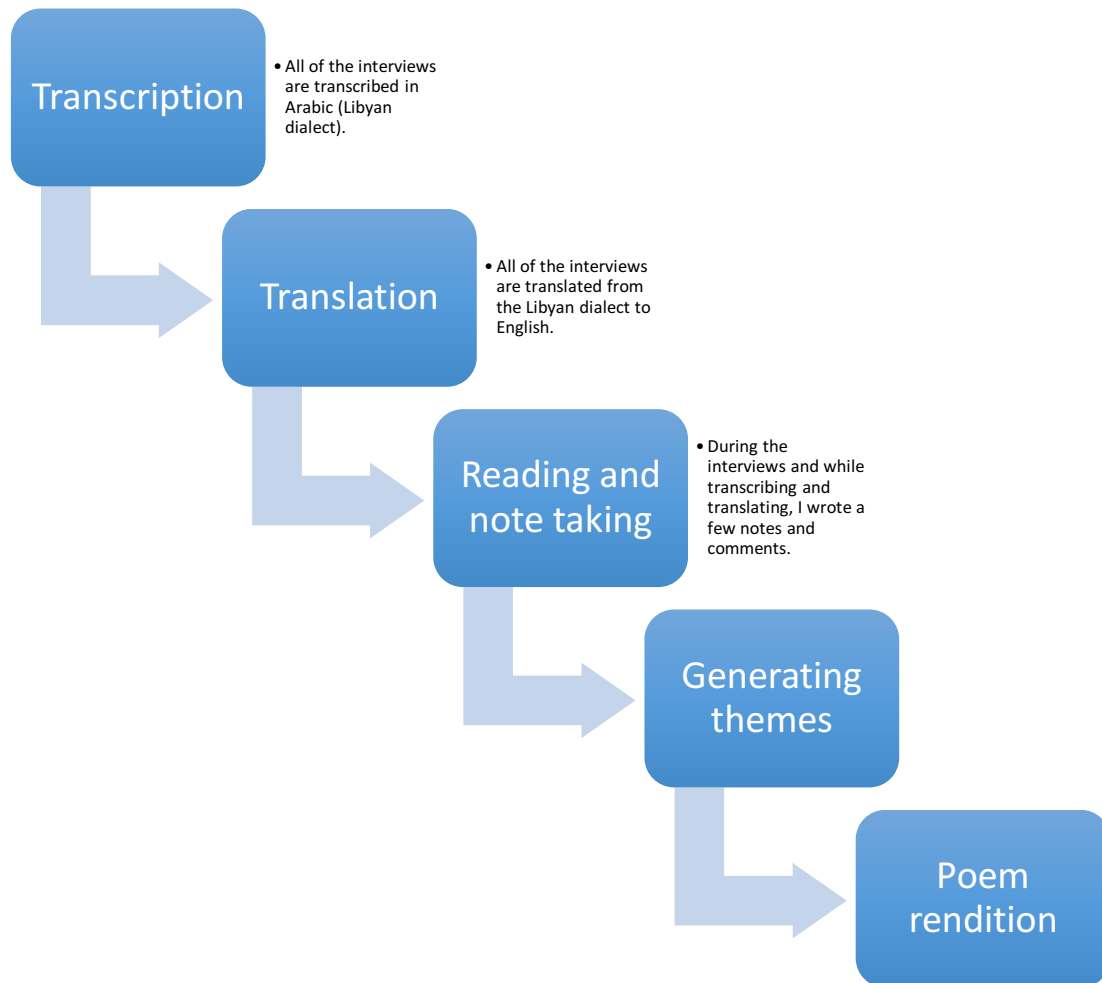
**Research Contexts**

The research took place at different locations, depending on the participants' preferences. Therefore, ten of the interviews were conducted in my home office via phone and Viber call. One interview was conducted in the participant's home; another interview was conducted in the participant's home office.

**Research Design**

According to Kerlinger and Lee (2000), a research design is the structure and the plan that is used in order to answer research questions. As such, the structure of this study is built on Hanauer's study on lived experiences (see Hanauer, 2012, 2013, 2015a). Thus, the research is designed the same way as Hanauer's study (2015a). The research consists of three stages. The first stage entails data collection. In this study, I used interviews only to obtain the data. The

second stage involved data analysis. In this stage, I explained how I analyzed and interpreted the data. The third stage highlighted the ethical considerations and credibility of the research.



*Figure 2.* Data analysis stage: Transcription, Thematic Organization, and Poetic Rendition.

### **Data Collection Method**

#### **Stage 1: Interviews (Narrative Elicitation)**

Interviews are the most powerful method in qualitative research, as they help to understand lived experiences (Weiss, 1995; Fontana & Frey, 2003; Gubrium & Holestein, 2003). It is a verbal interaction between the interviewer,

the ‘researcher’, and the interviewee, the ‘participant’. According to Shwandt (2007), an “interview is a behavioral event” (p. 162). It includes different strategies, like face-to-face interviews, telephone and/or email interviews, or online interviews. Interviews can also provide answers to the researchers about the things that are unobservable, such as feelings. Those unobservable facts play a very important role in phenomenological research (Richardson, 1996; Poindexter, 2001). Doby (1967) maintained, “interviewing serves best [as a way] to get at information, impressions and feelings that can be verbally reported” (p. 279). Fontana and James (2008) argued that interview data was the most powerful data by which we can understand our human fellows and their human experiences. Therefore, this data is very substantial in helping answer many research questions about abstract meanings, like anxiety, passion, and lived experiences. Furthermore, according to Marczy, DeMatteo and Festinger (2005), although interviews are a simple, straightforward form of data, they can produce a wealth of data. Schutz (1967) pointed out that “in interviewing guided by phenomenology, we strive to understand a person’s experiences from their point of view” (p. 20). In other words, the aim of interviewing in phenomenological research is to get a better understanding about the participants’ experiences from their own subjectivity (Seidman, 2013). Likewise, Weiss (1995) asserted that interviews allow us to access the people’s interior experiences and helps to teach us about different places and settings. In this study, I conducted in-depth interviews that were divided into three stages.

## **Initial Interviews**

Prior to the interviews, I called and texted 15 Libyan Muslim women. Only 12 responded and agreed to participate. Other women either did not respond or they refused to share their experiences. I later contacted each of the 12 women to arrange a time to conduct the interviews. Based on the participants' availability, the interviews were conducted in different locations. Ten of the interviews were conducted using international phone calls and/or Facebook and/or Viber in my home office; two interviews were face-to-face. One of the face-to-face interviews was in the participant's home, and the other one was in the participant's office.

After I introduced the study to each woman, I read the consent form and asked her to verbally agree to participate in the study. I had only two written consent forms; the other ten participants agreed verbally. All interviews were conducted in Arabic, except one; the participant chose to use English instead. I conducted structured and semi-structured interviews in order to gather my data. The following is the process that I went through in order to gather my data through structured and semi-structured interviews:

- a. In structured interviews, I prepared "predetermined" questions for all participants (Kumar, 2005, p. 126). Bernard (2000) states that "in fully structured interviewing, people are asked to respond to as nearly identical a set of stimuli as possible" (p. 191). Therefore, I asked each participant to close their eyes and remember the most important moments in their life before, during, and after the February 17, 2011 revolution. Based on Hanauer (2012, 2013, 2015a), and, similarly, Richardson (1993, 1994) and

Poindexter (2002), the participants were asked about particular moments in their everyday lives. For instance, some questions were focused on the participants' lived experiences around the time of the revolution and how their experiences were different compared to pre- and post-revolution times. The final narrative consists of the most significant moments in the lives of each participant.

- b. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer has the flexibility to move from a structured to an unstructured (open ended) mode of questions during the interview. Semi-structured interviewing is the most common type of interview, because it has the quality of unstructured interviewing but is based on certain rules as structured interviewing (Bernard, 2000). In other words, researchers have the choice to select the time and the place of the interview; however, they have to cover a list of predetermined questions. Researchers also have a chance to ask other questions that do not contradict with their ready-made list of questions. Therefore, during the first interview, I asked the participants several questions, depending on the stories they told me in order to help them remember or explain a few details.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Stage 2: Transcription, Thematic Organization, and Poetic Rendition**

#### **Transcription**

The initial stage of every data analysis is transcription, and it is often the most time-consuming portion throughout the whole study (Atkinson, 1998). After



each interview, I transcribed the whole narrative, considering the emotional states of the participants (e.g., their sense of happiness, excitement, and/or sorrow) while they reported their experiences (Poindexter, 2002). For example, some participants were crying during the interviews or they claimed that the moments made them feel happy or sad. All the data was first transcribed in the Libyan dialect before it was translated to English. I typed all my transcribed data in Microsoft Word Office and stored it in a protected folder under pseudonyms.

### **Translation**

I conducted all my interviews in Arabic, except one, because the participant is fluent in English, and she preferred speaking in English when reporting her experiences. Although 10 of the 12 participants understood and speak English, they used Arabic because they thought it was more convenient for them. After I finished each interview, I translated them to English.

### **Reading and Note Taking**

During the interviews and after the transcription and translation, I carefully listened and read the narratives while taking some notes (Hanauer, 2015a; Poindexter, 2002). I sometimes recorded these notes with a voice recorder. While reading, I underlined the words and phrases that sounded strong, meaningful and facilitate the flow of the narrative when narrating chronological stories (Poindexter, 2002). I wanted to carefully translate the participants' words as they said and meant them. I then excluded words that seemed unimportant to the meaning of the text (Langer & Furman, 2004) such as repetitive verbal phrases (e.g., "you know", "it is like", and "um").

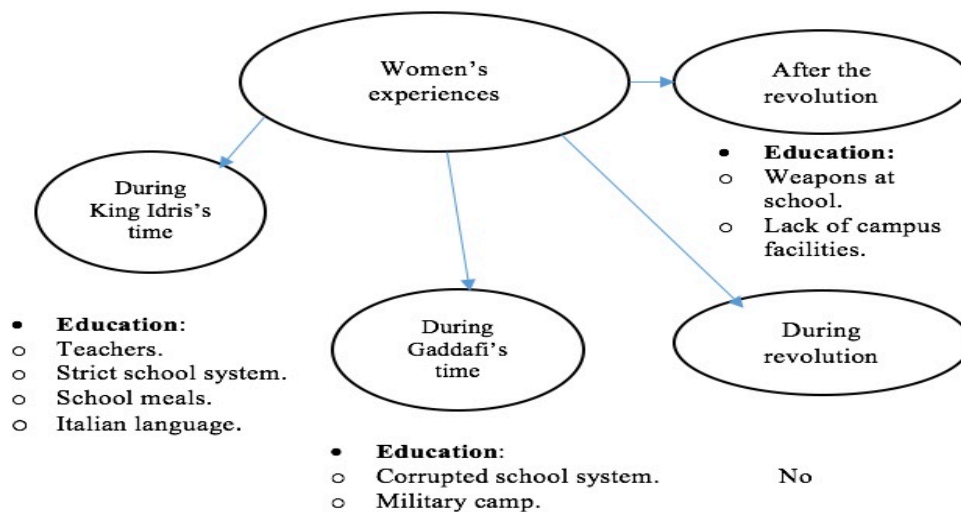
## **Thematic Organization**

The concept “theme” refers to “the element that occurs frequently in the text” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 78). Therefore, in order to engage myself deeply in the data, I conducted a thematic analysis, which refers to the “method [of] identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 82). According to Ryan and Bernard (2003), this analysis relies on the researcher’s “prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study (an a priori approach) ... and [from] personal experiences” (p. 88). After I finished transcribing and translating the interviews, I generated themes from each individual’s narrative, then I grouped all the themes under major themes and subthemes. In order to do that, first, I read the data very carefully to understand the stories and the moments the women described. In this respect, Coffey and Atkinson (1996) claimed that “thinking about the stories in our data can enable us to think creatively about the sorts of data we collect and how we interpret them” (p. 55). Since my interview questions were meant to ask the women to describe the most important moments in their lives, the women told those moments in chronological order, starting from childhood. In other word, one story as one complete subtheme tied to a historical space (Denzin, 2014). According to Coffey and Atkinson, (1996) sometimes researchers can generate themes according to the interview protocol. For example, in all the narratives, the women talked about education in Libya throughout different eras. They also spoke about education in accordance to the era they lived in, and then under the subtheme of education, they explored topics, such as topics about teachers, school meals, and the military

school system. As such, in this study, I first came with four major themes such as 1) Libyan women's experiences during Idris's time, 2) Libyan women's experiences during Gaddafi's time, 3) Libyan women's experiences during the revolution, 4) Libyan women's experience after the revolution.

**NVivo Software.** To assist my job, I used NVivo software to help organize the interview data. First, after I broke "the narrative into discrete segments", (Shinebourne, 2012, p. 175), I generated all the poems for each participant. Then, I created folders with the major themes that appeared in the narrative and associated them with my research questions. Thus, folders are labeled as major themes (e.g., women's experiences before, during, and after the revolution). Second, I started clustering the data according to the emerging subthemes under each major theme according to the women's most important moments. I first chose those themes according to the chronological order of each woman's story. According to Creswell (2013), "the researcher looks for [a] life-course of stages or experiences (e.g., childhood, marriage, employment) to develop a chronology of the individual's life" (p. 192). During the interviews, when I asked the participants to describe the most important moments in their lives, they chose to start as early as their memories could reveal. I then looked at the frequency of the stories and categorized them according to their commonality across the 12 women's data. That is to say, if one woman described her childhood memories, I check if the other women had similar stories about childhood memories and then I group all those memories under one major theme and subthemes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I was looking at the differences and

similarities between all the themes (stories) in different eras. (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). For example, the story of the British soldier in the 1940s was mentioned only once by one participant; however, as an insider of the study, such a story was very different and significant, compared to the other frequent stories I heard, because the soldier story described a moment that was barely mentioned in the history of Libya. I believe such a story should be recognized. NVivo software helped me to locate subthemes and helped me to count their frequency among the 12 women. In summary, I created the subthemes according to their frequency and significance, and I organized them in chronological order based on those patterns of frequency and significance.



*Figure 3. Example How I Clustered the Emerging Themes.*

According to the figure (4), the four major themes were women's experience during King Idris' time, during Gaddafi's time, and during and after the revolution. These major themes provide an answer to the second research question: What are the experiences of Libyan Muslim women before, during, and after the February 17, 2011 revolution? Under the themes of women's experience

before, during and after the revolution, I used one subtheme (education) as an example. I generated the subtheme, education, because of its frequency among the participants. The 12 women also talked about education in different eras. I grouped the similar stories and wrote them into a multi-vocal poem, which is divided in separate, but related, stanzas.

The following table summarizes the themes and the subthemes of the data, which helps to answer the first research question:

Table 3

*Summary of Themes and Subthemes*

Major Themes	Subthemes
<b>Women's experiences before King Idris's time and during his time from 1940 to 1969</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The British soldier.</li> <li>2. Life in the 1940s/1960s.</li> <li>3. Education: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Teachers.</li> <li>b. Strict school system.</li> <li>c. Italian language in schools.</li> <li>d. School meals.</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. Women and religion.</li> <li>5. Marriage and wedding: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Marriage.</li> <li>b. Wedding.</li> </ol> </li> <li>6. Women's lives from the 1940s to the 1960s.</li> </ol>
<b>Women's experiences during Gaddafi's time and before the February 17<sup>th</sup> revolution from 1970 to 2011</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Education: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Corrupted educational system.</li> <li>b. Military camps.</li> <li>c. April 7<sup>th</sup> students' revolution at universities.</li> <li>d. Education at higher institutions.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>e. Other experiences in the educational institutions.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Women and religion.</li> <li>3. Women during Gaddafi's time: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Women's experiences in urban area.</li> <li>b. Women's experiences in rural areas.</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. Marriage experience.</li> <li>5. Daily struggle during Gaddafi's time.</li> <li>6. Women and health care during Gaddafi's time.</li> <li>7. Women's work experience during Gaddafi's time.</li> </ul>
<b>Women's experiences during the February 17<sup>th</sup> revolution from February 15, 2011 to October 23, 2011</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The beginning of the revolution.</li> <li>2. NATO bombs.</li> <li>3. Daily struggle: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. No electricity or water.</li> <li>b. No gas for vehicles.</li> <li>c. Coding phone calls.</li> <li>d. Psychological struggle.</li> <li>e. Female doctors.</li> <li>f. Inside the hospital.</li> <li>g. Gaddafi's forces.</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. Abdul Fatah Yonis' death.</li> <li>5. 20 Ramadan. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The liberation of Tripoli.</li> </ul> </li> <li>6. Gaddafi's death.</li> <li>7. Liberation day.</li> <li>8. Liberation day formal speech.</li> </ul>
<b>Women's experiences after the revolution from October 24, 2011 to January 30, 2016</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Daily struggle: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Chaos everywhere.</li> <li>b. No electricity, gas, or income.</li> <li>c. Tribal identity discrimination.</li> <li>d. Smell of blood.</li> <li>e. Stories from the hospital. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Woman from Souq Aljomaa.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>

- 
- ii. Armed man in the hospital.
  - iii. Long beard, short pants.
  - f. Getting the Libyan passport.
  - g. Getting money from the bank.
  - h. Kidnapping.
  - 2. Destruction:
    - a. Tripoli International Airport.
    - b. Althulatha Market.
    - c. Bombing of the Mosques.
  - 3. Education:
    - a. Weapons at schools.
    - b. Examination day.
    - c. Lack of campus facilities.
  - 4. Marriage experience.
  - 5. The concept of freedom.
  - 6. They stole our dream.
  - 7. Gaddafi's house.
- 

**Multi-vocal poetic representation.** After excluding the insignificant words and phrases and highlighting the powerful ones, the final stage of analysis was the creation of the poems according to the given themes. I used the same method of generating themes for both Arabic and English poems because I considered the poems “as a research text before it [wa]s a poetic text.” (Shinebourne, 2012, p. 182). The poems consisted of the exact words of the participants (Richardson, 1993, 1994, 2003; Poindexter, 2002; Hanauer, 2012, 2013, 2015a). According to Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1997), “[silent women] do not explore the power that words have for either expressing or developing thought. Language is a tool for representing experience, and tools contribute to creative endeavors only when used” (p. 25). Furthermore, Richardson indicated (2003a), “writing up interviews as poems, honoring the speaker’s pauses, repetitions, alliterations, narrative strategies, rhythms and so on,

may actually better represent the speaker than the practice of quoting in prose snippets” (p. 516). The poetic representation is a compressed form of the longer narrative in order to allow the reader to focus on particular lived moments (Langer & Furman, 2006; Hanauer, 2003; Richardson, 1994). Richardson (2003a) added, “[p]oetry is thus a practical and powerful method of analyzing social worlds” (p. 516).

When presenting the data in the dissertation, I wrote multi-vocal poems. Multi-vocal poems mean writing the poem from different participants’ voices. According to Higgs (2009), multi-vocality refers to the “different voices” (p. 7). According to Denzin (2014), multi-vocality refers to “a complex text with multiple and overlapping voices. It is a text filled with emotion, complexity, confusion, selves reflecting on selves” (p. 40). I presented the poem in multi-vocal text because I believe that women’s lives and their experiences “are constituted through discourse in discursive systems which overlap and contradict one another” (Denzin, 2014, p. 41). Using multi-vocal poems also helped me to protect the identity of the participants and to make the one thematic poem richer in words, meanings, and artistic language than shorter unconnected poems.

### **Reliability, Validity, and Trustworthiness**

#### **Stage 3: Member Checking and Poem Revision**

Kerlinger and Lee (2000) provided several synonyms for reliability, including “dependability, stability and consistency” (p. 642). In other words, reliable data are accurate, stable, and “reasonable” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 292). In research, validity also deals with accuracy and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985;



Golafshani, 2003; Trent & Cho, 2006). Therefore, in order to check for reliability and validity of the data, I sent all the poems to the participants. I divided the interviews as follows:

### **Second Interviews**

After I finished the initial interviews, and after I finished transcribing, translating and creating poems from the interviews, I sent all the poems in English to the participants; I then asked them to read the poems in English. A few poems were read to participants instead of sending them, because the participants did not have email addresses, and they were not very good at technology related work. Therefore, the second interviews were conducted differently for each participant.

For the participants who received a digital copy of their poems, I gave them time to read them, and then they texted me to call them whenever they were ready for the second interview. As soon as they sent me a text with their appropriate time for the second interview, I prepared my interview questions. These questions were:

1. What do you think of your poems? Do you need to add, edit, or change anything about them?
2. Do you think the poems represent your experience? Yes, or no? Why?

During the interviews, and while listening to the participants' answers, I took a few notes and highlighted the places where participants asked me to change or edit something.

### Third Interviews

I conducted the third interviews immediately after the second interviews. A few participants decided to schedule their third interview for another time, while others were encouraged to do the third interview immediately after the second interview. The third interview consisted of a reflection of the participants' poems. At this stage, I asked each participant the following:

1. Having heard your poem, what would you say being a Libyan woman is like for you?

بعد أن سمعت قصيدتك، ما الذي تقوله كونك امرأة ليبية بالنسبة لك؟

2. Having heard your poem, what do you think the changes in Libya have meant to women's lives?

بعد أن سمعت قصيدتك، ما رأيك ماذا تعني التغييرات في ليبيا لحياة المرأة؟

3. What would you like to tell the world about being a Libyan woman?

ماذا تريد أن تقول للعالم عن كونك امرأة ليبية؟

A few participants made some revisions, along with editing them. For example, one of the participants asked me to hide all the names I used in her poems, and she removed parts from the poems where she talked about her divorced sister and her sister's ex-husband. The participant told me that her sister got married after the first interview, and for privacy reasons, she did not want to include her sister's very personal stories. Another participant added more lines to the poems, so they became clearer to the readers. This participant also scheduled another interview with me because she had a lot to share. She told me that the poems empowered her and made her want to say more. A third participant asked me to delete most of her poems because she talked about politicians in Libya, and

she was worried that if someone from Libya read the work, it would put both of us in a critical situation.

Since ten of my participants' English proficiency was adequate enough to understand the translation of their poems, I asked them to re-check the accuracy of the English version of their poems. For the two participants who did not speak English, they offered to have their relatives help with translation. One participant asked her daughter to translate for her, and the other participant asked her granddaughter to translate the poems for her. For all the poems, I had two of my Libyan colleagues re-check the translation, which was from the Libyan dialect to English. The re-checking process provided credibility to the results, and the use of pseudonyms helped to build trustworthiness between the researcher and the participants. Keeping in mind the nature of Libyan society, which provides discomfort and fear when women try to speak, hiding the participants' identities were my priority when interviewing and analyzing data. One of my research aims is not to generalize, but to give voice to Libyan women, and to allow their experiences to become "a window for understanding people of similar backgrounds" (Park, 2013).

Table 4

Summary of the Participants' Poems

Name of the participants	Number of poems
1. Aysha	10
2. Bahiga	9
3. Fatima	9
4. Rasha	22
5. Farah	10
6. Zainab	9
7. Rana	12
8. Wasan	24
9. Sania	29
10. Bushra	26
11. Rimas	7
12. Yasmeen	24
Total poems	195

### Challenges of Data Collection

Data collection was a long, challenging process. In order to remember the challenges, I encountered throughout data collection, I recorded myself talking and reflecting upon most of my participants' narratives. These recordings later helped me to classify the challenges I went through. Some of the challenges included the following:

### **Time Difference**

The time difference between the United States and Libya was six hours in the summer and seven hours in the winter. Libya was ahead of time during data collection, so when it was morning in the United States, it was evening in Libya. In order to conduct the interviews according to the participants' convenience, I had to occasionally stay awake all night in order to complete one interview. Sometimes I had to go teach my 8:00 AM writing class without getting 30 minutes of sleep. Although the participants tried to understand the time difference, morning times were better for women while all men were at work.

### **Inconvenient Phone and Internet Connection**

Due to the situation in Libya, making a phone call or Internet call was a challenge in itself. When I began my interviews in April 2015, Libya suffered, and is still suffering, from a serious lack of electricity and Internet connection. Sometimes I would wait around for an hour or two in order to make a call. This waiting was not successful all the time because when the electricity came back, the participants had to do house work that required electricity such as ironing, washing clothes, styling their hairs, vacuum the house and cooking. The last thing my participants should have worried about was continuing their interviews. Moreover, the Internet connection was not reliable. According to McIntyre (2014), the speed of the Internet in Libya is quite slow, about 0.5 Mbps, which is below average, compared to the speed of the Internet in other countries.

### **Date of the Interview and the Unstable State of the Country**

I conducted the interviews between April 2015 and January 2016. During these ten months, Libya went through many changes. First, Tripoli's International Airport was bombed in 2014, the only big market in Tripoli was burnt and demolished in 2014, and the country experienced a continuous lack of electricity, along with depleting financial resources for Libyan citizens. Libya was an affordable country, despite the low income for citizens; however, after the bombing and destruction, the country became very expensive, and people did not receive their income for months. In addition, the fear of ISIS and radical Muslims increased worry amongst the Libyan people. In fact, when I was doing the interviews, the participants really reflected upon these situations, and they explicitly explained their worries and their concerns.

### **Personal Stories**

Another challenge that I faced was hearing the very personal stories about the women's experiences. No matter how close I was to my participants, I occasionally felt sorry for making them re-live their painful moments. Sometimes I advised them to stop telling the stories if they did not wish but they insisted to continue. Sharing their experiences and remembering these moments were healing and relaxing them from the pain they were imprisoned in. Many times, I had to quit recording some of the sessions because my participants and I were crying. The feeling of sorrow and sadness followed me every time I transcribed, translated, or even read the data.

## **Insider and Outsider**

Being an insider (Libyan Muslim woman) did not help me very much. Some of the participants still see me as an outsider only, and the last thing I cared about was their struggle. This, particularly, impacted me emotionally and psychologically. Moreover, since I am living thousands of miles away from my country and my family, it was very difficult for me to listen to all the painful stories about my country. When I left Libya in 2010, everything was stable, the country was safe, and we never complained about electricity or gas. However, when the participants talked about the country, it was a shock to me. I could not imagine all the destruction and killing that took place over there. It was the hardest feeling ever. When I left my country to come to the USA, I had a dream of finishing my degree and going back to my country, my university, and my family. The women's stories have influenced my future decisions and have made me live in despair and worry all the time.

## **Translation Challenge**

Arabic is the standard and official language for all of the Arab countries, but each country has its own distinct dialect, which is very different from the standard Arabic language. Therefore, interviews were conducted in various Libyan dialects. For example, the participants from the west of Libya spoke different dialects from the participants in the east. I did not struggle very much when translating the dialects from the west, but I had to ask the participants for assistance when they were using their eastern dialect. On occasion, I had to sometimes first translate the participants' words to standard Arabic, and then I

had to translate their words to English. Therefore, I had to check and re-check the translation for accuracy many times when I wrote a poem.

Moreover, this study looks only at 12 Libyan women's experience with an aim to facilitate their voice and make their experience widely accessible.

Therefore, the results of the study cannot be generalized to all Libyan women.

More research is needed to study other Libyan women under different circumstances.

### **Final Remarks**

In this chapter I explained the methodology of the study and provided a detailed background about art-based research and poetic inquiry to help explain its significance to this study. Then, I clarified my method of data collection, along with discussing how I recruited participants; I also addressed the researcher's positionality. Finally, I provided explanation for data analysis, along with providing various tables and figures that were in line with this process of analysis. In the coming chapters, I report the major themes that answer my research questions.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### **Thematic Organization of Libyan Muslim Women's Experiences**

As stated previously, this study aims to explore and investigate Libyan Muslim women's experiences and understand feminism in the Libyan context. It intends to "uncover the social, cultural, structural and historical forces" of the participants' lived experiences within the Libyan context (Denzin, 2014, pp. 57-58). To do so, I collected interview data from 12 Libyan Muslim women, aged 25–75. The interview was divided into four stages: 1) initial interview: asked women to remember and narrate the most ten important moments in their lives; 2) second interview: after generating the poems, I returned them to the participants to check for accuracy and further editing; 3) third interview: general questions were asked about the position of Libyan women in Libya. All these interviews were transcribed and translated from the Libyan dialect to English. After that, I generated themes and organized them in chronological order (Creswell, 2013), similar to the structure of the second chapter. To analyze and interpret those themes, I used my insider Libyan feminist and historical lens. In the following chapters, I take my readers on a journey inside the Libyan houses and through different historical eras, which go back to the 1940s, and explores the voices of Libyan Muslim women.

In the coming chapters, I present the poetic ethnography of the women's experiences from pre-King Idris' time and until January 2016. Each poem

“mirrors a significant moment to describe” the lived experiences of the Libyan women (Iida, 2011, p. 108).

The major themes that I organized into separate chapters were 1) women’s experiences before and during King Idris’s time from 1940 to 1969; 2) women’s experiences during Gaddafi’s time from 1969 to 2011; 3) women’s experiences during the revolution; and 4) women’s experiences after the revolution.

### **Libyan Muslim Women’s Experiences before and during King Idris’s Time (From 1940s to 1969)**

<i>During King Idris’s time</i>	ايام الملك
<i>We never lack anything</i>	مكاش ينقصنا شي
<i>Life was simple</i>	زمان الحياه كانت ببساطه
<i>I remember a man came with drums</i>	زمان الطيبيله و النوبه في الليل و تنوض الناس
<i>to wake people up for suhoor</i>	بش الناس ينوضو يتسحرو
<i>he came before 2:00 am to wake us up</i>	قبل الساعه ٢:٠٠ تبدا تضرب ع الحياش
<i>we did not have TV</i>	قبل مفيش تلفزيون
<i>we used to watch dolls’ house</i>	كنا انديرو في الجراجوز... نمشو نتفرجو
<i>we pay money to watch the dolls</i>	كل حوش يدفعو فلوس و يجو الناس يتفرجو

### **The British Soldier**

I remember when the English soldiers came  
we were afraid  
The first time they entered Libya  
they knocked on our doors  
they thought it was ok to enter the house  
like Britain  
Women were not allowed to talk to men  
We caught them trying to enter the house  
from the kitchen window  
My brother caught one of them  
and beat him so hard  
He asked the Englishman  
What he wanted? and that man replied:  
Mabrouka (female name in Libya)  
He wanted to have a woman from the house  
He was drunk and he wanted any woman

## **Life from the 1940s to the 1960s**

My childhood was during the British colony  
before King Idris

I lived the best moments of my life  
everything was easy  
everything was simple

there was no fear  
nothing disturbed us  
we were playing in the streets

we were going out at night  
it was so quiet \_ no car noises like today  
we all know each other  
everything was cheap

we did not have oil but we lived very happily  
in the 60s when they discovered the oil  
Gaddafi found the oil ready  
as Libyans we did not get anything from oil  
during the King's time we did not have oil  
but we had better life

we were living on farming  
life was very simple and nice.  
we have everything  
families were very connected.

we used to sit in front of the house  
on small stairs next to the door.  
all the girls in the family went there.  
that was our fun time.

we used to go to the Garden of Flowers (جنان النوار/ janan alnuwar)  
we played there.

the garden is still there  
it was 100% safe.

## **Education**

### **Teachers**

In 1942 during the English colony  
after the Italian colony

I was six years-old  
schools were excellent  
the teachers were different from now

the teachers taught seriously  
they taught us many things  
like respect  
when the teacher entered the class  
we all stood  
when we left the class  
we did not turn our back to the teacher  
we left walking away backward \_ our face was facing her  
until we reached the door  
they taught us to respect the elderly not like today  
I learned all my lessons in Arabic not like my sisters  
they learned Italian in Libyan schools

### **Strict School System**

schools in the past were very organized.  
teachers were perfect,  
our study was very serious.  
when the girl graduates from sixth grade,  
she was excellent in everything  
not like teaching during Gaddafi time  
it was all cheating,  
and transferring credits.  
the transfer system was created during Gaddafi's time.  
in the past when people graduated from the elementary school  
after sixth grade,  
they could teach with their certificate.  
the classes were not mixed.  
only girls.

And all teachers were Libyans

### **Italian Language in Schools**

During my mom's time the schools were Italian  
they were learning Italian only.  
The Arabic language was ignored  
and marginalized.  
my mom was born in 1912  
she started school in 1919/1920  
she told me that during that time  
they were learning Italian only.  
there was no Arabic in school  
Libya was colonized by the Italians.  
the Italian language was very dominant.



he sends his father to talk to the bride's father  
after both families agree  
the couple got engaged  
then the bride only sees the groom  
in the wedding day  
the groom was not allowed to see her before wedding  
it was a family based decision  
I was engaged in the same way  
his sister came  
she saw me  
then she sent the men to talk to my father  
I was not allowed to see him until the wedding day  
it was a shame to see each other before the wedding  
although the religion allows that  
but people disagree  
I did not like that  
how would you marry someone you have never seen?  
or talked to  
after 1965 people became more civilized  
and couples were allowed to see each other

## **Wedding**

On Wednesday, a week before the wedding ceremony  
it was called Lailat Almistadnat (invitation night)  
in this night all the close family members get together  
they spend the night celebrating the beginning of the wedding.  
then in the second day,  
they hire women to go to invite people to the wedding.  
in the past we did not have invitation cards  
or telephones  
those women also cook during the wedding  
a little boy used to go with them to show them  
the family they wanted to invite.  
in the past people used to live close to each other  
all people celebrated the weddings inside the houses  
and it was so good.  
when the women went to the people's house,  
those people gave money to the women  
that's how they got paid  
then they sprayed perfume on them.  
on the next Sunday, the same women came again  
to bake the salt and sugar kaak (cookie)  
many family members come as well

On Monday, the wedding started  
and it started with Algufa day (baskets day).  
people usually were invited for this day and afterwards.  
this day the women came to cook rushdet burma (Libyan  
traditional meal)  
and the bride went to the bath (Sauna).  
then Zamamat came and women wore sudra.  
some women came to the wedding house with their (blugat) bags  
to dress sudra there.  
then the groom's family send the baskets  
with their wagafat (women who serve in the wedding)  
with other two women from the groom's family.

On Tuesday, the bride with her pink dress  
sat and brought the manual grounder (raha)  
the stylist (Alzeyana) stayed with the bride since Monday  
and they ground Henna leaves to make them powder  
they use it on the bride.  
the women take the bride out for people.

On Wednesday, this is the big party for the bride's' family.  
the groom's family came  
and their women wore sudra (traditional Libyan clothes).  
the mother of the groom gave a gift to the bride.

On Thursday, the wedding party day.  
in the past there was no wedding halls  
so people were invited for Monday,  
Tuesday  
and Wednesday  
but not Thursday.

On Thursday, the brides wore the white wedding dress  
and the groom family came to pick her up.  
then all families continue the wedding in the groom's family.

On Friday, is Almahder day  
the bride wore different clothes and sit on the chair.  
the Libyan wedding in the past was simple and long.

zamzamat were dancing in the wedding  
women were not allowed to dance  
it was considered as a taboo  
zamzamat dance and collect money  
from people while they dance

## Women's life from the 1940s to the 1960s

I remember my aunt's husband  
                                had a fabric store  
he used to bring those fabrics for us to choose from  
                                this was one of the very nice special moments  
  we looked at the different kinds of fabrics

I want to tell you about the Gold Market  
my family is considered a conservative family  
                                we did not go to the market to buy our stuff,  
  we used to have a woman  
who brought the stuff for us  
                                this woman worked for a few known families  
she was allowed to enter our houses  
                                with all the stuff she brought from the market.  
  her name was Albahlula (البهلولة female name)

(RIP)  
she came to our house and asked us what we wanted  
  and then she bought it for us.  
she was a very well-known woman.  
                                even the merchants knew her.  
she used to wear a white Farashia  
I still remember her I was a little old when she used to come  
                                she used to buy us gold and other stuff  
she first came to the house to tell us what they sold  
                                and then we decided what to buy.

in the past, women from some families  
                                were not allowed to go to the market  
we were not even allowed to walk in the street  
  so there was this woman  
she was not a servant for us  
                                but she was very well known among families over there  
  she told everyone that was there in the market  
she was our only source to get the stuff to the house  
                                we did not even know how to go to the market  
  or what to do there.

Aunt Bahlula had boys and girls and had a family  
but the only difference between us was  
                                she had a naked face  
this means she did not cover her face  
                                and could talk to men in the market.  
when a girl got engaged  
                                and to prepare for the wedding  
  she did all of that



I remember this woman and her visits  
as one of my joyful moments in my life

## CHAPTER FIVE

### LIBYAN MUSLIM WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES DURING GADDAFI'S TIME FROM 1969 TO 2011

*We started the tragedy since we were born  
I was born in 1968  
when I was young  
I did not feel anything  
everything was based on the King's system  
in the 1980s  
things started to change  
Gaddafi implemented his political ideology  
This change impacted us  
we rejected it inside*

بدت مآساتنا من اول مفتحننا عيوننا  
من مواليد ٦٨  
في البدايه في السنين الاولى  
في الدراسه محسيناش  
تحسي النظام الاول ماشي  
في ال ٨٠  
بدت تتغير  
بدت يخشش في الفكر متعه  
بعده بدينا نتاثرو  
و نرفضوها...من داخلنا

#### Education

##### Corrupted Educational System.

Education was very bad  
education was corrupted  
Gaddafi made us ignorant  
he prohibited English language  
English was a key to success  
he imprisoned us  
the curriculum was very bad

The treatment from the teacher was unfair  
If you have a teacher either your mother  
or neighbor  
or who's in a good relationship with you mother  
Then you will pass and get good grades  
If you do not,  
you are gonna fail

##### Military Camp

the schools were military camps  
military teachers encouraged us to work in the military  
or at the police academy  
even if the parents refused  
they would help us do what we wanted

When I entered high school  
Gaddafi changed the regular schools to military camps  
the schools became camps  
it was governed by the military rules  
accuracy  
punctuality  
uniform

they forced us to wear the military uniform  
I did not wear the uniform  
I was forced to sew green gowns  
to look like the military uniform

this impacted us negatively  
some girls left schools  
because of that  
our school was specialized in marines  
we studied intelligence marines  
other schools taught  
war tricks  
weapons  
shooting  
the students practiced that  
the school took them to places  
so they could shoot  
we heard of that  
it affected us badly

the school never followed  
the regular school system  
the principal had no authority in the school  
if you come to school late  
then you would be punished by the military way  
the soldiers would punish us so hard  
they made us sit on our knees  
they did not allow us to take classes that day  
No one could say anything  
we had to leave the house  
before sunshine so we reached school very early  
otherwise the punishment was so hard

even the principal  
his job just checks the teachers' attendance  
he had no control in his own school  
this military system controlled everything

it canceled schools  
it took us to protest  
the principal just looked on silently  
we felt oppressed in our schools  
we had to leave the house  
that was unfair

### **April 7<sup>th</sup> Revolution**

Before I entered college  
there was what is known as 7 April revolution  
Revolutionary Committees were everywhere  
when I entered college  
things got harder  
two years before I entered  
Gaddafi hung college students in the university  
many people decided to stay home  
many left education because of fear  
  
my brother studied at the time of the killing  
he told me it is impossible to survive there  
we were oppressed  
we had no voice  
we remained silent  
so we could live  
  
university was a place for terrorism  
it was not a place for education  
and creativity  
  
we had no freedom  
everything was not allowed  
only go  
take classes  
then go home  
  
that was life in college  
Revolutionary Committees  
were controlling everything  
we were afraid of doing anything  
we were horrified

This poem represents the women's

## Education in Graduate School

I am like many women in Libya  
We suffered  
There were no ambitions  
I am one of the people who decided to apply for graduate school  
In my first day of school,  
I was surprised that the place of study was very dirty  
It was not well maintained  
In my first class we sat in a room  
Without a door,  
broken windows,  
very dirty.  
I went there for a week  
My mom forced me to go  
she encouraged me to continue my graduate studies.  
She told me it was good and I would be a professor in the university  
but I told my mom I hated the university  
If you just see the place where we study,  
it was very dirty  
I said it is enough  
I had a BA degree and that's enough  
Gaddafi did not let us dream  
and work towards our dream  
It took many days to finish my paperwork  
Most professors were very tough  
That's all.  
They did not encourage me to go on.

### Other Experiences in the Educational Institutions.

In my first day on campus  
     I realized that women were oppressed  
         I do not have older male brothers  
 I entered the bus station,  
         I was scared  
 people were shouting:  
         Gurgi,  
         Ain Zara,  
         Janzour,  
             Enjila.  
 loud sounds everywhere  
     I was wondering around looking for the university bus.  
 I was crying

and crying  
I lost motivation to study  
I wanted to go home  
I used all my time to translate the readings  
almost I did not read anything  
I just translated  
I held the dictionary in my hands and translated  
I did not know a single word in English  
I spent the whole day just translating  
translating,  
translating,  
translating.

### **Women and Religion**

My cousins were religious men  
they could not practice the religion freely  
they were raising awareness about Islam  
Gaddafi arrested them  
he put them in the prison  
their sister left the country  
she wanted to practice her religion  
without fear

Gaddafi had never liked the hijab  
he never welcomed it  
as a woman I could not wear the khimar  
because he would arrest me  
Gaddafi removed one of the women's khimars  
in front of everyone in the street

### **Women's Status During Gaddafi's Time**

#### **Women's Experiences in Urban Areas.**

Women at his time were nothing;  
they did not have any status  
or respect.  
Women were nothing  
Everyone knew what he was doing to women  
he was surrounded by prostitutes  
Any woman, who tried to be prominent,  
was afraid that he would kidnap her  
the woman could not think of revolution  
if she did  
then she committed a crime

she could not demand freedom for herself  
she could not ask freedom for the others  
she could not even ask for her needs  
all her decisions, under men's control  
men found what satisfied them before her satisfaction

women were marginalized  
we thought we lived in safety  
but the truth is  
as a woman I did not have rights  
the world thinks we had them but we did not

### **Women's Experiences in Rural Areas.**

In the 1970s  
it was the first time I left Tripoli  
I saw the clouds clearly in the sky  
I found them very close to earth

I found people sitting on the sand  
I sat on the sand too  
they did not have electricity  
they lived in tents  
they did not have bathrooms  
they did not have water  
when they had to shower  
they carried the water over donkeys

the women there were very undeveloped  
they did not know anything outside their farms  
they worked on the farm all day  
they made woolen blankets  
they collected the olives  
they grew trees  
women there worked just like men  
there was no difference

### **Marriage Experience**

I was introduced to my husband  
his mother was one of my patients  
it seems she admired me  
she liked my way of talking  
his mom told him to see me  
so he started thinking about me

after a week he came back to me  
    he was talking and talking  
        after that I talked my mom  
            and she talked to my dad.  
My dad went to their area and asked about them  
    Most people spoke highly about them  
        then he came and we got married.

My friend's husband is a dentist  
    He knew that my husband was looking for a bride.  
        This person told him that his wife's friend was a good person  
He came to me in the university.  
    He talked about himself.  
        He talked normally he told me that  
            he admired me because of my quietness

In Ramadan, his mother and his two sisters came.  
    I was so scared.  
        Almost dying from fear.  
Then after the women's visit,  
    my brothers went to my husband's town,  
        One of my brothers went there  
and found that my husband is a good man.

It was in the Eid  
My husband's family came to celebrate Eid  
  they sat and chatted  
they were my cousins  
    My husband saw me  
After the Eid day, they came again  
    they proposed me to their son  
        My husband was known in the family as a good man  
                                    he fears of Allah and prays

### **Daily Struggle During Gaddafi's Time**

During the interview, the women mentioned the different struggles they faced on a daily basis, such as lacking job connections and the depressing state of the country, which made the women feel essentially pessimistic. Therefore, this subtheme provides a brief overview of the daily struggles they went through during Gaddafi's time.



Gaddafi did not do any good for us  
I do not even know how to describe it  
everything goes if you have good connections  
there was a lot of oppression  
we suffered from the sanction of the country

Our days were depressing  
people were so depressed  
You feel as if there is something sitting on your chest  
This thing now is not there anymore  
Psychologically,  
Gaddafi was like (phlegm) on our heart  
During Gaddafi's time I had nothing to tell you  
My life was boring  
Gaddafi was sitting on our heads

in the 1980s  
we hardly survived  
we did not have anything to buy  
we lived in siege  
we did not know about the different kinds of fruit in the world  
we did not know about the chocolate or cookies  
we had to buy one type of  
local brand  
he surrounded us with poverty  
although the country was full of oil  
we did not have ambition to live  
we lost hope for our future

in the 2000s I remember the Iraq War  
the war impacted us in a good way  
Gaddafi started to change a little bit  
the country started to open to the world  
slightly  
he gave us little tips to remain silent  
he sent a few students to study abroad  
before that no one was allowed to travel for education  
if you travelled  
then you would stay abroad forever

### **Women and Healthcare During Gaddafi's Time**

I was pregnant  
everything went normal  
but the worst moment I have ever lived  
is the delivery moment

I was in pain  
no one in the hospital cared for me  
they injected me with artificial pain to help speed the delivery  
I could not deliver the baby  
they did a C-section and the baby died  
Thanks Allah

I was very depressed

in Libya, they do not care about sick people  
this has nothing to do with Gaddafi  
it has to do with humanity  
the medical team did not care about pregnant women

that time when I was in pain  
the doctor could decide for me what to do not Gaddafi  
they took me to the surgery room twice

I was crying and no one cared  
the doctor was sitting and asking me for prayers  
I prayed for him and for everyone  
other women were crying too  
I tried to calm them down  
although I was in pain too

then when I left the surgery room  
I found myself in the hospital corridor  
Because there were not enough beds for patients  
then I went to a room  
with another six women  
the room was full of cockroaches  
if one of the women had a disease  
then we would be infected  
my mother-in-law came to help me  
she slept under my bed  
there was not even a mattress or a rug

### **Women's Work Experience During Gaddafi's Time**

I was working as a volunteer called attachment  
my father was working in the children's hospital  
and I did not want to be close to him  
I want to build myself by myself  
away from him and his connections  
I decided to volunteer in the cardiology hospital for eight months.  
After eight months,  
they would only choose two doctors to sign position contracts

Me and another doctor were the oldest ones  
in the hospital  
we thought we had a 90% chance of acceptance compared to the others.

However,  
the department head told me:  
I know you are an excellent doctor and you work so hard.  
but the two spots are reserved for the doctors'  
daughters

he said those two positions are for them  
I started crying and had a panic attack  
After all this work for eight months.  
this is unfair  
this is not right  
it is not her right

even if she is a doctor's daughter  
even if her father is the founder of the department  
but what about me  
I worked so hard  
it is not fair if my father is not a doctor I will not get the job.

Later  
I told my father that I wanted to work in the children's hospital  
at first my father did not like it

but eventually he agreed  
he used his connections and I was hired in a week.

We all worked with Gaddafi  
I myself was one of the people  
who was forced to teach a political awareness  
course which represented Gaddafi's ideology

We had no other choice  
at the end we were working in and for their country

We did not have other choices  
that's our country and we had to work there

Where do you want us to go?  
You either work or leave the country

## CHAPTER SIX

### LIBYAN MUSLIM WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES DURING FEBURARY 17, 2011 REVOLUTION FROM FEBURARY 17, 2011 TO OCTOBER 23, 2011

*We felt something would happen  
it started with a joke  
the joke that impacted us  
"Tunisians told the Libyans to bend down  
we started talking  
why not us?*

حني من بدينا ،،حسينا  
فينا لما طلعت النكتة  
اول حاجه اثرت  
متع التوانسه يا ليبي نزل راسك  
حسينا روحنا  
اش معني حني خيرنا

### **The Beginning of the Revolution**

It was Thursday  
I think it was February 13  
They said that people are gonna go out  
and protest I was at the university  
I said no way  
Gaddafi is gonna kill them and depress them  
It is not gonna happen  
Even in your dreams guys  
  
The news was broadcasting the event in Benghazi  
We were sitting in front of the TV  
We were astonished  
We did not believe  
I did not believe what was happening  
We did not know what was going on  
We did not believe there was gonna be a revolution  
  
he called us the angry generation for 42 years  
when we were young  
he trained us to ruin his own rule  
we lived very hard moments  
he bombed Misrata and Alzawia  
we saw him killing the men  
  
I wanted to go out too  
  
The revolution itself was a positive act  
It was something so good. It made us all happy  
It impacted our lives  
We had hope that the country would be better.

we were very happy  
we thought we would move from one era to another

no more Gaddafi  
no more oppression  
no more slavery  
we would be free

when Gaddafi bombed Benghazi  
we worried about them  
but we were silent we could not speak  
we did not trust people around Gaddafi he put out many spies  
if you said something  
Gaddafi forces would arrest  
you  
cousins are no longer cousins  
friends are no longer friends  
neighbors are not trusted  
we lived in fear  
we were two parts our revolution their revolution

### **NATO Bombs**

NATO stands for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. This organization interfered in the Libyan revolution and bombed many locations in Tripoli that belonged to Gaddafi in order to protect civilians. The first NATO bomb occurred on March 19, 2011 in Benghazi, and the last one was on October 20, 2011 when Gaddafi was killed.

On our way home  
we heard the first NATO bomb  
the car just shook up and down  
I still remember that moment  
you feel like an earthquake  
at the same time  
while in the road  
you hear people weeping  
and others ululating  
my neighbors were playing drums  
others were weeping and crying

The first NATO bomb

I was in my neighbor's house  
suddenly  
The house was vibrating  
we heard three loud bombs  
As if you were hit by a natural disaster  
like an earthquake  
people were terrified  
they went to the basement  
we all got together  
I was very afraid  
it was very loud  
very strong  
very very strong  
you felt the house shake up and down  
the windows opened  
  
some people were happy  
I was not  
I was afraid  
NATO bombed the military camp twice a day  
I could not go to the restroom  
our windows broke  
the walls were moving  
I was psychologically down  
yes, psychologically  
please mention that  
people never talk about it  
psychologically  
destroyed, I could not go to the restroom  
or have a shower  
our life was no longer stable  
  
Gaddafi threatened to bomb  
NATO was bombing  
they all destroyed Libya

### **Daily Struggles During the Revolution**

#### **No Electricity or Water**

There is no electricity  
in 24 hours you only had electricity  
for an hour  
  
It was Ramadan  
People were fasting  
It was difficult to cook

It was during the summer

The weather was hot

can you imagine that

I am a medical doctor

when I go home there was no electricity

and water to sterilize my body

or my clothes,

there was nothing

I stayed in my clothes that were full of blood and dirt

there is no electricity

how would I wash myself or my clothes?

then in later months we ran out of water

Aljalaa hospital had no water for three days

the neighbors brought water to the hospital in gallons

people used the water in the restrooms

and other work in the hospital

this took three days

all Tripoli stayed more than three days without water

but the hospital only stayed for three days

to the extent that Aljalaa hospital closed its doors

it did not accept any new delivery cases.

we experienced a loss of needs

no more gas

no more water

no more lights

just fear

### **No Gas for the Vehicles**

We did not have gas for our car

we used to stand in long queues

because the queues were very long

people were fighting with weapons

so my husband looked for people who sold gas

to take me to the hospital to work

He bought the gas for our car,

It was very expensive

the gallon cost 50, 70, 150, 200 dinars.

the country was shut down at night

we were going out only early in the morning

I was going to school by bus

then there were no buses  
I walked to school  
First, no gas  
We used buses  
then no diesel,  
the buses stopped  
I decided to walk to school  
I wanted to get out from the depressed state I was in  
we were imprisoned at homes  
Men and women the same  
We all felt depressed  
I walked for an hour to get to school  
until my foot hurt and became bruised  
I go there two or three times a week  
There was nothing to do there  
but I wanted to leave the house  
Only a few teachers went to school  
Usually those who live close to school  
because there was no gas,  
other teachers who lived far away from school could not go  
  
There was no gas  
and no transportation  
  
The country was almost closed and no one went outside  
I used to walk and never felt afraid  
because I knew that Gadhafi's militias  
were awake all night long drinking and dating  
They had parties every night  
They were doing crazy stuff  
I knew they would be sleeping all morning until 12:00  
we all knew that,  
  
So we bought our groceries and needs while they were asleep  
At 12:00 people took the palm trunks  
and burned trucks to close their streets  
and stayed inside and never left their house  
until the next early morning  
  
The highways and main roads  
were for the mercenaries and masked militias holding weapons.  
It was a real ordeal.  
We were just sitting and following the news  
  
Gaddafi and his government  
wanted to show to the world That everything was normal





We wanted to see what was going around us  
He intended to compress us  
He did not want us to listen  
At that time my mother was in the UK with my older brother I would call them  
but they told me nothing  
they were afraid to talk on the phone

### **Psychological Struggle**

In Tripoli we suffered  
psychologically  
when we heard that  
Gaddafi bombed Misrata  
we felt very depressed  
when he talked on the TV  
we felt so scared we were horrified  
we were observing and waiting  
but we did not know  
what are we waiting for?  
we did not have electricity  
no water  
no fuel  
but we said it is ok  
we tolerated that  
the kids were very scared  
they were horrified  
they could not even go to the restroom alone  
I had to go with them  
we heard the bombing  
we heard shooting  
when I remember the revolution  
I remember how scary it was for my kids

### **Female Doctors.**

The hospitals were calling for doctors to help  
there were not enough doctors in the hospitals  
My mother told me:  
go and help since there are no doctors  
people are dying,  
go and help them  
I was so depressed  
I talked to my husband  
and told him I would go to the hospital  
I would not stay home anymore  
At the beginning he said no

he told me that I was on maternity leave  
 and no one could force me to work legally  
 I told him that I did not care about my legal status  
 I wanted to go  
 because I wanted to help helpless people  
 I went to Aljalaa hospital  
 There was a shortage in doctors  
 the female doctors had better roles than the male doctors  
 we had duties  
 we scheduled a program for us  
 we changed our shifts  
 instead of coming in at 8:00 pm  
 we came in at 6:00 in the morning  
 all female doctors were working during the morning  
 they were the ones  
 who checked on the patients  
 while at night  
 when the male doctors were working  
 there were not any cases  
 because of the revolution  
 even those who died,  
 their families did not bring them  
 because the roads were not safe  
 the male doctors did not come for their night shifts,  
 so we had to work 24 hours  
 most of us were married  
 we had to tell our husbands  
 that we would stay 24 hours  
 because the male doctors did not come.

### **Inside the Hospital**

My moments in Aljalaa hospital were very bad  
 the nurses used to open the recorder very loud,  
 the songs were Gaddafi's songs  
 the nurses were dancing in the hallways  
 they did not respect the patients  
 or the doctors  
 I did not care who was with or against Gaddafi  
 I was only thinking of the patients' feelings  
 People were under tension,  
 they did not know what would happen to them  
 we had cases from Misrata  
 they lost connection with their families

they should respect those people  
instead  
they were telling them that  
armed gangs were in Misrata  
Gaddafi would kill them all

### **Gaddafi's Forces**

the days of the revolution were very hard  
if you go out  
expect Gaddafi forces  
to stop you  
to ask for your identity  
it was horror  
Once my husband was driving slowly  
he did not see the checkpoint gate  
the soldiers shot us  
I was crying we did not know  
what happened

### **Abdulfatah Yonis's Death**

Abdul Fatah Yonis is Gaddafi's former minister, and he joined and  
supported the revolution since it began in Benghazi in March 2011. He was a  
military general who led the rebels in the war against Gaddafi. Towards the end of  
the revolution, he was killed in Benghazi on July 28, 2011.

Abdulfatah Yonis; victim of the conspiracy  
the revolution did not accomplish anything  
It was stolen  
It turned from reevaluation to a conspiracy  
The conspiracy since the death of Abdulfatah Yonis  
He was considered the one who would lead the army  
They  
discovered that he was a man with leadership qualifications  
He was leading the army,  
he was one of them  
we saw him drinking tea with them,  
working with them,  
walking with them  
when they discovered he was a prominent person  
that had a strong personality  
He was able to gather and lead the Libyan army from east to west

The conspiracy happened  
he was killed  
His death was shocking and impacted us badly  
Mustafa Abduljalil was the one  
who announced this bad news on TV  
The news was shocking  
like a thunderstorm.  
It shocked all Libyan men and women  
it affected us a lot  
Because he was a symbol of the army  
and worked to gather the army  
We hoped that he would take the revolution  
to the next higher step.

### **20<sup>th</sup> of Ramadan/August**

August 20, 2011, which is equal to Ramadan 20, 1432, highlights the day  
of the Liberation of Tripoli from Gaddafi's forces. This date and event is very  
important to the Libyan women; in fact, they talked about it a lot. The rebels came  
to liberate Tripoli from the east and the west of Libya. The following poem  
focuses on the night of the 20<sup>th</sup> of Ramadan:

on 20 Ramadan  
Tripoli was Liberated  
we heard loud bombs  
it was a real war  
but people remained united  
they wanted to face Gaddafi  
but later hate spread  
and those who were united  
started killing each other  
the bombing was so strong  
we felt like the buildings would collapse  
we heard bombs  
psychologically  
we were destroyed  
when we went home  
we saw burnt cars on the sides of the streets  
we saw military uniforms everywhere  
lots of gates and checkpoints  
psychologically

I felt so bad

### **Gaddafi's Death**

It was October 20, 2011  
they found Gaddafi and killed him  
I was in my house I heard chaos in the streets  
people were very happy  
the cars were beeping  
it was huge happiness  
we thought that is the end  
we thought we would go forward  
but we were going backwards

His death was mercy for everyone  
his existence would cause a big problem  
I still remember one of my sisters  
was crying so much  
she was crying and saying  
that death should not be like this  
death is hard  
people should not kill him like this why  
channels brought his photos while he was beaten  
and abused

That moment impacted us in a very emotional way  
We got rid of him  
He was a tyrant,  
like a monster sitting on our chest  
We got rid of him  
we were watching the news channels  
The first channel that broadcasted the news was CNN,  
then the other channels broadcasted it as well  
His end was shameful and humiliating for a person like him  
He made his end by his deeds and was unjust to people  
That moment we were so happy  
we got rid of him,  
he was not there anymore  
he would not rule us again  
that was his destiny  
he made his end  
His end was similar to what he did to other people  
I did not like how they abused him  
It was a heinous end.

when he was caught

we were so happy  
we felt relieved  
we were happy that he could not enter Misrata  
we saw what people did to him  
he was humiliated and abused  
I wanted to go and see him in this state  
my husband went to Misrata and saw him  
Gaddafi was a murderer  
a terrorist  
he abused his people  
he killed his people  
he marginalized them  
he sent kids to Chad's war to be killed  
he destroyed our future  
he made our life terrible  
my father always hoped for a better future for us  
but Gaddafi did not let anyone achieve his dream

It was Thursday, I did not go to work  
I was cooking and watching the news with my brother  
then in the news they said:  
a big shot man was caught  
later they said Gaddafi died  
I was not happy  
I was not sad  
it was a strange feeling  
the strangest feeling ever  
he did a lot of bad stuff  
but when I saw him  
I did not know  
I was neither happy nor sad  
until today  
I do not understand that feeling  
my feeling was like fear  
he was not a good man  
then suddenly people beat him  
people abused him  
this was not a happy feeling  
I did not like how he was treated  
I remembered Allah  
everyone has the last day  
and his last day was not pleasant  
I do not want to talk about it anymore  
I do not want to recover this moment anymore  
this feeling is terrifying

I feel the shudders

When Gaddafi died I was coming back from the university  
I was listening to the radio  
Suddenly they announced through the radio that Gaddafi was killed  
I did want him to die

I did want him to not appear in our lives any more  
Suddenly everything turned into a joyful moment  
The cars were honking  
People were waving the independence flag  
They were clapping and celebrating  
It was a special moment  
When I saw him on the TV  
The rebels were taking pictures of him  
I said, "God is the Greatest"  
Although he had all this power  
He was a dead body  
I was happy  
I did not like how they were holding him  
I do not wanna look at his pictures again  
He was dead  
It's is like brining a dead body from many scenes  
I do not wanna see him anymore.  
Ok he is dead.  
We get rid of him  
that's the point.

That's it.

we did not like how they killed him.

Because this was not ethical for us as Muslims.

Moamer was a big deal.

They kept him for a long time abusing  
and playing with his body before they buried him.

This is not right.

Since they killed him,  
it should be ok and they should burry him immediately,

we thought that was the end of Moamer

but eventually now we have many Moamer.

### **Liberation Days**

Since I am one of the Tripoli residents

I witnessed this day

when they said today is Liberation day,

the Mosques called



“Allah is the Greatest”

then the rebels entered Tripoli  
from the west and the east  
We were so happy  
We saw them on the TV  
People were so happy  
They went outside in the streets  
Women started ululating in the yards of their houses

Ululation,

ululation everywhere in the streets  
Everyone went outside  
We were so happy  
we did not know that the revolution would be corrupted  
During that day people were very happy  
they used their guns to shoot in the sky

I was not in Libya that day  
My husband decided to slay a sheep  
Oh Allah  
I was ululating and dancing,  
although I do not know how to ululate  
but I continued dancing and singing  
My husband was with me  
We were over the moon  
I heard the news from the computer  
My husband bought a sheep and made barbeque  
and invited all his friends to eat  
they all were Libyans  
One from Ghat,  
another from Garian  
and one from Tripoli

They were all good single men  
My husband took them and they celebrated  
and brought me some meat too  
Everything went all right  
Alhamdulillah  
We felt good  
No more worries about our families  
We had hope in new Libya  
we wanted to see our country

### **Liberation Day Formal Speech**

The liberation speech appeared to be one of the most important moments  
in which the women experienced during the revolution. Six of the women talked

about this subtheme because Mustafa Abduljalil, the former supreme court judge during Gaddafi's time, and the president of the National Transition Council during the revolution, talked about women in his formal speech in the Liberation day celebration. In his speech, he said the following:

Any law that conflicts with Islamic Sharia law is suspended and one for those laws to give example is the polygamy restrictions and refrain all Libyans from paying interests to the banks and all the Libyan banks will be Islamic banks that does not deal with interests" (translated, BBC Arabic, October 23, 2011).

The women did not like how he used women and polygamy as an example on this very important day in Libyan history. the following poem describe precisely what did the women say about the liberation speech?

The Liberation day speech was not  
on the level of the revolution  
it was not on the level of the people who died  
and those whose lives were destroyed  
it was not on the same level as the suffering of the people  
people suffered from lack of electricity  
during the hot days  
it did not help us get relief  
honestly  
it was the complete opposite  
it added other loads to us  
it put women down  
when Abduljalil mentioned women and religion  
he put another tension on women  
he described men only as victims during Gaddafi's time  
I want to say that Gaddafi gave women more rights  
than they have now  
when Mustafa Abduljalil read his speech,  
he wanted to be against anything that Gaddafi used to do  
he told men to marry four wives  
women were  
the mother

who sent their child to fight against Gaddafi  
 the wife  
 who received the dead body of her husband  
 the mother  
 who sacrificed  
 women were the mother,  
 the wife,  
 the sister  
 some women sent their sons  
 and their husbands to fight  
 and their men never came back  
 some women sent their kids to help  
 and the kids never came back  
 now you tell all those women  
 that your man can marry more than three women  
 maybe he did not mean what I said  
 but what he did touched women's hearts  
 we women sacrificed a lot like men  
 we during Ramadan on the very hot days,  
 we lit the fire to cook for the family  
 we cooked for people in the war zone  
 then you come to tell me that  
 that was the worst Liberation speech a person can hear.  
 if I can write journals about MA  
 to insult him is so little  
 compared to what he did  
 he started everything and then left  
 he did not take Libya to the safe harbor  
 he said Libya was in safe hands  
 Libya was not in safe hands  
  
 Mustafa Abdulgalil, this person.  
 Although people think he is a good man  
 and he is a symbol of the revolution  
 but I do not see him like this  
 in his formal speech after the liberation of Tripoli,  
 in Benghazi in Alkeesh Square  
 I heard that the stakeholder there gave him a two-page formal speech  
 celebrating the victory of the revolution  
 What happened he read another paper  
 I realized he was one with the Muslim brotherhood  
 and was hiding his identity  
 They gave him a paper that discussed the country's new era  
 But he said something else  
 He said we would give money to the rebels (altwar)  
 and we would give them financial rewards

he made the rebels the same as the mercenaries  
He corrupted them  
he killed them for money  
He also said that men could marry four wives  
This is not the time you say such stuff  
Although at that time I was not married yet  
but I was shocked at what he said

This is ridiculous  
The man can marry up to four wives  
without the first wife's permission  
I will give you money  
and allow you to marry four wives  
what is that?  
Honestly,  
he misrepresented the revolution the time he gave money to the rebels  
By doing that,  
he was not different from Gaddafi  
Gaddafi gave money to mercenaries  
and he gave money to the rebels and made them mercenaries  
He gave them monthly income  
a lot of money then he released people from the prison  
and gave them money too

He is the one who opened that door  
Allah May not forgive him  
Until today  
Those militias are taking a very high income  
money for them is always available

He said marry four women  
he said there will be no more money interest  
Sirt and Warfalla still under Gaddafi's forces  
this was not the time to talk about this  
I hope I can meet this man  
and ask him why did you talk about marriage  
and money interest?  
women and money are these priorities?  
there are more important things to talk about  
talk about electricity  
talk about gas  
talk about our future  
not women and money  
people did not do the revolution  
to have more women  
these issues are optional  
the revolution is for social equality  
now we are silent again

we are living  
and cannot say a word  
if we try to speak  
then we kill ourselves  
like past like present

I was sitting listening carefully  
we were all waiting in front of the TV to hear about the future  
Abdulgalil started to talk

I looked and said  
young men were the ones who did the revolution  
now the elderly control us  
one of the young men should have this honor  
I felt this way because  
I objected to what he said

he was a counselor,  
the counselor of Libya  
he was a judge  
but when he read the speech  
he said

Do not shake hands with women  
now you can marry four wives what is this?  
it was shameful  
so ridiculous

he did not appreciate people who died  
I am not saying that men cannot marry four wives  
that's our religion and we understand it  
but he understands the religion in a wrong way  
instead of telling us about our future  
the accomplishments of the revolution  
what will we do to build the country?

he told men to marry four wives  
that's personal freedom and choices  
if I want to shake hands with men  
that has to do with me  
not the whole country

people never die so others marry four wives  
NATO bombed the country several times  
not for men to marry four wives

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### LIBYAN MUSLIM WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES AFTER THE REVOLUTION FROM OCTOBER 24, 2011 TO JANUARY 30, 2016

*After the revolution  
At first, we felt happy  
we had an election  
we could choose  
it was a conspiracy  
a thief left  
another thief came*

بعد الثورة  
في الاول فرحنا  
في الانتخاب  
قلنا الشعب هو الي بيختار  
كله تخطيطات خارجيه مليهاش علاقه بينا  
نحي خناب  
حطي خناب

#### **Daily Struggles of Libyan Women**

##### **Chaos Everywhere**

I am praying to Allah to help us

It is killing  
kidnapping  
not safe

Militia people are horrifying people  
we do not have a government  
we do not have a president

there is no good man  
in the correct place

everything is very expensive  
a loaf of bread is 50 cents

a thief left  
thieves came

##### **No electricity, Gas, or Income.**

The suffering starts after 2012  
I mean 2013, 2014, and 2015  
we are not living comfortably anymore  
in 2011 and 2012, everything was fine  
now living in Libya is very difficult

in 2011 and 2012, people loved each other  
and helped each other  
now they hate each other  
the revolution impacted everyone in a  
negative way

now we do not have electricity  
it is 6:00 pm  
there has not been electricity since 2:00 pm  
we need to wait from 8 to 12 hours  
we sleep and wake up with no lights  
when the electricity comes back  
even in the doom  
we act crazy  
we do not know what to do  
we iron or wash clothes  
now all Libya works with electricity generators

we do not receive our salaries  
we spend three months without a single penny  
no oil to fill our cars  
After February 17,  
chaos, chaos everywhere  
there is nothing good I can share with you

### **Tribal Discrimination**

Due to the nature of the Libyan tribal society, it becomes very common to refer to one's tribal identity in order to retain some privileges in the country.

However, if the tribe's loyalty is to Gaddafi's regime, then belong to one of these tribes creates another level of struggle. During Gaddafi's time, tribes, such as the Wershifana (قبائل ورشفانه), the Werfallah (ورفلة), the Almgarha (المقارحه), the Algddadfa (القذافيه), the Altrahna (التراهنه) and the Algohos (القحوص), which belonged to big cities in Libya, used to hold power in the country, due to their support for Gaddafi. Those tribes also supported Gaddafi by sending their men to fight with his forces during the revolution. After the revolution, despite the fact that some people in those tribes are against Gaddafi, they are still blamed for being from the tribe that supported his regime.

while my mother was sick

Militia men attacked our house  
they were looking for weapons  
because we are from Wershifana  
My tribe is pro-Gaddafi  
they love Gaddafi  
they made a lot of troubles after the revolution  
but they should not judge them for their love for him  
that's freedom  
everyone should have the freedom  
to choose without being judged

My sister was alone with my mother  
no men were in the house  
they broke the door and entered the house  
they destroyed everything they faced  
my sister told them to stop  
she did not want my mom see them  
she told them that we are orphans  
and hardly get money to repair the door  
they did not care  
when they left they gave her 30 dinars  
she did not accept it  
they did not respect the privacy of the house

violence  
aggression

when they did not find anything  
they did not apologize  
they imprisoned my brother  
but they released him when they did not find weapons  
the revolution is

miserable  
miserable  
miserable

### **“Smell of blood”**

I went to Libya in 2012  
Libya was at its best  
but the minute I entered the country  
my heart choked  
I felt depressed  
the country was full of dust  
the smell of the blood everywhere

this was not the only thing  
people were not the same



Libyans were cold-blooded  
they had adjusted to the blood and violence  
I thought when I came back  
I would find people waiting for me happily  
I was in the USA for two years  
but no one cared for me except my close family  
everyone was talking about politics  
they were still talking about Gaddafi  
they should stop talking about the past  
they should talk about the future  
they were still living in the past and were stuck there  
no one talked about the future  
they all talk about they did  
not what they will do  
that made me lose hope for Libya

### **Stories from the Hospital**

Woman from Souq Aljomaa

A woman in her 40s came to the hospital  
she was wearing an Abaya and looked like a respected person  
she was standing in the crowd in the hospital  
At least 500 people were in the hospital  
we were very busy  
I was working with a doctor; his name was Omar Ali from Aljmeel  
Aljmeel was from Azlam too  
that woman kicked the door with her foot,  
she was holding a baby in her hand  
her baby did not look very sick  
Maybe he had the flu and a fever,  
but his case did not look very serious  
she was shouting  
I am Misrati from Souq Aljomaa,  
I cannot wait in this crowd  
I am one of February 17 revolution rebels  
it was the doctor's turn to examine the patient  
he moved his chair back and said:  
I am Omar Ali from Aljameel that loves Gaddafi  
I do not have time to examine your baby  
you are not coming from heaven  
you need to wait your turn like everyone else.

Armed man in the hospital

I was the head of a group of doctors  
it was in June 2012

we were on night duty,  
a man with a young girl came to the hospital  
he came to the emergency room  
the girl had dehydration  
the hospital law did not admit children to the hospital without their mothers  
if not the mom,  
then the aunt,  
or any female company  
we examined the girl; we told the father  
that his daughter is admitted to the hospital  
and he needed to bring his wife or any woman  
to stay with his daughter  
we told him to go very quickly  
because the beds in the hospital were taken very quickly  
we would not hold the bed for his daughter  
he said that his wife was at a wedding party  
we argued with him  
we told him to bring his sister, aunt, or any female relative  
he shouted then he left  
he came back and brought other men from the streets,  
he had Kalashnikov (guns),  
he left his daughter on the bed and did not take her  
he brought the weapon and started shooting in the hospital  
he was shouting:  
today I will kill you  
you have to examine her  
people in the hospital tried to calm him down  
my brother was with me on that day  
my brother got very nervous  
the man was shouting and called me a prostitute,  
he accused me of selling myself to people in Tunisia  
he was very angry  
because I told him that his daughter would not be admitted  
he was shouting  
he was one of the Souq Aljomaa rebels  
he could have killed us all  
then later his brother came and brought the girl's mom  
and stayed with her daughter

“Long beards, short pants.”

the night before  
cars full of men with long beards  
and short pants came to the hospital  
those men said  
that if we found a woman wearing pants  
then we would kill her  
that night they entered the hospital  
while the women were sleeping  
women were wearing dresses and scarves,  
they kicked them with their feet,  
how come women were sleeping  
they told the women  
that even if you wear pants under your dress  
we will cut your legs  
because I used to wear a Niqab,  
doctors in the hospital told me that  
they would put me in the front door when those men came  
all of this happened after February 17, 2011

## Getting the Libyan Passport

One of the new moments that impacted me  
emotionally  
and physically is what happened this month (May, 2015)  
I went with my mother to get a new passport  
When you see the Libyan people, you cry for them  
The place was very crowded and messy  
People were fighting  
I heard the shooting of guns,  
the police came and nothing happened  
Some people were sick in the ambulance  
they brought them to get a picture for the new passport  
because you have to take the picture there  
They did not let them get a passport in the end  
They were sick in the ambulance  
and no one cared about them  
it was very crowded  
humanity disappears in Libya  
you do not understand how things are happening  
They help only people they know

bribes are increasing everyday  
Now to get a passport quickly you pay 1000 LD  
We do not pay bribes because it is against the religion

We do not want to get it this way

I went to the office in Tajora  
The place was bad  
Very long queues  
and the queues are not organized  
when you go inside, you see the worst

Whenever a plane flew above us,  
people looked up at it  
They wanted to leave the country  
People are so powerless  
they just wanna travel anywhere  
They all get tired of everything

Other people are coming with their young kids  
from far places  
One woman told me  
that her kids did not go to school for a week  
Even the baby has to come and take a picture

I went for two days and got sick  
Physically sick  
All my body hurt  
I spent my day in bed, I could not move  
Almost five hours of standing for nothing  
My mother is an old woman  
This event impacted me negatively  
I felt the country is at her end stage

La ilah illa Allah. (No God but Allah)  
I do not think the country will be any better  
I saw the manager leaving his place  
People were shouting and fighting  
We asked about the manager  
We wanted to talk to him  
He ran away when he heard people shouting  
There were only three officers  
who write your data,  
check the accuracy,  
do a fingerprint  
take the picture  
Only three officers and more than 100 people  
were waiting outside  
That's ignorance  
we told them to hire more officers

### **Getting Money from the Bank**

When we go to the bank  
    we wait in long lines  
        around 80 people in one line  
            and only one officer works  
The other officers are drinking  
        coffee and tea  
            moving around carelessly  
I feel like I wanna leave the country  
    and never come back.

### **Kidnapping**

last year in 2014  
a man was kidnapped in front of me  
I was with my husband  
two cars in front of us  
they stopped another car  
they dragged the man and  
forced him to leave his car  
they had weapons  
we could not help the man  
they had weapons  
all of them had weapons  
  
another story  
my husband was going to work in Ain Zara  
it was Friday  
a car full of rebels stopped him  
they closed the road  
they asked him to get out of the car  
they wanted to steal the car  
but suddenly,  
another fancy car came  
they saw that car  
they left my husband  
and followed the other car  
my husband ran away  
he was horrified  
he drove very fast

## **Destruction of the Country**

### **Tripoli International Airport Attack**

We cannot forget the destruction of the airport day

honestly,  
we will not forget it  
Whatever they say  
whatever excuses they have are nonsense  
I do not accept any excuse  
from the people who burnt the airport  
they come to the country's associations  
and burn them  
and destroy them  
under the name of the revolution  
  
they say we will save Tripoli, you are not saving Tripoli  
they are destroying Tripoli  
What is the difference between them and Hafter  
He is destroying Benghazi  
and they are destroying Tripoli.

### **Althulatha Mall**

Tuesday Market, known as Souq Althultha, was considered the biggest shopping mall in the heart of Tripoli. On Monday, January 19, 2015, a huge fire broke out in the complex, and it burnt all the stores inside. According to Yousif Alharash, a member of civil defense in Tripoli, a short circuit in one of the restaurants inside the mall caused the fire to spread throughout the entire mall. This incident affected Farah, one of the women. Her experience is captured in poetic form below:

we are very sorry for what is happening  
in the country everywhere  
Every time  
we see only destruction  
Althulatha Market looks so bad  
Once, I passed from there with my mother  
my state became miserable

I said to my mom  
Look at the Market  
Look how they burnt it  
What do we have here in Libya  
we do not have malls  
We have nothing  
We were waiting for the revolution to build the country  
and get more malls

### **Bombing the Mosques**

sometimes things happen at night  
but when morning comes everything goes back to normal  
Like Alghazala<sup>2</sup> statue's theft  
They stole it at night  
and in the morning people did not find it

Now they started bombing the Mosques  
They bombed a room in the Mosque  
because people gathered there and read the Quran and the Hadith  
They said this is wrong Haram  
You do not build a room for reading the Quran and the Hadith  
This Mosque is very beautiful

now look at it  
They destroyed it

those people are the extremes  
They say that halqat althedikar (reading Q and H) is wrong  
They do not believe in that  
If you wanna read the Quran  
read it anywhere not in a particular room

Gaddafi imprisoned those extremes in the past  
But those extremes are following  
everyone and everyplace  
Now more killing is happening in Tripoli.  
They kidnapped a lot of people  
They oppressed a lot of people too

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<sup>2</sup> Alghazala statue is an ancient statue in Tripoli that was built during the Italian colony located in the middle of downtown Tripoli. The statue displays a naked woman with a deer. Alghazala is part of the history of Tripoli. The naked woman refers to Tripoli, as it was called the bride of the Mediterranean Sea.

## **Education**

### **Weapons at Schools**

We suffer from the weapons  
    the weapons enter schools  
        and sometimes we hear shooting  
Many times students come with their weapons  
    those boys are young teenagers  
        it is very common for them to argue inside the class  
They get angry quickly  
    then they fight each other  
        now the weapons are present  
            you can imagine what may happen  
Every time they fight they use their weapons  
                Every time this happens  
we call security to come and imprison them  
    The security guards check the students before they get to school  
                                and if they find any weapons  
they take them from the students and throw the student in the car trunk  
                                and take him somewhere  
Sometimes if the student is well connected,  
    his family can get him out of prison  
but if he is not  
    then he will stay in an unknown prison forever  
It is sad but we have to talk to the security about the student  
                                if he carries a weapon  
if we do not tell on him he will kill another student  
He brought the weapon with the intention of killing  
    Those militias will take him away  
        This student will be punished  
He is a poor student  
At the end he was  
angry,  
ignorant,  
and owned a weapon  
    it depends on his family connection to release him

### **Examination Day**

I told the students you cannot take Grammar 3  
                unless you study Grammar 2  
it needs to be in the order of grammar 1, 2, 3, and 4  
    Then you go, for example, to Grammar and Syntax  
because the students did not like the timetable  
        They would skip Grammar 4 and would go to Grammar and Syntax



Which was against the rules and regulations of the school  
I was the head of the studying and examination board

I made an announcement:

Any students who did not study Grammar 4  
And went to Grammar and Syntax  
Won't be allowed to do that exam

The students ignored that  
They thought it was a joke  
About 120 students that day  
I did not allow them to go and take the exam  
They were shouting from the stairs inside the building  
They were shouting:

You are like Gaddafi  
You should not be here  
OMG we did the revolution  
We can get our fair treatment and This is unfair  
You are a dictator

They call me names  
like They called me one of his [Gaddafi's) son's names

I told them: OK listen

you say whatever you wanna say  
Do whatever you wanna do

For me this is right

These are the rules and regulations  
You are the one who is wrong  
So the security men

At the end of the day took me out of the building  
They went with me to my car  
Every time I would look in the mirror  
in case one of the students would follow me

### **Lack of Campus Facilities**

We went to the president of the university  
We were complaining  
that we did not have electricity in classrooms  
After the revolution  
They cut the electricity seven hours a day  
These times were during the day  
When we had exams  
Or when we had studying  
We told him we wanted a generator  
Every time we asked he told us yes,

Yes, we will bring the generator  
Yes, we will secure the campus of the university  
Yes, we will fix the windows  
Yes, we will do this but nothing happened  
I got tired of the situation  
I was not interested anymore  
I was compassionate after the death of Gaddafi  
After the freedom of Libya

### **Marriage Experience**

Marriage protocol is the same  
It did not change after the revolution  
But weddings had revolution spurts  
I immediately got married after Liberation day  
Many people did come  
This was a very important day for me  
after the revolution  
People told me that the revolution liberated me too  
It was a happy event among many happy events  
The events were very emotional  
In the wedding all the songs were the revolution songs  
My friends were singing in the wedding hall

### **The Concept of Freedom**

The phrase, "Libya is free," was frequently mentioned in the women's narratives; therefore, this subtheme explores the meaning of freedom, as explained by the women.

After the revolution  
if you talked to anyone they would say  
Libya is free  
Everyone said that in the workplace  
There were no new rulers  
and no one followed the previous rules  
Everyone ruled him/herself  
It was getting worse every time

Freedom is good if understood correctly  
but people here  
do not know what to do with freedom  
some people perceive

the wrong behavior as freedom  
the mistakes as freedom  
freedom requires you to respect others  
not doing what you like disrespectfully  
Freedom has limits  
because of the freedom  
the country collapsed  
now everyone says Libya is free

freedom in Libya has different interpretations  
the Libyans do not understand what it really means

Freedom in Libya now is

corruption  
ignorance  
impoliteness

for example, when you drive in the streets  
no one respects the traffic lights  
if you talk to someone they will tell you Libya is free  
they will kill you and say Libya is free  
when a girl wears something inappropriate  
she says Libya is free  
they do not understand that  
we can have freedom through the law  
through the country's institutions  
through construction, not destruction  
freedom should be bound by law  
Freedom now is act the way you like  
no law stops you

### **They Stole our Dreams**

Our dreams have been stolen  
look at the airport's road, its compounds, and its building.  
Nothing is finished.  
After the revolution all the construction stopped  
They stole the country's money  
All our money is stolen.

Oh sorry  
even those who were outside of Libya  
they call themselves opponents of Gaddafi  
They came and stole the money

The revolution shows that  
those people and the others do not like the country  
They do not feel the country's pain  
Only the regular citizens love the country  
And they sit down powerless crying about it  
The country is shut down  
since the revolution until today

### **Gaddafi's House**

After the revolution I went to Gaddafi's house  
I saw how he lived  
and how we lived

when entered I was amazed  
so many doors  
so many gates  
long streets  
tall walls  
walls  
walls  
something horrific

we passed the first huge wall  
then the second  
then the third  
then we entered the road  
that took you to his house

I entered the house  
inside Gaddafi's house  
it was very crowded  
people were coming to see  
I cannot describe what I saw  
I remember how people sold stuff in front of the house  
how they urinated there  
how they threw their garbage there  
they made the palace a big garbage can  
they made it a public restroom  
they were very angry  
this was how they expressed their anger

I could not tolerate the smell  
I could not tolerate the scene  
I was thinking how did he live inside those walls  
in a palace like paradise

and we lived in poverty  
he took our money  
our oil  
we do not have houses to live in  
he lived a luxurious life  
he lived in a very big palace  
we live in small houses  
I felt sorry for Libya and the Libyan people  
I cannot describe my feelings  
I felt very bad  
when you enter the house  
you enter a dream  
something amazing beyond imagination

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### UNPACKING LIBYAN MUSLIM WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES

As we write about lives, we bring the world of others into our texts. We create differences, oppositions, and presences which allows us to maintain the illusion that we have captured 'real' experiences of 'real' people. In fact, we create the persons we write about, just as they create themselves when they engage in storytelling practices (Denzin, 2014, p. 6).

This poetic ethnographic study was designed to explore and understand Libyan Muslim women's experiences. The poetic ethnography "rel[ied] on the subjective verbal and written expressions of meanings given by the individuals being studied, these expressions being windows into the inner life of the person" (Denzin, 2014, p. 2). As I mentioned in the previous chapters, the lived experiences of Libyan Muslim women were absent from the world of academia (Pargeter, 2005), and their experiences were underestimated by the patriarchy and tribal nature of Libyan society. For this reason, I could not find any definition for Libyan feminism in the literature; thus, I felt as if the voices of Libyan women were clearly unrecognized. By doing this study, I aim to provide Libyan women with tools to pass their silence and present a unique experience about their daily lives as early as 1940s and as soon as 2016.

#### **Overarching Themes in the Women's Poetry**

In previous chapters, I presented the narratives of the Libyan Muslim women. These narratives were written in poetic form after the women's words were translated from Arabic. This chapter is "an attempt to reconstruct a more holistic understanding" of the themes that emerged from the women's narratives (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015, p. 188). As such, I discuss the answers to the

research questions that encompass the women's past and present experiences. I also connect the women's narratives to the literature about Libyan women, Islamic feminism, the history of Libya, and my position as a Libyan Muslim woman.

Q1. What are the lived experiences of Libyan Muslim women before, during, and after the February 17th revolution?

### **The Colony**

Throughout history, different countries colonized Libya, and this impacted the lives of many Libyans. As the women recalled their past and present stories, the women made reference to "the colony." Based on the women's narratives, it became apparent that the colony's impact was different from era to another. For example, Aysha talked about the British colony in her first poem, which, for me, was a big surprise, as I did not know that there had once been a British colony in Libya. Aysha mentioned that at one time, there had been a British soldier who was drunk and tried to enter their house through their window. This British soldier attempted to rape one of the women in the house. Aysha explained that it was more common for British soldiers to attempt to rape women at one point in time, but it was not as common when Libya became an Italian colony. In her poem, Aysha mentioned something very significant about women's lives. She stated that women were not allowed to talk to men or open the door to their houses if someone knocked on their door. Aysha's statement highlights the very culturally conservative (Elbelazi, 2015) nature of the Libyan people during that time. It also

highlights the fact that women were kept inside and did not have prominent roles outside of their houses.

Other women, Fatima and Bahiga, mentioned that the Italian colony impacted their educational system. Based on the poems, the Arabic language was marginalized, and the Italian language was only required in schools. This statement echoes Adham's (2012) and Bugaighis' (2011) statement about the lack of Arabic language teaching in schools. I believe the prohibition of the Arabic language in schools in an Arabic country was a form of oppression imposed upon others by the Italian colony. Due to this imposition, very few Libyans were able to hold good jobs, and the majority of the people were left illiterate and ignorant, causing many to work as farmers for the Italians.

The colony also impacted the dress code for women. Although the most noticeable dress in Libyan society was the al Farashia, the data reported that at some point in the women's lives, they started wearing short skirts, and they went out without covering their hair or face. Wearing short dresses and uncovering their hair were very common among Italians and British in Libya more than the Libyan women. During the time of the colony and the very first years of King Idris, Libyan women were not allowed to go outside. These findings assert Adham's observation about the Libyan society. Adham (2012) pointed out that when she visited Libya in the 1950s, she found that the country had been Westernized, and only men walked the streets. The very few women Adham (2012) saw wore a white Farashia. However, during the 1960s, Libyan women started to go outside more frequently.



After the king's rule, few women considered Gaddafi's regime as another form of the colony. Farah, for example, mentioned several times that "Gaddafi was like a phlegm on our heart . . . he was sitting on our heads." The women considered Gaddafi as a colony because he restricted their freedom and did not allow them to live in the way they liked.

All women agreed that after the revolution, the country was under an unknown colony, which resulted in a poor and unstable government. They believed that this hidden colony came to steal what Gaddafi had left. Further, the findings of the study reported that the king's era was the best era for women, as during this era, they were living stable simple life. Paradoxically, women seemed to have a better status during the colony and the King's era because their connections were very limited to the outside world. Their world was restricted to working in the house and to caring for their children. The colony did not have direct contact with the women, as the women were kept at home.

### **Women's Daily Lives from the 1940s to 2016**

Based on their poems, the women's experiences (Aysha, Bahiga, and Fatima) during the era of the 1940s to the 1960s was considerably simple, as the nature of their lives throughout such a time was not very demanding. Two of the women were housewives, and only one of them was able to continue her education. This woman was considerably younger than the other two women. The three women indicated that when they were young, they were allowed to play outside of their houses without feeling afraid. Although this time period occurred during the time of the Italian colony and the beginning of the King's era, all the

women stressed the safety of the streets during daytime. Two of them talked about going to the park and having fun.

The poems also show that women remained at home; there, they cleaned, cooked, and took care of their children. The women, Aysha, Bahiga, and Fatima, did not reflect negatively on these responsibilities. Instead, one of the women, Fatima, claimed that this simple life carried lots of great memories. As women, they did not feel as if they were oppressed by their male siblings or by society. The women accepted their lives and did not complain. They thought that staying home and not being out in the public was a feature of a conservative, respectful family at that time.

From the 1970s until the revolution, the data shows that the women lived depressed lives during Gaddafi's regime. The women's depressive state was evident as they started talking about the 42 years of Gaddafi. They expressed that Gaddafi did not offer any privileges to them. They were very marginalized, oppressed, and became more silent than before. For example, Farah claimed that if any women tried to succeed, then Gaddafi's forces took her down. They believed that Gaddafi was surrounded by women because he wanted to show the world that he respected women's rights; however, the truth was that he was surrounded by prostitutes who followed him on all of his travels.

Zainab indicated that women thought they lived in safety, but they did not. As women, they were always afraid that Gaddafi's forces would take them to him. Farah commented that "everyone kn[ew] what he was doing to women," referring to the claim that Gaddafi would send his forces to collect and rape the women he

liked (Zainab, April 12, 2015). Gaddafi's rape crimes were extensively discussed in the media after the revolution when a French journalist, Annick Cojean, penned a book<sup>3</sup> about the experiences of a schoolgirl who had been kidnapped and raped by Gaddafi. Moreover, Libyan authorities found a fully equipped gynecological unit under the university halls where women were kidnapped and checked for Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) before being sexually abused by Gaddafi (Porter, 2014). Therefore, during Gaddafi's regime, women had very little freedom to move around and choose the jobs they liked. They always lived in fear of being Gaddafi's next victims.

The women described their lives as "boring", a "tragedy", and "depressing", which explains their discouraging psychological state. They suffered from a lack of different food in the 1980s because the country was under siege. Rasha stated that they "did not know about the different kinds of fruit in the world ...[, they] did not know about chocolate or cookies ...[, and they] had to buy one type of local food" (Interview 1, June 8, 2015). Although Libya is considered one of the richest countries in the world, Libyan people have lived in poverty and have experienced a shortage of many resources.

It was only in the 2000s during the Iraq War when Gaddafi realized that he had to be less demanding on people's lives, so he allowed a few students to travel abroad so that they could continue their education. Nevertheless, the women implied that they could not gain equal opportunities when applying for jobs. Bushra, for example, claimed that her father had to use his connections to help her

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<sup>3</sup> *Gaddafi's Harem: The story of a young woman and the abuses of power in Libya*

get the job she wanted because when she tried to apply without connections, her application was overlooked, despite her job qualifications.

Compared to those women living in urban areas, in rural areas, the women's experiences were quite different. In the 1970s, women lived in rural areas, and they were very behind in education. Families lived in tents, and they did not have bathrooms or tap water. They carried water over donkeys, and they brought water to the house. In rural areas, women worked more than men, as they worked both inside and outside the home. Women did all the same jobs that men did, such as farming, shepherding sheep, and carrying water over donkeys. They also made wool blankets, and they collected olives. Bahiga, who visited some of the rural areas, was very surprised by the women's lifestyle, because women in urban areas were more developed and worked as teachers and medical doctors, not as farmers and sheep herders. Farah also explained that when she visited women in rural areas after the revolution, she always felt as if they had been "marginalized."

The women's experiences in rural areas do not seem very different from the 1970s. After the revolution, rural women seemed very uneducated, and they either worked at home or on the farm. Farah stated that she could not carry on conversations with the women because they were not aware of what was going on outside of their houses or farms. She also indicated that women in those areas had to cover their faces when they left their house. Farah said that when the women got married, their husband forced them to cover their face so that other men did not see their wife's face.

During the revolution, Libyan women faced a different kind of struggle. First, they thought that the revolution was the best event to have happened in 42 years. They described it as “positive” and “good”. Later, the data showed that the women changed their opinions about the revolution and considered it a “conspiracy” against the Libyan people. The Libyan people’s lives became more complex, as their country began lacking many facilities. The women supported the rebels, and they often assisted the rebels on the front lines in the war zone. However, women were barely mentioned in the media. While men were in the war zone, women stayed at home to take care of the family while attempting to make ends meet. The families suffered from a lack of electricity for 12 to 18 hours a day, and they suffered from a lack of gas and water, too. They had to cook on coals during the very hot days of summer, and they had to wait for two days to get their cars filled with gas. Finally, they lived in constant fear of being raped.

The women also suffered from a variety of traumatic experiences during the revolution. Rimas, for example, stated that she was afraid to go to the restroom and take a shower because she feared that the house would collapse due to the NATO bombing. Rana also indicated that whenever she recalls the revolution, she remembers how her kids cried at night and how she had to go with them to the restroom because they were afraid.

After the revolution, the women’s psychological state became even more depressed. They felt as if they went through all the struggles during the revolution for nothing. Over five years, the country did not develop. Instead, there was destruction at the country’s vital institutions, and this negatively impacted the

women's lives. The women claimed that presently, their homes still lack electricity. Sometimes they spend two days without electricity, and when it turns on, the women rush to complete their responsibilities, like washing clothes, ironing, or cooking.

When I talked to the women, they all were very angry about the lack of electricity because they could not do any housework. The women indicated that they could not even get a good night's rest because of how warm it was in their houses. A lack of electricity made the women feel very pessimistic, and they wanted to leave the country in order to find a better life.

**Women's status.** Twelve women talked about how their status has changed since the revolution. Some women believed that there were no changes to the status of women after the revolution, and others believed there were a few changes. Aysha and Rana, for example, thought that after the revolution, they have more freedom to speak and criticize than before. However, Bushra and Rimas believed that this perceived freedom of speech is only in social media, because women cannot actively and visibly engage in society's decisions.

Rimas stated that if someone attacked a particular tribe, she would most likely be kidnapped or killed. Bahiga and Rana mentioned that they cannot drive at night, nor can they go outside for a long time, as they feel as if they will be kidnapped or mistakenly killed. Bushra, Zainab, and Farah explained that women after the revolution are marginalized, and they are lacking many rights, like the right to go to a university safely. Farah pointed out that in cities under the control

of ISIS, such as Sirt and Derna, women have been taken out from their jobs, and they have been constantly abused.

After the revolution, Farah and Fatima indicated that Libyan women, who held positions in Parliament, did not represent the majority of Libyan women. They believed that those women in Parliament are not speaking on behalf of the women and they held these positions to entertain some privileges such as higher salary and diplomatic state. On the other hand, Rasha believed that no changes have occurred after the revolution. Wasan and Sania claimed that the status of women is the same, while Yasmeen expressed that the status of women has not changed because, from the start, the revolution was not meant to give women any rights.

**Understanding freedom.** After the revolution, people considered Libya a free country, and many Libyans believed that they could do whatever they wanted. Based on the data, the concept of freedom has different interpretations; these interpretations have negative connotations. First, some people believe that having freedom means behaving in any way they wish. In fact, Rana stated that in Libya, “everyone rules himself” (Interview 2, December 5, 2015). Second, for other individuals, freedom means having the right to disrespect others. Yasmeen explained, though, that “freedom has [its] limits . . . [B]ecause of the freedom [,] the country will collapse” (Interview 2, September 20, 2015). Finally, others believe that freedom leads to corruption, ignorance, and impoliteness. For example, Yasmeen mentioned that people in Libya do not stop at traffic lights anymore, indicating that these people are not only impolite, but that they do not

respect authority. Farah also mentioned that instead of doing their job, officers in banks just sit and drink their coffee; they are “lazy people” who misperceive the concept of freedom. Since there is no one to penalize the officers, they do not work.

Wasan described freedom as, for some, having the right to murder others. She also argued that girls wrongly understand freedom, for they perceive freedom as having the right to dress in a way that ignores the teaching of Islam. The women do not like how many in Libya perceive freedom, because these people’s perceptions have made them feel unsafe. The country’s government has not yet drafted constitutions, and until they do, Libyan citizens will regulate and manage their own lives, leaving many women to continue living in fear.

Tracing women’s lives since 1940s reflects that women had better status during King’s rule despite they were not socially active in the society. During Gaddafi’s era, the women realized their invisibility, but they could not do anything to improve their status. The political system marginalized and terrified the women, and the system helped devalue their individual personalities.

### **Women and Marriage**

When reflecting upon the period between the 1950s to the 1990s, the women reported feeling very happy and satisfied with their wedding experiences. In the past, weddings lasted for seven days. It was a huge occasion where all women in the neighborhood, along with family relatives, would gather and celebrate the marriage of a woman. However, from the 1940s to the 1960s, women were not asked for their opinions when they were engaged. Marriage was



a family decision, or, more accurately, was a man's decision. The future bride could not share her opinion about her future husband. Moreover, it was considered a shame if the woman said what she thought about her marriage.

The marriage protocol has changed since the 1970s. As women started becoming more educated, started gaining more Islamic awareness, and started going outside, they began to have more opportunities to choose their husbands. People soon realized that not asking the woman to choose her husband was against Islamic rules; therefore, they allowed women to see and talk to their potential husband before marriage. Nevertheless, couples still married friends of their families. In fact, all women in this study indicated that they knew their husbands through their families or friends. The women also felt that knowing their potential husbands before marriage was good because it helped to avoid a holistic investigation of their future groom by their families.

While weddings in the past were more like a large festival, by the 2000s, many families cut down the seven-day celebration to one or two days, depending on the family's financial status. Many couples realized that spending their money on a honeymoon was a better investment, compared to spending their money on a seven-day wedding celebration. However, data from this study did reveal that a one or two-day wedding celebration could cost more than a seven-day wedding celebration, especially when considering the number of guests who were invited. In the past, families would invite around 20 guests to attend their wedding. Today, families invite around 100 people. In the past, all weddings were celebrated at

home or in the future bride or groom's neighborhood, whereas today, wedding celebrations now take place in wedding halls in order to accommodate all guests.

When considering a husband, all women explained that they looked for a guy who prayed, who was educated, and who was respected. None of the women made any reference to the financial status of the groom. Sania told me that when she was told about her future husband, she asked one question: "[D]oes he pray?" (Interview 1, April 8, 2015). Sania believed that if her future husband prayed, then this meant that he was close to Allah and that he would be a good man. Wasan, Bushra, Yasmeen, and Farah mentioned the same concern, as they, too, asked their families if their future groom prayed. Overall, data revealed that the Libyan women I interviewed were very connected to their religion and that they were very proud of it. When I told them that praying could not be the only criteria for selecting their future husband, they all agreed, yet they all agreed that having a future husband who prayed was something they desired.

### **Women and Religion**

In the 1940s, religion did not seem to have a noticeable impact on the women's lives. Based on the women's stories, there was no Islamic awareness; they were just Muslims by name. The country became Westernized (Adham, 2012), thanks to the Italian and the British colonies, and this westernization affected the ways in which women dressed. Women once wore short skirts and perfume in public, which today, is against Islamic rules. The women were also imprisoned in their houses, and they only started to go outside after the independence. They were not asked for their opinions when getting engaged, nor

did they receive any inheritance if their male sibling(s) died. Instead, all money went to other males in the family.

With a lack of religious education, the women suffered on many levels. Islam, as I argued in previous chapters, was never meant to oppress women; instead, women could have more freedom and rights if Islam was understood correctly. I believe the absence of religious awareness was due to the Italian and British colony since they did not allow Libyans to practice their religion freely. The colony banned the Arabic language, which was the language of the *Quran*, and the long absence of the Arabic language delayed the understanding of the religion since most books about Islam were written in Arabic.

By the beginning of the 1970s, Islam was revived in the country, thanks to the media. Television stations began airing programs to help educate people about their religion. Also, people who went to do Umra came back to the country with lots of resources and information about Islam. During this period, women also began to wear long coats to cover their legs, and they began to wear small scarves to cover their hair. Veiling did not restrict women from work or study. However, the standards for veiling changed when Gaddafi started to fight the religion and the religious people.

In one of his speeches, Gaddafi claimed that women should not cover their hair because our mother, Eve (Hawaa), did not cover her hair and her body. In Tunisia, Gaddafi (1988) stated that in the era of liberation, all people should be

equal, and women should not wear a hijab. Gaddafi's statement<sup>4</sup> reflected what Zainab claimed in her interview: "Gaddafi had never liked [the] hijab."

Zainab indicated that her religious freedom had been very restricted because Gaddafi fought women who covered their faces. In her interview, Zainab also recounted a very important story that had occurred in the past. While Gaddafi was walking in the street, he stopped a veiled woman who covered her face. Gaddafi did not hesitate to remove the women's khimar (facial cover) in front of everyone in the street. This action violated the woman's personal freedom and personal space. After the incident in the market, many women were afraid to cover their faces in public. Zainab also mentioned that her cousins were imprisoned because they were educating people about Islam. In an attempt to also prevent others from learning about Islam, Gaddafi filtered shows that even taught the religion. However, all of this siege did not prevent women from asking and learning more about Islam.

After the revolution, new Islamist groups landed in the country. During Gaddafi's time, Libya was known as one of the moderate countries, as it is both conservative and liberal. However, after the revolution, many extremists and radical Islamists appeared to try to control people's religious freedom. While Gaddafi did not allow people to practice their religion freely, extremists forced people to practice religion. Both extremists and radical Islamists fought under the flag of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). They created two university

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<sup>4</sup> Alhijab is a work of devil and Hawaa was without clothes ... and the strong woman could wear short clothes without covering her hair but at the same time this woman should be ironed with weapons and professional training to protect herself, that's Alhijab. It is not the one that is used to cover the weak girls. (FreeeeeLibyan, 2011).

campuses—one for men and one for women. They forced women to cover their faces and to wear long black gowns. They also forced men to grow beards and to attend all prayers in the mosques. They killed many innocent people and claimed that those people were not worshiping God (Kufar). Currently, Libyan women are very scared to go outside and wear what they prefer because they might become a victim of ISIS.

### **Education**

Education was one of the repetitive themes that appeared in all of the narratives and included diverse experiences throughout the women's personal histories. Before the independence, the majority of Libyan people were illiterate because they could not afford schooling and because schools were moderated by the colony, who only allowed wealthy citizens to gain education. There were very few Libyan schools (Adham, 2014). The Libyan women I interviewed were among the very few who had gained education in the Libyan schools, but they did not continue their education, as the highest level of education was sixth grade. Based on the women's narratives, the educational system in Libya throughout the 1950s and 1960s was very strict; it focused on teaching students subjects and manners. In the past, teachers were very well-respected by students, compared to today. Moreover, teachers did not only teach subjects, like math and reading, they taught politeness and respect. One of the examples was mentioned by Aysha. She stated:

when the teacher entered the class we all stood  
when we left the class we did not turn our backs to the teacher  
we left backward our face facing the teacher

These few lines from Aysha's narrative offer one example of how the students behaved with their teachers. Fatima also described teachers as "perfect" (Interview 1, August 17, 2015). According to Adham (2012), at the beginning of the independence, Libyan schools were moderated by Iraqi and Egyptian educators, who were very well-respected. Fatima mentioned that in school, they took many courses, some of which were cooking and sewing. The schools in the past were segregated, and girls took different courses from boys.

Fatima, Aysha, and Bahiga also claimed that they used to have free lunches. The food served at school was enough for them to survive on throughout the day. Meals were typically a tuna sandwich, a Halava sandwich, and dates. All of this food was served with milk.

Unlike education in the old past, education during Gaddafi's time was also strict, but in different way. When Gaddafi ruled Libya, he started to impose his ideologies on all of the country's institutions, including the educational institutions. In the coming section, I explore the nature of the educational system during Gadhafi's time.

**Credit transfer.** The first decision Gaddafi made was to apply the transfer system in schools. In this system, students could transfer two course credits each year if they failed a grade. Fatima described the education during Gaddafi's regime as a system full of "cheating" because the students knew they would still move on to the next grade if they failed.

**Military system.** During the years of the 1980s, Gaddafi changed the regular school system to a military system, which affected both men and women.

This change caused many families to take their daughters from schools and keep them home. The families were silenced by the dictatorship of Gaddafi, and they were not able to complain or find another alternative for their daughters. The Libyan women were the victims of Gaddafi's dictatorship and their family's silence. Based on the data, the military teachers had more power and authority in schools than the school principal. The principal's job was to only supervise teachers and to take attendance.

The military system required students to wear a military uniform. They were also required to take a military course, to learn about different kinds of weapons, and to attend protests and other various events. Data revealed that when Gaddafi came to power, he changed the educational system; Gaddafi attempted to brainwash the students and attempted to make them systematically ignorant. Therefore, the most vital institutions in the country were influenced by his political violent ideology.

While in the military system, Rasha indicated that when female students came late to school, the military teachers forced them to sit on their knees, which caused the female students to miss classes for the rest of the day. Female students who were late to class were also assigned to clean the whole school (Gaddafi, 1976) or to serve as school gate guard. I remember when I was in high school, we had to clean the whole school if we were late; while we cleaned, other students studied. This kind of punishment encouraged lazy students to come late to school. By doing this, these students were excused from classes. Teachers could not change the penalties for being late to school. Punishment was intended to

humiliate the young students; it was an attempt to physically and psychologically abuse students, a form of punishment favored by Gaddafi.

**Dead bodies on campus.** In 1976, one of Gaddafi's most violent, inhuman decisions was when he ordered his Revolutionary Committee to hang a number of students in public at the university campus. Gaddafi and his forces continued to arrest students of both genders in Tripoli and Benghazi and abused them. These horrifying acts were repeated every year on April 7<sup>th</sup>. Gaddafi forced all students to attend the killings. He required all schools to send their young students to witness the terrifying events.

The women indicated that while in college, they lacked productivity due to the fear of being killed on April 7<sup>th</sup>. Further, the women also indicated that they viewed their college as a place of terrorism. They claimed that many of their friends could not continue their college education because of the terrifying college events. This data asserted that the college students had a very depressing college life. Rasha stated:

everything was not allowed  
only go  
take classes  
then go home  
that was life in college  
Revolutionary Committees  
were controlling everything  
we were afraid of doing anything  
we were horrified

**No English in Libyan schools.** In 1986, Gaddafi prohibited the teaching and learning of the English language, as he considered it the language of the enemy (Ghouma, 2015, 2016; Elbelazi, 2015). According to Suwaed (2011), "The



banning of English language instruction was implemented when the Arabization campaign sought to eliminate western influences, including the English language, in reaction to the American air raid and the US sanction on Libya” (p. 23). The decision number 195 in 1986 to stop teaching foreign languages was declared by Ahmed Ibrahim, one of Gaddafi’s men (Ignywa, 2009). Later this decision became a law that enforced all schools to follow that affected the education for almost 8 years (Mohsen, 2014).

The women reflected on the long absence of the teaching of English in Libyan schools during the era of Gaddafi. Zainab stated that

Gaddafi made us ignorant  
                  he prohibited the English language  
  English was a key to success  
he imprisoned us

Her words emphasize Gaddafi’s systematic plan to make the Libyan people ignorant. The English language, as stated by Zainab, is “. . . a key to success,” and Gaddafi took this key from the people’s hands and made them feel imprisoned, thanks to his ridiculous decisions and declarations. The Libyan women suffered from a lack of English proficiency on different levels. First, in college, where most of the curriculum was written in English, the students experienced a huge learning gap. Jha (2015) described this period as “a blank phase” (p. 79). Wasan indicated that in Medical College, she spent all her time translating the materials instead of reading them without translation. She stated:

I hold the dictionary in my hands and translate  
                  I did not know a single word in English  
                                  I spent the whole day just translating  
  translating,  
  translating,

translating

While tracing the women's educational experiences since Gaddafi came to power, I learned that Gaddafi aimed to destroy education in Libya with his declarations. The educational system in any developed country is a source of empowerment and enlightenment. However, in Libya, it became a place where students became humiliated and were devalued.

In the women's first years of education, Gaddafi implemented the credit transfer system. As a result of this implementation, young students did not study hard because they knew that eventually, they would pass to the next grade with a passing grade. Then in high school, Gaddafi turned schools into military camps, where students wore military uniforms and learned about fighting and wars. In those schools, students were physically and psychologically abused.

Gaddafi also banned the English language from Libyan schools in an attempt to isolate students from the outside world. After that, in the university, which is supposed to be a place for creativity and production, yearly, on April 7<sup>th</sup>, Gaddafi hung students to silence the rest of the population. On a different note, Bushra indicated that in very recent history, there was not a convenient transportation system that would take students to campus. In fact, Bushra had to take different buses from different locations to get to college. While Bushra insisted on finishing her education, Farah quit graduate school after one week of study. Farah claimed that the campus was not clean and that classrooms were very dirty. She pointed out that university professors were not cooperative, nor were

they inspiring. Farah decided to leave graduate school and did not listen to her mother when she asked her to go back to study.

**No security in Libyan schools.** Rana and Farah pointed out that students came to schools armed with different kinds of weapons, which made it very difficult for women to feel secure at their workplace. The students also perceived the revolution in a misguided way. They thought that after the revolution, they could do whatever they wanted; this included thinking that they could pass from one class to another without taking examinations. This misconception of freedom created chaos in the university. Sania stated that while trying to manage chaos at her university, she was accused of being “. . . like Gaddafi.” Sania also claimed that she asked the university Dean to help the campus with few resources such as generators of class lightings; new windows instead of the broken ones and security on campus. The dean could not help Sania, so the situation remained the same. Like Sania, Farah, Bushra, and Wasan decided to quit their jobs at the university and sought employment elsewhere. Based on the data, the chaos that erupted from the unorganized educational system was an inevitable result of a corrupted educational system based on Gaddafi’s decisions.

### **Corruption**

During the king’s era, the only corruption the women (Aysha, Bahiga, and Fatima) mentioned was the religious corruption. They indicated that there was not Islamic consciousness, and many women did not follow the teachings of Islam. Apart from religious corruption, the women did not mention any sign of corruption in the country’s institutions or systems. Instead, they praised their life

under the rule of the kingdom, and they pointed out that despite the poverty that existed in Libya, they did not feel as if they lacked in their needs.

However, after the king's era, Gaddafi's declaration created a huge amount of corruption in the country's former organizations. During his time Libya was ranked 160 among 176 countries in corruption (Sousa and Larmour, 2010). In fact, when Gaddafi first came to control, he removed the country's constitution, and he ruled the country by his own regulations. Part of these regulations, as stated in the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (2009), included the following:

1. Article 75/1973: All organization must publish newspapers and periodicals under Gaddafi's supervision.
2. Article 72/1972: ban the freedom of speech and all strikes and demonstrations.
3. Article 71/1972: ban all political parties and consider them betrayals against the country.
4. September Revolution Protection Law in September 11, 1969: this law allows authorities (Gaddafi's forces) to arrest any citizen that could revolt against or oppose Gaddafi's regime.

The above information reflects a few regulations that were meant to restrict people's freedom in their own country.

The data of the current study reported different kinds of corruption, which resulted in oppression. The first notable corruption is the corrupted educational system. Twelve women talked about their diverse experiences with the

educational system during Gaddafi's rule. The women's experiences included the banning of foreign languages, such as English and French, from Libyan schools (Jha, 2015; Mohsen, 2014; Suwaed, 2011) and the implementation of the credit transfer system. Banning the teaching of foreign languages in schools made the Libyan people feel isolated from the rest of the world. The credit transfer system also provided opportunities for lazy students to pass their classes. Gaddafi also turned regular high schools into military camps and forced students to wear military uniforms. He also had teachers provide their students with training on weapons. This change in the educational system put more of a burden on the young students. In the university, Gaddafi killed a number of college students because they opposed his regime, and he spread his Revolutionary Committee across campus to observe the students. This killing and supervision restricted the students' freedom and made their college life full of angst.

The second corruption that emerged from the data is the use of family connections to survive in Libya. This theme was included in five of the women's narratives. Aysha and Bahiga began their interview by comparing the king's time with Gaddafi's time. Both women indicated that when Gaddafi came to power, he corrupted the country by simplifying people's lives through connections. To be more specific, this meant that if a person wanted any privileges in the country, he or she had to make some good connections with authorities to facilitate privileges. Sania claimed that when she was in school, the teacher did not help her increase her grade to pass the course because her mother did not know the teacher, while her classmate whose mother was a friend with the teacher passed after she submit

a poster as a supplication to increase her grade to pass. In another incident, Sania claimed that the teachers and the students bullied her by laughing at her when she read aloud. She explained that when she was young, she could not pronounce sounds, like gh/ غ and kh/ خ. Because she was new in school, and because the teachers were not friends with her mother, Sania suffered from mistreatment. As a result of this experience, she began to hate school and chose to be a “lazy student” (Interview 1, April, 15).

Bushra and Wasan reported similar experiences. Bushra stated that she was not able to get the job she deserved because she did not have connections in the hospital where she had trained. She indicated that she had all the qualifications for the position and that the doctors told her that she was likely to get the job. However, the positions were taken by another two candidates. She stated, “[I]f my father is not a doctor [,] I will not get the job” (Interview 1, May, 20). Later, in order to get a job, Bushra decided to ask her father to use his connections so that she could become hired at another hospital.

In her interview, Wasan stated that she was only admitted to Medical College because her father’s friend worked in the registrar’s office. When she tried to apply without him, she was rejected because of the number of students admitted that year. Wasan also claimed that since that time, she has relied on her father’s friend to help get her lab results and other paperwork more quickly on campus. She stated that she was forced to contact him because she could not survive on campus if she did not have his connections.

As stated in chapter two, when coming to control, Gaddafi encouraged the tribal system and put authority in the hands of a few tribes (Gaddafi, 1976). Usually, those tribes had some privileges, but other tribes did not have some privileges at all. Therefore, people without privileges had to be connected to those that did in order to survive in Libya. This kind of corruption forced the women in this study to look for people to help them. Without their connections, they would be left behind.

The healthcare system was the third type of corruption during Gaddafi's time. Yasmeen detailed her delivery experience in one of the biggest hospitals in Libya. She claimed that when she had contractions, the doctors and the nurses did not care about her, nor did they treat her kindly. After several hours of pain, she could not deliver the baby normally, so the doctors decided that she had to have a C-section. This decision was a late decision, and the baby died after delivery. This traumatic experience made Yasmeen feel very depressed. After the surgery, instead of taking her to rest in the Care Unit, Yasmeen was put in a bed in the hospital hallway; she was then transferred to a room with other six women. Yasmeen described the room as unclean, unsterilized, and full of cockroaches. When Yasmeen's mother-in-law accompanied her to her hospital bed, she had to sleep on the floor under Yasmeen's bed. Reflecting on the clear corruption in the healthcare system, Yasmeen stated that she did not blame Gaddafi for the corruption, because what happened to her required humanity; it was not Gaddafi's decision. Yasmeen said, "[W]hen I was in pain, the doctor could have decided for

me what to do[,] not Gaddafi.” Yasmeen mentioned that although she did not like Gaddafi, she did not like how the Libyan people blamed him for every failure.

Yasmeen did not blame Gaddafi for corrupting the health system, however, this corruption was an expected outcome from a corrupted educational system. Schools are not only a place to gain knowledge; they are a place to teach respect, compassion, sharing, and caring.

After the revolution, corruption in the country continued to spread. What Gaddafi had shaped in four decades was hardly wiped out by the end of the revolution. Instead, the revolution helped form a convenient atmosphere for some people to continue on with corrupting the country. This corruption included the spread of weapons in the educational institutions, which resulted in chaos and a lack of security for teachers and students.

Another form of corruption resulted because of the absence of strict laws. In general, laws help to regulate people’s actions; they are regulations that tell people what behaviors and/or actions are prohibited. Without strict laws in Libya, some Libyans began engaging in corrupt behavior and violence. For instance, according to Imjin (2014), the smuggling of weapons became a common practice, which made Libya an unsafe territory. Soon, the majority of Libyans owned weapons, and their presence caused the women in my study to feel constantly on edge.

Besides feeling on edge due to the prevalence of weaponry, Bushra claimed that women felt even more on edge because they feared being kidnapped and raped. She stated that after the revolution, her sister quit education and left the



university because she lived miles away from the university's campus. Bushra explained that her parents were very worried about the safety of her sister, so they convinced Bushra's sister to stay at home, rather than to attend college. As a Libyan familiar with the society's culture, if a woman was raped, she would be blamed for this action. Thus, she would not be provided any form of care or support, and she would damage her family's reputation. Additionally, if a woman is raped, she will not have any chance to marry because she will be looked down upon and viewed as a disgrace by men.

Overall, the corruption that occurred after the revolution negatively affected the women. Due to the negative circumstances in the country, the women had to make difficult decisions, such as quitting school, that would help to ensure their safety.

### **Intergenerational Trajectories**

One of the strengths of the current study is that it explores the experiences of Libyan women, whose age range from 25 to 75 years old. This diverse age group provided detailed stories about life since 1940. Part of my aim for this study is to not only capture the women's contrasting experiences over time, but to see how their experiences are connected. Therefore, I relied on the use of word trajectories.

According to Scheter and Bayley (2002), a word trajectory refers to the transformation and endurance through life histories. Menard-Warwick (2005) pointed out that a trajectory "describes a path of development, often through a variety of social contexts, in which each step builds on the previous ones, though

sometimes in unpredictable ways” (p. 169). Based on the data, the women did not show any resistance to change or development throughout history. The women in the 1940s and 1950s were not able to make decisions when they got married; however, as time progressed, the women did not mind asking their daughters before getting married. They welcomed this change, which was an impossible dream during the old days.

The women explained that the new generation felt as if they had more rights, compared to the old generation. In fact, Wasan stated the following:

[I]n the past [,] during my mother’s time, the Libyan women were oppressed . . . they could not go to school or go outside the house . . . but the generation after, we had more rights. We stud[ied], work[ed] and [went] out. (Interview 1, April 16)

Bushra believed that Libyan women over time have different challenges. She claimed that her generation is more developed than her mother’s generation, and what she perceives as normal, her mother perceived as not allowed. For example, Bushra can ride a bus, but her mother cannot; in fact, it would be seen as a taboo. Nevertheless, Bushra stated that her mother did not resist change and that she wanted the best for her daughters. Furthermore, Bushra claimed that her mother has changed her thoughts over time, but when it comes to the comparison between men and women, her mother still believes that men are better than women “even if the women sacrifice herself more” (Interview 2, December 12, 2015). This contrasting belief is a result of how women have been marginalized in society. When Bushra criticized her mother for her belief about men being better

than women, she explained that instead of living in a “cycle of repeating mistakes” (Menard-Warwick, 2005, p. 176), she has built on the experiences of others to avoid doing those mistakes.

Farah’s poems also showed how her mother supported her and pushed her to continue her education. Although Farah did not respond to her mother’s request, this data provides more evidence of how women’s experiences are influencing. Yasmeen, on the other hand, indicated that despite the fact that she could not finish her education and live a luxurious life in her childhood, she wanted to provide her daughter with all that she lacked as a child. In fact, Yasmeen stated, “I want my daughter to live like a princess [,] and I want her to take all the opportunities that I could not have . . . I want her to have the biggest piece of meat” (Interview 2, December 20, 2015). Although all of these experiences can be viewed as contrasting (Menard-Warwick, 2005) and disconnected, they show that throughout generations, the women were still able to fill a gap and perceived their daughters’ lives as a continuous trajectory of their own.

### **Women and Silence**

Although the women talked very positively about their past experiences during the 1940s and through the 1960s, it was clear from their narratives that there was a vast silence in their communities. From the first poem and the very first narratives, women talked about themselves as the ones who remained home and had very limited contact with the outside world. In the British soldier poem,

Aysha claimed that women were not allowed to open the door and were kept inside.

Similarly, when Fatima talked about the woman who would go to the market to buy her family's goods, she became very happy, for she loved seeing the woman and considered her time with her one of the best moments in her life. Fatima perceived Albahlola, the woman, as her window to the world. Albahlola was the one who talked to men; she was the one who interacted with both genders while not covering her face and while not wearing a Farashia. Without Albahlola, the women never knew what was taking place outside of their homes.

Another example of silence is explored in Bahiga's and Fatima's stories of marriage. The women indicated that they were not allowed to choose their husbands until the 1970s. Before that, marriage was a family decision, and the woman had no opinion about her future husband. Bahiga stated, "I was not allowed to see [my future husband] until the wedding day . . . it was a shame to see each other before the wedding" (Interview 1, June 17, 2015). This tradition, which was applied against women's wishes, contradicts with the Islamic teachings and rules. The prophet Mohamed (PBUH) required men to ask their daughters or sisters for permission before they approved a marriage. However, in Libyan society, in the past, women were forced to marry whomever their parents chose for them. Bahiga told me that she has never liked this tradition because it was not a comfortable feeling to find herself marrying someone she saw for the first time.

During Gaddafi's time, women's silence was coming from different perspectives. First, women were silenced by their families as a kind of respect. In fact, Yasmeen mentioned that her mother always forced her to remain silent so that people did not criticize her reputation or talk badly about her. Yasmeen's father passed away, and her mother silenced her because she did not have a father to speak up for her. Yasmeen was very upset when she told me about her experience. She stated that she always wanted to express her opinion, but she was not allowed to do so. When she got married, her mother-in-law forced her to remain silent because she is a woman and her job is to obey and entertain her husband.

Yasmeen's husband was also a source of silence, as he represented the patriarchal nature of Libyan society (Pargeter, 2005). Yasmeen said that when she felt tired and could not do the housework, her husband asked her to be silent and told her not to complain because he believed that Allah created women to serve men unconditionally. The husband's claim completely contradicts the word in the *Quran* and the *Sunnah*. The Prophet (PBUH) required men to treat their wives gently and to help them with their housework, because he, himself (PBUH), was a great helper to his wives. Yasmeen continued to explain her experiences with silence and said, "[W]omen in my family tell me [that a] good woman is the one who remain[s] silent and [that] she [is the one to] obey men without any questions..." (Interview 2, December 2015). Usually, the mother is the one who silences her daughters and does not value their contributions.

Rasha explored another form of silence, and this form was through Gaddafi's government. Rasha always refused Gaddafi's political ideology, but she could not express her rejection to his ideology because she was very terrified. She stated:

Gaddafi implemented his political ideology in everything  
This change impacted us  
we rejected it inside  
but we could not speak

Gaddafi used to arrest any citizen who argued against his political ideology. Therefore, people remained silent. Rasha indicated that the government silenced both men and women because Gaddafi did not differentiate when he decided to punish people. In schools, male and female students were also silenced while in a strict military school system. Female students were forced to wear military uniforms and were forced to study different kinds of weapons; they could not reject their studies, nor could they give their opinion about their studies. This form of silence caused many families to take their daughters out of school. The principal had no authority in schools, and the parents did not feel supported.

Beginning in 1977, university students were silenced in a very brutal way. In 1977, Gaddafi hung university students on campus and forced all students to watch this collective massacre. His intention was to silence any student who opposed him or his coup. In the 1980s, Gaddafi asked his Revolutionary Committee (اللجان الثورية) to jail any student who talked about him in a negative way. In one poem, Rasha addressed this form of silence:

we were oppressed

we had no voice  
we remained silent

so we could live  
the university was a place for terrorism  
it was not a place for education  
and creativity

Rasha described the university as a terrorist zone because students lived in silence and were terrified to live a normal college life.

During the February 17, 2011 revolution, Gaddafi continued to silence the Libyan people and oppress them with his heavy artillery. He spread his spies throughout the country, and if anyone was caught supporting the revolution, then he or she would be killed. Zainab commented on this particular moment in time and stated:

when Gaddafi bombed Benghazi  
we worried about them  
but we were silent, we could not speak  
we did not trust people around  
Gaddafi put many spies  
if you said something  
Gaddafi's forces would arrest you  
cousins were no longer cousins  
friends were no longer friends  
neighbors were no longer trusted  
we lived in fear

This type of silence was scariest type since women remained silence because they lost their trust of their families and friends.

After the revolution, Libyan women indicated that they thought they gained the freedom they were fighting for. However, this was not true. Based on the women's stories, after the revolution, the rebels transformed to terrifying militias who horrify people and arrest them if they spoke against their tribes or ideologies. Therefore, the women remained silent, and they expressed this in their poem when they talked about the kidnapping and the killing in the country. Rimas

and Rasha claimed that there was no difference between “before” or “after” the revolution. In both periods, women remained silent in order to protect themselves and their families.

While listening to the interviews, I realized that while women tried to defy their silence and share their experiences, I found pauses and breaks in conversation, which carried my analysis beyond the construction of the poetry. Soon, my attention turned to the construction of silence within the poetry (Mazzei, 2004, 2003, p. 356). In other words, instead of looking only at what caused the women’s silence or the various forms of silence, I tried to understand the unspoken words throughout their interviews.

Women sometimes decided to remain silent because they felt very hopeless; it was as if all of what they said was meaningless. Such a form of silence appeared in most of the narratives. For example, when I asked the women about their lives after the revolution, they stated their opinion in very few details, yet they delivered a powerful message. In fact, Rima claimed:

In 2012  
parties,  
music,  
happiness

Similarly, Bushra said:

After the revolution,  
There is nothing to tell you about  
Chaos, chaos everywhere

Rana and Rasha claimed:

After the revolution,  
Killing,  
Kidnapping,



Not safe

Finally, Aysha and Fatima pointed out:

After the revolution,  
No electricity,  
No gas,  
No safety

The women refused to express their opinions about their lives after the revolution in more detail. Instead, they remained silent for a few minutes between each story. It was as if the women did not have any valuable information to share (Denzin, 2014). Like Mazie (2004), I believe that “silences are not always veiled, nor are they always unintentional, but they can often be deliberate or purposeful—a choosing not to speak” (p. 30). Therefore, understanding this silence and defining it was one of my goals.

In summary, based on my analysis of the different forms of silence, the data revealed two important types of silence in the women’s stories. First, the data revealed what I call “oppressive silence,” which can be interpreted as “the veiled silence” (Mazzei, 2003, pp. 356-366). This form of silence refers to silence that is the result of oppression, such as family oppression, government oppression, and school oppression. The women chose to hide their voices and to avoid any chance to speak up because they were afraid of being arrested or punished.

The other type of silence is “purposeful silence,” which refers to when people choose to remain silent because either they do not think they have something important to share (Denzin, 2014), or because they think their words will not change the world.

Both types of silence indicate that women still consider themselves as powerless and their experiences are insignificant and are not equivalent to men. In chapter nine I discuss in detailed sections how to help women overcome their silence through writing courses.

### **Women and Oppression**

Based on the poems, the women experienced diverse forms of oppression over time. However, the women interpreted their various forms of oppression differently. For example, while I consider imprisoning women at home a form of oppression, the women indicated that they felt proud of their status and explained that they have never felt as if they were missing out on something by staying home. Nevertheless, the women believed that their marriage protocol was one form of oppression. As I detailed in the previous section, silence and unquestioned obedience to the family's orders is considered oppression.

During Gaddafi's time, the women were more oppressed than ever before, but their views on oppression varied. Nine of the women considered Gaddafi's regime as the oppressor, while three of the women felt women that they had more rights during Gaddafi's time than before and after. Those women who blamed Gaddafi focused on the corrupted educational system, which did not respect their femininity and forced them to act like men without asking for their opinions. They believed that Gaddafi chose what they wore and what they did in school. Gaddafi also limited the women's religious freedom. In fact, during his time, wearing alkhimar (face cover) was a risk to the women.

The other group of women believed that oppression was imposed upon them by their families and by their male siblings. Bushra suffered at her first day at the university because she did not have an older brother who could drive her to college. She felt very oppressed and very restricted. Yasmeen also indicated that Libyan women were oppressed by their brothers, their husbands, and by the other women in their family. Yasmeen stated that to be a good Libyan woman, a woman needed to remain silent and to obey the selfish men around her.

Yasmeen was first oppressed by her brother, who controlled her life and even told her if she could “polish [her] nails or not” (Interview 1, July 12, 2015). Yasmeen’s mother was also a source of oppression because she always told her to obey her brother and to obey her husband without complaining. The mother believed that males had a better status, compared to females. Then, after Yasmeen got married, her husband continually oppressed her by marginalizing her role in the family. To him, Yasmeen was simply a maid and a mom; she cooked, cleaned, and took care of the children. Yasmeen has always remained silent, that is until the moment I interviewed her.

Now, Yasmeen wants to speak up and share her thoughts. She has requested several interviews with me, because now, she feels empowered and wants her stories known. In our last interview together, after she read her poems, at first, she remained silent. Soon, she shouted:

I should have stopped that (her brother’s control). I should have faced my fears and stopped my brother from his control. I should have fought for my education. I was an excellent student, and I love studying. He did not let me go back to school. He destroyed my life. All men I know destroyed my educational life. My brothers and my husband. They are selfish. They look at me as

weak person. And a silent person. That's all because of my mom. She gives men power over women. All women in Libya are the enemies for themselves. We always blame men, but the truth is that women are the ones who should be blamed.

My mom always asks me to remain silent because my brother is a man, and I am a woman.

My mother-in-law always asks me to remain silent because women should tolerate men's moods, not the opposite.

Women in my family told me, 'A good woman is one who remains silent and obeys men without any questions.'

The society also . . . all of them force us to be silent.

No, no more.

I do not want to remain silent. Even if I cannot change my destiny now. I will use your dissertation as a tool to speak and make my voice heard. When I read the poems, I felt so oppressed.

I do not care if people know who am I. But I care that they listen to me and read your work. They should listen to my voice because it is their daughters' voice, their wives' voice, and their sisters' voice. Women in Islam should be respected. Men should follow the Prophet's (PBUH) words and actions and not their unfair mentality.

If you turn your dissertation into a book, I will buy it and give it to my daughter to read. She needs to understand what women are going through. I want her to build a strong personality and empower herself through these stories.

I believe Yasmeen's message, which she asked for me to include in this dissertation, says it all. Libyan women realize the oppression they live in, but they remain silent towards it. None of the women mentioned that they wanted to change the status of women because the majority of Libyans believe that Gaddafi was the oppressor. The women asserted that even today, oppression continues. They did not mention any information about their families, except Yasmeen, who is still suffering.

For the other women, they felt oppressed because their dreams had been stolen and their security had been taken. They lived in fear and experienced trauma nine months after the NATO bombings. Bushra and Yasmeen mentioned

that after the revolution, they faced a new kind of oppression. Because both of them were from Wershifana, their tribe was accused for its loyalty to Gaddafi. Both women suffered from ethnic discrimination. If they, or one of their family members, were caught by the Militia, then they would most likely be arrested because of their connection to Wershifana.

Rasha, Farah, and Rana believed that not only are women oppressed in society, but men are as well. Both men and women are oppressed by the instability of the government and by the continuous marginalization, either from Gaddafi, or from the many governments that were established after the revolution. Only one woman, Sania, believed that Libyan women were not marginalized and were not oppressed. She claimed that over time, she was able to do what she liked and that she has never felt stressed about her status as a Libyan woman. All of these forms of oppression have burdened the women's lives.

### **Gender Equality**

In relation to gender equality and oppression, the data shows that in some parts of their daily lives, Libyan women see themselves as equal to men, while in other parts, they feel that men have better positions in society. For example, Rasha, Farah, and Rana always talked about gender equality and how they did not see that men had more opportunities than women. They believed that both genders were oppressed and silenced. Gaddafi also did not differentiate between men and women in schools; they both were exposed to the same military training.

For Bushra and Yasmeen, the situation is different. Their mothers have always respected their brothers because they thought that men were better than

women. Bushra's sister had to stop her college education because she was a woman, while her brother continued his education. Bushra's sister was forced to discontinue her education because her family was afraid that she would be kidnapped and/or raped.

Seven of the women, Fatima, Zainab, Farah, Wasan, Sania, Rimas, Rana, and Rash, have never been exposed to any form of gender inequality. These women mentioned that they know their rights in the religion and that they are acting within those rights. Two of the women, Aysha and Bahiga, made one reference to gender inequality when they talked about marriage proposals. Generally, the data shows that Libyan women and men have similar opportunities when attempting to get an education, when applying for a job, and when seeking equal pay.

The role of the father was not completely absent in the data. In fact, the women mentioned many moments in their lives when their fathers encouraged them to study and to establish a strong personality. Yasmeen, however, whose father passed away; have lived under the oppression and control of her brother and later her husband. In the other women's stories, the fathers and the husbands were seen as supportive in many ways. They would drive the women to school or work. They would encourage them to gain a higher degree, and they would allow them to travel and achieve their dreams. Wasan mentioned that her father used to wake up early and prepare breakfast for her before he would drive her to the university. Wasan's father would also go to the university to see her final results before she does. Besides her father, Wasan's husband has supported her in her

graduate studies, and he has often told her not to cook when she is tired or has exams.

### **Issues of Voice and Power**

Although the data showed that Libyan women were politically silenced over time, it also revealed that their voice was contextualized according to the men's and government rules. In that, the patriarchal society determines for women what to say and how to say it. However, the data indicated that women were not always silence or unaware of their silence. For example, Bushra in her interview stated that women tended to use social media websites under nick names to express their opinions freely. (Interview 2, December 2015). This statement demonstrated that women were not inherently silent or passive as their dominant image implied. They were restricted to visibly express and share their thoughts. On contrary, the data reported that women were socially voiced and active. Libyan women were the one who heavily responsible to raise the children and administer their houses. Yasmeen for example indicated that as a Libyan woman, she has more freedom at her house to choose what to cook and how to raise her children. The Libyan men's role in the house is to bring food and financially support the family needs. Wasan, Fatima, Bushra and Zainab also stressed that Libyan women are very powerful because they are responsible to build a healthy, well raised family in addition to their work outside the house if they decide to work. Neither the society nor the Libyan men would excuse the women from ignoring her house duties because of her work outside the house. All these findings are the key that indicate that despite Libyan women are silenced;

they have some sort of power that should not be overlooked. Because of the society bias against women, Libyan women believed that their job at home to serve men is the job they were born to do. For this reason, they tolerate the burden of being working women and house wives at the same time. Since this dissertation is about women's empowerment through their own experience, the least this work can do is recognize their struggle as strength instead of treating them as only passive and powerless. For example, Wasan and Bushra when stating about their experience at hospitals, they claimed that women more responsible and had more workload compared to men. Libyan women despite the fear of Gaddafi's forces, faced the country's conflict bravely and continued to go to work, to teach, to help the injuries and to stand overnight in long gas queue to fill gas to their cars. Those women, while they could have chosen to stay home, they decided to work and help their men's counterparts because they felt the country needed their effort in that critical time. The women did not feel they were passive or helpless, instead they stressed that they were working side by side to help the country.

Another strength of this dissertation is the representation of the Libyan history through women's voice. This strength reflects the power of women's voice in recording the country's history. Previously, as stated in the first three chapters, the history was either written by males or by westerners. However, the women's poetry in this study portrayed a unique rich experience of twelve Libyan women since 1940s. These poems send powerful messages to the world and to the Libyan society through personal stories in conflict zone. These messages include awareness of the Muslim women's voices in Libya that were barely a subject to



any qualitative research. It also shows that silence and powerless are not synonyms.

### **Who are Libyan Muslim Women?**

*“Libyan women are the candles that burn so Libya is still alive”*  
(Bushra, Interview 2, December, 2015)

After listening to all the women’s stories and generating the poems, I asked the women to define Libyan women based on their lived experiences. Bushra described Libyan women as educated, emotional, and givers without limitations. They give in their house, in their work, everywhere, without any appreciation. Fatima, Rimas, Zainab, Yasmeen, and Wasan also defined Libyan women. They explained the following:

Libyan women are strugglers, and they work more than men because they work inside and outside the house. They raise the kids, they clean the house, they take care of the family, they work, and they study.

Compared to other women in the world, Libyan women are more tolerant than other women. (Interview, June through December, 2015)

Zainab also added her individual thoughts. She stated that “The Libyan woman, no matter how educated she is, or whether she is a doctor, a professor, or an engineer, at the end of the day, she is a housewife, and her place is in the home.”

All of this data indicates that Libyan women are aware of their agency (Menard-Warwick, 2005) and their role in society. This reveals that Libya women know their power if they have to use it. However, because of Libya’s unbalanced state, the women are not able to contribute to the changes in their social status. In

regards to familial oppression, the women stated that the new generation should deal equally with their daughters and their sons. New mothers should never place boys in higher positions than girls. They should teach both genders to help each other because they complete one another. Men must learn to respect their mothers, sisters, and wives because Libyan women are raised to be “givers” to their family, and this state does not underestimate them or make them less important than men. While they are under pressure to perform the many roles in their lives, they do them well. Overall, the women’s experiences show “resistance and resiliency in the face of these pressures” (Park, 2005, p. 219). With this, women are able to reflect on their experiences and face their weakness.

To this end, the following section answers the second research question:

### **What is Feminism within the Libyan Context?**

#### **Libyan Feminist Movement**

The primary purpose of conducting the current study is to facilitate the voices of Libyan Muslim women. The women’s experiences are contextualized from within the framework of Islamic feminism when considering voice, silence, marginalization, power, and oppression (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Traule, 1997; Moghissi, 1999, Mernissi, 1975; Schlossberg, 1989). In Libya, there was not a movement called “feminism,” and the term “Libyan feminism” has not been introduced until this moment. However, this does not mean that women in the past did not struggle to gain their freedom and make their voices audible. For this reason, I claim that Libyan feminism is as old as 1952, when Libyan women in Tripoli and Benghazi established the Libyan Women’s Renaissance Association

in 1954 (Adham, 2012). Libyan feminism established its own movement over time in Libya, but it was not documented or recorded as it should be. For example, according to Adham (2012), women in Benghazi were quicker to create this association and to speak on behalf of Libyan women than women in Tripoli. At that time, women in both associations were asked to educate women and to involve them in the society in a positive way. Unlike feminism in Egypt, which focused not only on education, but also on changing the dress style and lifestyle to fit with the Western style, the Libyan women's movement focused on educating women in different fields. This diversity in defining the feminist's acts is characterized by the nature of each country, because there are distinctive variations for Muslim women based on where they live, regardless of sharing the same religion (Ferenea, 1998).

When Gaddafi ruled Libya, the country witnessed a clear gap and changed the dialogue for women's rights. This time the women's movement had been interrupted. In the King's era, the women fought for their right to education and to vote; during Gaddafi's time, the women struggled to be heard and to make their own decisions. Over the four decades of his rule, there was a huge shift in the status of women. Gaddafi did not prevent education, but education in his time was systematically structured under his supervision and his political ideology. He took their rights to wear what they liked, to study what they liked, and to practice religion the way they liked (Pargeter, 2005; Abdul-Latif, 2013). He encouraged the tribal system (Gaddafi, 1976) and put more pressure on the women's lives.

Gaddafi also corrupted the country's most vital institutions, such as education and health. He banned English and French from the educational system so that students remained isolated. These actions, among others, marginalized the Libyan women. The only women who were prominent in his rule were the ones who had immediate connections to him and/or his forces. However, the majority lived in silence to protect themselves and their families.

Regardless of this marginalization, the data shows that the two types of Islamic feminism are embedded in Libyan society. Secular and Islamic feminism (Badran, 2005, 2009) were seen walking side-by-side throughout the women's narratives. It is true that none of these terms are present in the scarce literature about Libyan women, but this does not mean that they do not exist. I believe there are two reasons for why the two terms were not placed comfortably in Libyan society. First, Secular feminism was not placed comfortably in Libyan society because it was associated with the west and the colonial era that Gaddafi spent all his time arguing against it. Second, Islamic feminism was not placed comfortably in Libyan society because it called for women's liberation under the Islamic framework; this did not serve Gaddafi's ideology. However, based on the literature about those two types of feminism, I claim that Secular and Islamic feminism have interacted interchangeably in Libyan society over time.

When King Idris ruled the country between 1952 and 1969, the country was intensely affected by his long colonial rule. After the colony, women started to go out more actively than before. However, their voices were still marginalized. Based on the women's poems, feminism, at that time, was more

secular than Islamist. This type of feminism emerged with the aid of literacy education, which enabled the women to access the world press (Badran, 2005; Bahi, 2011, Ahmed, 1992) and compare their lives to other women in the world. Women in Libya called for their freedom by imitating the West, instead of developing their independent identities. With the absence of the Islamic consciousness, the women became liberated by releasing themselves from their family's control. Within this movement, the women began gaining education, but schools were still gender segregated. Although I consider this liberation as secular, the women's poems did not show any intention in separating the religion from the country's constitutions. In the 1970s, by the beginning of Gaddafi's rule, Islam revived and gained more attention than before. Therefore, women educated themselves through the teaching of Islamic regulations, not through imitating the West. Although women in Libya during Gaddafi's rule appeared to be very secular, compared to other Muslim countries, based on the women's poems, they associated their daily life with Islam more than any secular thought. The women did not show any opposition to the Islamic teaching; instead, they reflected on the fact that they gained more rights under Islam if the society understood those rights. The women in Libya did not have any controversial discussion about the religion. They wanted to practice religion freely, since they consider it as protective, not as oppressive. For this reason, the data displays more Islamic feminist movement than secular. The secularism only appears in some forms of dress code. Farah and Sania, for example, pointed out that Islam in Libya is very

moderate; there are no radicals or liberals; women would live peacefully if society would apply the Islamic teaching correctly.

After reading and analyzing the women's poems, it became clear that women were aware of their silence, oppression, marginalization, and gender equality. Those concepts are deeply grounded in the theory of Islamic feminism, which raises awareness about women's right within Islam. Therefore, as I introduce Libyan feminism to the larger theory of Islamic feminism, I define it as an empowering tool that educates society about women's rights and obligations under the Islamic religion. Libyan feminism seeks equality, as presented in the *Quran*. Moreover, it neglects all kinds of oppression because this oppression contradicts the regulations of Islam. Libyan feminism is not for women only; men also need to be educated to stop abusing their wives and their sisters. When drafting the country's constitution, people should consider Libyan feminism theory to help understand women's rights and their daily living experiences.

### **Final Remarks**

From the above discussion, women's experiences entail various meanings about women's lives in Libyan society. This data shows that Libyan women experienced different kinds of marginalization and oppression throughout Libyan history. Their presence was contextualized and controlled by either their male siblings or the government, which is also run by males. During the 1940s to 1960s, women were expected to stay home and act as a homemaker and mother. Very few women were able to go to schools, so those women did not have an immediate impact on the country's political or social roles. At that time, society

still perceived women as objects who should be kept indoors. Interestingly, the women who lived throughout the 1940s to the 1960s in my study considered that period of their lives as the most joyful and entertaining. On a different note, the women in my study did not mention anything negative about their male siblings because they viewed themselves as dependents on men; in fact, each of the women felt that she had a specific role to fulfill. While men were working outside, the women were at home taking care of the family. Therefore, men remained the controllers, and their voices were the ones that were heard in society.

During Gaddafi, the women's roles had expanded, but still, their roles were very much controlled by Gaddafi and his ideas on family traditions. As such, during Gaddafi's time women should fulfil their roles as housewives, as daughters, and/or as sisters, but he also believed that women should still have the option of working outside their homes. The role of women exceeds the role of men in society, as men only work outside their houses to only assist their wives with home duties. In Libyan society, women are expected to maintain their house and childcare duties, even if working at a job outside of their homes. In fact, if the women's jobs interrupt their household duties and childcare responsibilities, then they are forced to leave their jobs.

After the revolution, women's roles expanded, but their freedom became even more restricted than before. Now, women in Libya are seen walking side-by-side with Libyan men; however, their status is still underestimated. The Libyan society still perceives women as weak and powerless. Because Libya is within a

male-dominated culture, women have historically remained invisible, despite their presence being shown inside and outside of their homes and this is very powerful for women to do. For example, Bushra mentioned in her poem that female doctors were working more than male doctors in the hospital because the female doctors were taking on the morning shifts. Unfortunately, only men's experiences float to the top. In Libyan culture, women are always seen as dependents and powerless, while, in fact, my data shows that Libyan women are quite intellectually and physically powerful, even though the society expects them to be docile.

It also appears that education is an empowerment tool for women, which helps them to gain more independence, personality, and stronger positions in family and society. The educated women in my study were more independent and had a better family life. Their husbands were presented as supportive and loving, compared to the husbands of the uneducated women, who were described as controlling and disrespectful. One of the women, Yasmeen, claimed that men in her family did not allow her to continue her education; and because she was not educated her husband views her as weak and helpless.

In Libyan society, men are more visible and audible. Since the King's time, only men have been in government positions. Based on the poems, all the oppression, violence and corruption is coming from the men. Men have many privileges, regardless of their education level or their qualifications, in general. They can go outside freely without any restrictions. They can work the jobs they like, and no one forces them to help with housework. For example, when women and men come home from work at the same time, the women immediately go to



the kitchen to cook while the men sit down, relax, and wait for food. Although many women in Libyan society see themselves as equal to men, family norms and gender roles actually put more pressure on them, compared to men. Therefore, women are not and cannot be equal in such a society. The findings of the study reports that Libyan women are not aware of their position in the Islamic religion. The Libyan women are following the males' interpretations to those texts without looking for the answer themselves. This conclusion asserts that Libya is a male dominant country, where women remain invisible and are under the control of men.

## CHAPTER NINE

### POST-SCRIPT

Now that I have reached this point in my dissertation, I will admit that I am very scared of my work. Having my voice heard in such a silent country is terrifying. Throughout my time working on this dissertation, I always thought about what to reveal and what to keep hidden. I struggled a lot as I interpreted my participants' words. I am carrying this work on my shoulders and spreading it worldwide to represent Libyan Muslim women's experiences for the first time; this is scary, especially now in this time of transition. The data revealed very fearful moments that silenced women's voices. My female participants even asked me how I was not afraid to do this type of work. I could not tell them that I was afraid, too. Since I started this job, I have to finish it; I have committed to doing work that helps to have our voices heard and our experiences recognized. One day, when I go back to my country, many parts of this work will be removed in order to secure my life and a job. I do not yet know who will be in control in Libya when I return; however, for now, I am afraid of three groups. The first represents the political groups who are fighting with each other; one of those groups will want to rule the country. The diverse data I collected criticized those political groups and accused them of being robbers and criminals. The second group refers to the radical Islamists who inhabited Libya after the revolution. Those radical Islamists view women as inferior to men that should remain silent forever. For them, women should cover their faces, and they should not be allowed to study or work. This group is the most dangerous because they

mistakenly use the Islamic text to oppress women and underestimate their existence. They are spreading hatred and terrorism under the name of Islam. This group views women, like me, as dangerous and very liberated. The third group is the Libyan men in general. They are in control of everything in the country and I know my work will not be welcomed. When once I spoke up in Indiana, PA where I live now, Arab men accused me to be liberated and dangerous to their women. Libyan men are not different, especially after I heard all those stories.

Reaching this stage of my work and not yet defending it is another challenging task because the more I keep this dissertation in my hands, the more I wrestle with concepts, terms, and positions. I truly believe that my dissertation is just the beginning. While writing the words in my dissertation, I recalled one woman who stated that when Libyan women go outside and study, they are perceived by society as mannish or non-feminine. Her words echoed throughout my mind as I read the poems for another round of revision. Some men still resist education and the idea of liberation for women. They consider liberation a dangerous tool for women, as they are afraid that being liberated will be used against men. Those men described women who are educated as manlike to assert that power and independence is men's property.

Throughout this dissertation, I discovered that many of the prophet's hadiths were interpreted to serve men and to devalue women. However, hadiths were said to actually help protect women and to help respect their rights and personalities. I looked into my religion, but I could not find any statement that says men are good thinkers or better humans. In the Quran, Allah addressed us

equally and asked us for the same duties and the same responsibilities. Allah excused women from some worshiping duties in the days of periods and maternity, and he still gave equal rewards to men who do not have such biological functions. If Allah, the creator, placed women in a very respected status, how can we convince ourselves to be underestimated by the patriarchal ideologies of society?

All the poems I generated from the interviews I conducted with participants indicated that the Libyan society is still following the cultural norms and traditions, compared to the religion. In our Muslim societies, men appear as aggressive oppressors, while in the Islamic religion, they are expected to be kind and have mercy on their females. In his last speech, the Prophet (PBUH) talked about women and asked men to treat them kindly and with respect. The Prophet (PBUH) signified women as a bottle of glass (رفقا بالقوارير) to show that women are sensitive and easily broken. Therefore, men were expected to respect women and treat them very kindly.

In his glass example, the Prophet (PBUH) did not mean to indicate that women are powerless or weak, compared to men; rather, the Prophet (PBUH) meant to show that women should demand respect and understanding over judgment. In the Hadith, the Prophet (PBUH) said, “Your mother, your mother, your mother, then your father,” suggesting that people should respect and obey their parents. He repeated the word “mother” three times in order to emphasize the significant role that mothers play in their children’s lives. There is a list of Hadith from Sunnah which explains the position of women in Islam that needs

another dissertation or may be dissertations. However, I mentioned two examples only to assert that the Libyan society is not following those purified merciful teaching of Islam.

In another level, I recall since childhood I was reading stories and books that represented women as inferior and powerless. For example, the fairy tales present the princess as helpless and as a person who is waiting for the prince to save her life. This image of fairy tale's princess viewed girls to both genders as someone who always need help from boys. Video games are also another example of how women and girls being viewed. The video games I played circulated around the image of the princess who need to be rescued by another male character. In contrast, men and boys were viewed as brave, strong, powerful, superior idols and authentic. I have never thought of women as equivalent to men, while in reality, we are. I do not understand how men could not be equivalent to women, especially if women are getting the same type of education and training. Through my participants' stories, sadly, I found that women, themselves, have inherited this patriarchal ideology, despite disagreeing with it.

When I started writing this dissertation, the revolution was over. I thought that I was free and that I should use my freedom wisely to break my silence and involve Libyan women in my research. However, every year, I discovered that this revolution was never meant to liberate women. It is a male revolution, supported by women, but serving men. Women are victimized throughout Libyan history. Their existence has been marginalized by the masculine culture of the society that we embrace as authoritative and for males only. Libyan men, since

they were born, saw their mothers and sisters serving them. They saw them as maids and cooks, regardless of the kinds of jobs these women took on outside of their homes. When seeking a wife, those men, who saw their mothers and sisters as maids and cooks, sought replicas of the women in their lives—women who would serve them. Therefore, even today, Libyan women have to deal with the pressure of serving their husband and taking on multiple roles within their lives. According to Libyan men, their wives should listen and obey unquestionably.

This dissertation has changed my view on the world. While talking to all of my female participants, I never felt that they were not civilized or that they were unaware of what was taking place around them. Despite the fact that they were oppressed on different levels, the women appeared to be very educated and very powerful in their narratives. One of them told me that this dissertation is her microphone and that it helped her talk and hear the stories of others. The experiences that were shared by the women showed that people in Libya have been continuously oppressed by different governments since the colony. The poems within this dissertation also provide evidence that Muslims in their countries are suffering more than the rest of the world from the terrorism and oppression.

### **Pedagogy of the Oppressed: Libyan Feminist Version**

When I finished writing the first draft of my dissertation, I was not sure how I could turn it into pedagogy for teaching writing or for maybe life itself. I struggled to contextualize my work within feminist and critical pedagogy, where both pedagogies are very related to my work. After much thought, I decided to

have a very distinctive pedagogy, a pedagogy that emerged from the living experiences of Libyan women. I refer to this pedagogy as the Libyan feminist version of the *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. This pedagogy borrows from feminist pedagogy, a way of teaching that encompasses gender, class, race, and social justice (Siebler, 2007). Furthermore, it stresses the aim of the critical pedagogy, which inspires students to “assume the responsibility for collectively recreating society” (George, 2002, p. 97). In the coming sections, I aim to explore my understanding of oppression and feminism based on my research about women’s experiences. I call the process of creating this pedagogy feminizing teaching (Yuh-Mei, 2000), which has a similar aim to liberatory education (Fierero, 2000).

### **Thoughts about Oppression**

Based on my study’s data, oppression in Libya came in different shapes and formats, such as marginalization, silence, and gender inequity. Through my detailed analysis of oppression against women in Libya, I found that oppression emanated from family patriarchal ideology, society culture, political decisions, and an undeveloped educational system. Therefore, I claim that the past Libyan educational system was an oppressive system that, over time, became programmed by authoritative oppressors and acted to dehumanize and silence students. This educational system also underestimates women as students and as teachers and gives more power to men through school curriculums and policies. This system helped to create powerless members of society, who are not aware of their oppression (Young, 2004). Having made this statement, many Libyan people will criticize me for such an idea, claiming that the educational system is an

oppressor. Those people would then question how I found my way to the United States to finish my Ph.D. My answer is simple: I expanded my understanding of education the first time I stepped in an American classroom. I decided to be a new me, a me who could establish her voice and distance herself from a very demeaning political and educational system. I know that when I go back to Libya, I will teach under the university's unchangeable policies, but at least, while staying here, I can release myself from the chains of oppression. Unexpectedly, not only myself, but people in my country have also decided to liberate themselves from the oppression and marginalization that has taken over the country for four decades. Therefore, I have become very optimistic that one day, Libya will have a respected, well-developed educational system that respects people and their choices.

As educators, our job after the revolution is to help liberate students and help change the current curriculum. Being specialized in Composition and TESOL, I attempt to represent a writing pedagogy that embraces the political change in Libya. But first, I must discuss my understanding of the notion of oppression/oppressor/oppressed as a global phenomenon, which has revealed itself in the experiences of my participants.

According to Fereiro (2000), liberating the educational system requires the oppressed to have political power that cannot be gained prior to a revolution (p. 54). In my country, the main political oppressor, Gaddafi, is no longer alive. He is dead after a bloody revolution that lasted for nine months; nevertheless, this revolution created new forms of oppression and new oppressors. Based on my



findings, this new oppression is more violent and destructive than the old oppression. Fereiro (2000) argued that “[n]ever in history has violence been initiated by the oppressed” (p. 55). However, if the oppressed acquires power, there is no guarantee that this newly transformed oppressor will seek violence. I believe this type of oppressor is more dangerous than the previous oppressors.

The former oppressors were usually raised in an environment that made him/her be the oppressors. Usually, those who are exposed to power and authority at a young age continue the sequence of oppression in the same way as their former oppressors. However, the new oppressor, who transformed from being oppressed to an oppressor, the whole experience of oppressing others is very new. First, this new oppressor lived all his/her life in a humiliating way that silenced him/her and taught him/her to be a blind follower and obey the old oppressor. Second, this new oppressor may have never learnt to initiate decisions or to take on responsibility.

The women’s experiences in this study shows that presently, in Libya, new people have the power; currently, there are no previous oppressors on the ground. The new oppressors start with violence in order to demean those who have less power. New oppressors will create new generations of oppressors, who continue to suppress others. For instance, my data shows that when students come to school with weapons, and when these students use their weapons against those who do not own any weapons, those who have weapons feel empowered, compared to those who lack them. Thus, I suggest in our educational system, we should introduce new pedagogies that engage students who lived during the

revolution in an open dialogue. We should educate students about social justice before they grow up as future oppressors and/or become oppressed. We should start from now before it is too late.

### **Thoughts about Feminism**

As I stated in the first chapter of this dissertation, the number of Libyan women graduating from educational institutions are equal to the number of men graduating from the same institutions (Abdul-Latif, 2013). However, the role of women is barely noticeable and recognized. When women work in mixed gender institutions, usually, the power and authority is in the hands of men, who have more authoritative roles than women. Women are usually perceived as inferior, weak, and powerless, compared to men, despite of the hard work of women, who are present every day in academia. When it comes to teaching, in Libya, I was taught and taught with books written by men and addressed to men. For example, in elementary school, I took a technical course that dealt with auto parts repair and home maintenance. At a young age, I learned how to fix broken windows, how to check auto batteries, and how to measure engine oil. We were forced to study this course for six years with different levels. When one of the teachers implemented a housekeeping course for elementary students, the boys were not required to attend the course; instead they were allowed to have a sports class while we learned different food recipes and embroidery work. At that time, the Ministry of Education considered the technical course a required, credit-bearing course while the housekeeping course was an optional, non-credit-bearing course. Even as kids, we were raised in an educational environment that looked down on

women's activities and sent an indirect message that insignificant courses were meant to be for girls, because boys would not achieve any value from them. This subliminal message continued, causing women to see themselves as inferior to men, even in intellectual work. This is just one example of the oppressive nature of Libya's educational system. For me, this division and marginalization is one of the many faces of oppression against women in academia. Therefore, I believe that my role as a teacher-researcher is to introduce feminist pedagogy to Libyan education. As stated previously, this pedagogy shares similar aims with critical pedagogy. Being an English major, I discuss the possibilities of feminizing English language teaching in Libya, and specifically, in composition classes. According to Mackie (1999), "feminist-oriented courses" help to raise one's consciousness of the relationship between theory and practice in ESL; and between writing as a researcher and as a woman (p. 566).

### **Pedagogical Implications**

Based on the previous discussion about oppression and feminism in Libya after the revolution and the data of this study, I believe that this dissertation provides a good example of how we can design a writing course that respects and tolerates all members of society and facilitate the voice for minorities. This writing course embraces the personal experiences of students and helps to "[e]ndorse family literacy events and writing" (Park, 2013, p. 16). Thus, first, I encourage promoting students' voices in writing by exposing them to different readings, which can help to increase their knowledge and their understandings of their surroundings. According to O'Reilly (1993), reading "vitalizes both the self

and the community” and helps students to make connections between the two (p. 58). This study presented two important forms of silence; the oppressive and the purposeful silence. Teachers should provide students with helpful tools to facilitate their voice. These tools can be represented by writing about the personal experiences and criticizing their surroundings. The findings of this study provide an evidence that writing about the individual’s significant moments, empower the students. In the first interview, the women were not very excited to tell their stories. They were questioning me; how would such stories be important for my research. However, after I sent them their poems, they did not expect first, that those life moments could be turned into a poem. Second, they started thinking critically about their life choices and decisions. Based on these findings, I highly recommend that teachers of writing should start with personal narratives because those stories break the silence and empower the writers.

Second, Students need to read about different topics that encourage critical thinking and makes them want to engage in deep discussions about texts. They need to read about different experiences in the world to help understand their positioning in their society. In this dissertation, the women’s poems indicated that Libyan people, in general, and women, in particular, have lived in long isolation from the international world. During the four decades of Gaddafi’s rule, Libyans suffered from a complete shutdown of airports and travel. The poems also implied that limited resources exist at universities in Libya, such as the Internet and having access to up-to-date literature. Further, the university campus lacks the simplest necessities, such as class windows and electricity. Asking Libyan

students to read about issues at their university will help to increase their critical awareness about how their surroundings impact their education and their future.

Furthermore, the results of this study recommends that the Libyan teacher job is like the job of the psychological therapist. The poems showed that students have faced traumatic experiences before and after the revolution. In fact, the poems presented multiple cases where young kids and adults could not go to the restrooms because of the fear of being bombed. Additionally, they showed that people were terrified to go outside after sunset; schools were not even safe. These few facts need to be carefully considered in writing courses. Teachers should be aware that their students have encountered different traumatic experiences, compared to them. I argue that we should have “peaceable classroom[s]” (O’Reilly, 1993), which encourage peace over violence and respect over blind obedience. According to O’Reilly (1993) students “know a lot about competition, little about cooperation; more about the male than the female; the outer world than the inner. (pp. 34-35). Hence, students need to feel welcomed in the classroom, and they should know that all their experiences have equivalent importance.

On the other hand, as educators, we should teach students that opposing opinions should not be faced with violence and hatred. Instead, our classrooms should foster a healthy environment for arguments and discussions; the writing classroom should be a place where power is not held by any one gender or group. The writing classroom should teach students about equal rights and democracy, and students should engage in lessons where they apply these concepts (George,

2001). Having said this, I admit that I do not completely agree with the notion of sharing power between teachers and students because I do not think Libyan students are used to sharing this power in the classroom yet. I still believe that during this critical time in my country, teachers should take on an authoritative and guiding role. My judgment is based on the data of this research, which shows that Libyan students are misinterpreting the notion of freedom and are perceiving what is wrong and unacceptable as personal freedom. Students need to have adequate time to understand their roles in their smaller communities, such as in their classrooms. The classroom should be the nucleus, where students build their personalities and improve in their critical thinking.

Along with reading diverse texts and having classroom discussions about different texts, students should practice daily free writing tasks in the classroom. These writings do not have to be sophisticatedly written, but they have to stimulate students' voices and self-awareness. Students can begin by writing about and interpreting their life experiences. According to Atkinson (1998), "writing about personal experiences offers a template that can be applied in many disciplinary settings or to fulfill many research needs, from sociological to anthropological to linguistics to literacy" (p. 2). In composition classes, those narratives and poems can be genres that help students reflect on their experiences and capture their own individualized understanding of their lives (Hanauer, 2010). In the past, teaching writing in Libya focused only on grammatical structures and formatting. The students, who were being oppressed and marginalized by previous regimes, did not have the freedom to incorporate their voices in their

writing. Furthermore, the students felt like they did not have valuable stories to share (Denizen, 2014). After doing this research, I believe educators should consider implementing poetry and narrative in their writing courses in Libya. This study provides evidence that reading the poems empowered the women and helped them view their lives differently.

Finally, in the writing classroom, we should change the dialogue from “he is more powerful than she” to “we are all powerful.” The Ministry of Education should pay more attention to Libyan women in academia and give them the opportunity to share their opinions, which have been based on their research and their lived experiences. This study, for instance, provides ample examples of how women’s voices could contribute to society’s vital institutions. Furthermore, it shows that women are strong and capable and can handle the same responsibilities as men. Despite coming from different places in Libya, and despite having different educational backgrounds, the women in this study speak one voice. They reject all kinds of oppression and promote peace and inclusion of all people in the society.

To sum up, in order for me to teach in this way, I suggest that the poems in this research informs the field of composition and TESOL to:

- *Consider teaching poetry reading and writing in Libya because it is therapeutic and promotes self-discovery:*

Although my participants did not write the poems by themselves, I used their own words to generate these poems. In the second interview, the participants claimed that reading the poems was healing for them. They

also reflected that they did not think of their experience as important until after they read it. Therefore, their reflection provides an evidence that asking the students to write poems about their lives can be healing and raise awareness about their importance in the society (Furman, 2004; Hanauer, 2010). For example, housewives thought that since they did not continue their education, they were inferior to other women. After reading the poems, those women were very pleased that they were not left behind and they had important role at their homes.

- *Include women's voices in country's decision making:*

Prior to this study, Libyan women had rarely share their experience publicly (Pargeter, 2005). Their silence dominates their voice, but this does not mean they do not have valuable ideas to share. When in this study they had the tool to speak up, they showed that they are educated and knowledgeable to work with Libyan men side by side. I encourage the country's authorities to include the women's voices in different fields to contribute to the society's development.

- *Establish Libyan women's journal to help highlight and hear the voices of Libyan women:*

In every institution in the country, there should be a space for women to be recognized. Especially, currently where the country is moving towards democracy. I recommend establishing women's journals and magazines that recognize the daily experiences of women. Those journals will be



another tools for women in different places to share their experiences and understand the significant roles they have in the society.

- *Support teaching for equality and social justice:*

One of the most important contributions of this study is facing silence by teaching about gender equality and social justices. As stated in the study, Libyan women are not aware of their status in the society. They always perceive themselves as less qualified to men. Thus, teaching about gender equality will help women as well as men understand their positions in the society.

- *Improve English language curriculum in Libya:*

In my research I have not discussed in depth the situation of English language teaching in Libya. I believe this is going to be one of my future research direction. However, based on the women's experience, English language teaching in Libya is not getting the attention it deserves in high schools and universities. English language was prohibited for almost eight years. The findings of this study reported that this absence of English language created a gab for the current generation. The participants (Wasan, Zainab, Rasha) talked about how this absence of English language created a different level of challenges when studying in the universities. This gab forced the ministry of education to hire unqualified teachers to teach English.

Additionally, in university of Tripoli for instance, I was teaching the materials my professors taught me. There was no room for creativity

and improvement. In that respect, the analysis of the women's experiences suggests that the English department should improve the quality of the English curriculum. In one aspect, for instance, this curriculum should reinforce gender equality by giving the opportunity to women to help in designing the English curriculum. It should "become professionally accountable to the learning and future teaching needs of all ... students, as opposed to adhering to a "one-size-fits-all" approach in TESOL teacher education" (Park, 2006, p. 224). The Libyan women, through their research should incorporate new creative methods to teach English.

### **Methodological Implications**

The current study supports the literature about using art-based research in feminist research. Based on 12 women's reflections when revising their poetry, the poems are very accurate and very focused (Hanauer, 2003). In fact, the poems helped focus on the most significant experiences in the women's lives and were accurately stated. The women commented that the translation of the poems were also very good, as the translated poems accurately capture their words and expressions. Yasmeen, Fatima, and Zainab stated that the language of their poems is very concise. Sania and Wasan, on the other hand, claimed that their poems summarized their three decades in an artistic way (Poindexter, 2002; Leavy, 2009). Moreover, the women indicated that the poems affected them emotionally (Furman, 2004, 2007; Hanauer, 2010; Poindexter, 2002, Richardson, 1993, 1994) and made them relive their experiences (Luce-Kapler, 2009; Dark, 2009). Finally, and most importantly, the poems empowered the women (Langer & Furman,

2004) by making them rethink their life choices and decisions. For example, Yasmeen started crying when she read her poems, and she reflected on her emotional moment in a letter to me, which I previously shared in this dissertation. She told me that she should have stopped her brother and her husband from controlling her life by speaking up instead of staying silent. This data provides new evidence for using poetry in research, and it “provides its readers with specific insights into individualized, personal human experience” (Hanauer, 2003, p. 69). By converting the women’s narratives into poems, the study aimed to enrich “the experience of those who are disenfranchised” (Leavy, 2009, p. 74). Therefore, I highly recommend implementing poetic ethnography into feminist research to help understand and recognize minorities in world academia.

### **Historical Implications**

Due to Gaddafi’s interference in the country’s educational curriculum, the history of the country was only taught from his point of view. For example, I still remember that I have never learned any lesson about the historical eras previous to him. The history usually started with the Ottoman Empire and how the Ottomans ruined the country. Gaddafi taught us that Ottomans implemented what is called “divide and conquer” / (فرق تسد); this political ideology refers to the way the Ottoman corrupted the educational and health systems. After reading my data, I discovered that Gaddafi was the one who corrupted the whole country, not the Ottomans. After briefly studying the Ottoman Empire, in school, we began learning about his Coup and how he liberated the country from an evil king. Gaddafi taught us to hate the west and see them as invaders and as enemies. All

the history books that we used to study in our country just glorified Gaddafi and his deeds. Now, after doing this research, I excitedly present the history of my country through women's experiences and through the analysis of pictures and memoirs in my second chapter. All the poems displayed different periods of times in Libyan history. The information from this study should be incorporated into the history curriculum in Libya in order to teach students about the eras that were wiped out by Gaddafi's autocratic regime.

### **Psychology and Social Services**

Based on the data, the psychological part of the women's lives was completely ignored, due to Libya's instability. Several times, the women mentioned their psychological states, which worsened during and after the revolution. First, they lived through different forms of oppression and marginalization during Gaddafi's rule, and then they suffered from a lack of vital resources and services during the revolution. The women also suffered from Posttraumatic Disorder, which could have been caused by the fear of NATO's heavy bombing and Gaddafi's continuous threats. Even six years after the start of the revolution, the women expressed how badly they were affected by it.

Unfortunately, as stated by the women, the psychological health of women in Libya is overlooked; as a result, the women have not received much attention for their psychological health, leaving the women feeling very helpless. The traumatic experiences that the women faced have caused them to live unstable and unpredictable lives. Therefore, I encourage all psychologists and social workers to read the poems in this dissertation and orient themselves with

the women's experiences.

### **Future Research**

As I write this last section of my work, I have mixed feelings about my dissertation. For the last four years, I have grown as I listened and interpreted the words of the women in my study. While interviewing the women, there were times when I would cry so much that I had to stop recording our interview. I had times when I needed to forget that I was collecting data. There were times when I just needed to be a friend who opened her ears and her heart. Many women revealed to me that it was the first time telling their stories, not because they never deemed their stories as important, but because they had never been asked to tell their stories. Therefore, I would say this research is just the beginning. It only opens the door for other researchers in the Muslim world to consider listening to women's voices and to search for tools that help to highlight those voices. In this study, by using poetic ethnography, I was able to capture the most significant moments in the Libyan women's lives. In doing so, I was able to not only understand my experience as a Libyan woman, but I was also able to understand my position as a Muslim woman in my own religion and my own culture. Now, it is our job as researchers to continue depicting and researching women's lives in more in depth. It is time to consider their contribution to society's institutions and constitution. This study shows that the women play very vital roles in society, and they are lacking the tools to have their voice heard and their messages shared with others. With the use of different research methods, such as art-based research

methods, future research could focus on breaking the silence of women and empowering women through their own experiences.

I plan to contact my participants again in two years to find out if their experiences have changed with prospected government in Libya. I will also have a research that focus only on women in the English department in Libya. I want to hear their voice and understand their experience. I plan to deeply research the English department situation through women's voice in order to help improve the quality of English education.

However, since currently, more women are using social media as a space for sharing their experiences and opinions. I suggest that I research this discourse in social media to help understand the women's interests and positions.

Furthermore, to get bigger samples, I think we need to have another quantitative research that includes larger population of women.

Finally, further research should consider men's voices, as opposed to women's, and seek to understand why their experiences are not similar. For instance, one could ask, "What is the reason behind giving power to men over women? Is this act of giving power to men due to the religion, the culture, or the women themselves?" Although this study answered my research question, I want to hear from men as well. I want to understand why Libya's society is constructed as male dominant.

“My Lord, increase me in knowledge” (20:114)



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## Appendix A

### Glossary

**Hadith:** Refers to the oral and written sayings of the Prophet Mohamed (PBUH).

Hussain (1984) explained that

*Sunna[h]* was recorded and transmitted in the form of *hadith*, short narratives or traditions, each of which consisted of a text \_ containing an element of doctrine, ethics, law or social custom and etiquette\_ and a chain of transmitters, i.e. a chain of the names of all those men and women who had handled that particular text and had pass it on one to the other. (p. 13)

**Ijtihad:** The act of interpreting the *Quran*.

**Quran:** The holy book of Muslims; the source of Islamic law. According to Esposito (1982), “the Quran is the revelation of [Allah] God, the central fact of the Islamic religious experiences. As the very word of God, for Muslims the Quran is the presence of the numinous in the history (space and time)” (p. 3). Rafiabadi (2009) defined the *Quran* as "the eternal book whose teachings are a summary of all the preceeding [sic] Prophets message. The guidance for mankind which ALLAH revealed through every Prophet, consisting of religious principles, worship and good deeds are found in the Quaran” (p. 1). The *Quran* has never changed for more than 1400 years. It was revealed to Prophet Mohamed over a period of 23 years (Esposito, 1982; Rafiabadi, 2009).

Sharia Law: The legal system that takes its legitimacy and rules from the *Quran* and Sunnah.

Sunnah: The sayings and the deeds of the Prophet Mohamed (PBUH). Sunnah also includes the interpretation of Quranic verses and explores the value of them. When the *Quran* first appeared, a Muslim would go to the Prophet and would ask him about things in Islam, like marriage, drinking, working, etc.



# Appendix B

Letter from the USA Ambassador in Libya to the State Department in the United States

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**A-57** **LIMITED OFFICIAL USE**

TO : Department of State

INFO : BAIDA, BENGHAZI

FROM : AmEmbassy TRIPOLI

SUBJECT : King Idris Holds First Audience With Libyan Woman

REF :

DATE: March 7, 1969

For the first time in Libyan history, King Idris has received a Libyan woman in an official audience. The occasion was the presentation at the Khold Palace in Tripoli on March 3 of the Muhammad 'Ali Senussi decoration to Mrs. Hamaidah al Anaizi, President of the Libyan Women's Renaissance Association, in recognition of her long services on behalf of Libyan women.

Mrs. Anaizi is Libya's uncontested leading "suffragette". Her feminist activities date from the Italian Occupation of Libya and have grown continually until the present day. She started the first women's association in Libya, the Libyan Women's Renaissance Association, in Benghazi in 1954. There were 11 ladies in the original organization. The Association now has hundreds of members and chapters scattered throughout Cyrenaica.

A few years ago a similar organization, the Libyan Women's Society, was established in Tripolitania and is currently also growing in strength and membership. Thanks to personal encouragement by Queen Fatma, who served as honorary President of the Women's Renaissance Society and who is an active promoter of women's activities, Libyan feminism has recently become not only accepted, but fashionable in Libyan society. Consequently, women's organizations include leaders of Libyan "society" in their current membership.

Mrs. Anaizi's feminist crusade has covered a wide range of activity. In 1964, she and a dozen or so members of her group were the first women to attend an Opening of Parliament. In 1965, at her insistence, women were invited to view the Independence Day parade from the official reviewing

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Drafted by: POL:RSSuddarth:jmr:3/6/69

Clearances: POL:HCHandyside

Consent and Classification Approved by: DCM:JJBlake

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stands. Mrs. Anaizi fought successfully to secure the right to vote for Libyan females. She has also frequently served as a "marriage broker" in Benghazi in an effort to circumvent the Muslim practice of arranging marriages without regard for the preferences or suitability of the prospective spouses.

Comment:

In recent years, King Idris has personally been relatively liberal by Libyan standards regarding the position of women. He has permitted the Queen to doff the traditional baracan and more recently to discard even the face veil. Queen Fatma, in addition to her work with Libyan women's organizations, has come to appear increasingly in public at Girl Scout meetings, women's club activities, and entertainments. In the past three years, the Palace has permitted photographs of the Queen, showing her in smart Western attire without a veil, to appear first in magazines and more recently in daily newspapers. King Idris also reportedly gave personal approval, in the face of divided GOL opinion, to the amendment to the Constitution in 1963 which granted Libyan women the right to vote. Mrs. Anaizi's audience therefore is another instance, albeit a much more public one, of the King's personal support for the emancipation of and the public recognition of Libyan women. As such, it provides explicit, public Royal encouragement of the move toward greater recognition of women in Libyan society. The status of women in Libya is still among the lowest of any Arab country, but significant evolutionary progress has occurred in recent years. Now, with the public encouragement of the King himself, progress in this significant field will continue, and may even accelerate.

NEWSOM  
*8/5*

## Appendix C

### Permission and License Agreement

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Samah Elbelazi	<b>Pennsylvania</b>	Indiana University of Pennsylvania	
<b><i>Legal Name of Business/Organization or Legal Name of Individual</i></b>	<b><i>State/Country of Formation or State/Country of Citizenship</i></b>	<b><i>Legal Entity Type or Title/Affiliation/Organization</i></b>	
<b><i>Business/Organization/Individual Address</i></b>			
	<a href="mailto:ytsr@iup.edu">ytsr@iup.edu</a>		724-467-9435
<b><i>Contact Person</i></b>	<b><i>E-mail Address</i></b>	<b><i>Facsimile No.</i></b>	<b><i>Telephone No.</i></b>

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Libya Status of Women Survey 2013 – Data File			
<b><i>Title of Works/Description of Materials</i></b>			
			SPSS Software
<b><i>Term (Months/Years)</i></b>	<b><i>Languages (if a translation)</i></b>	<b><i>Geographic Territory</i></b>	<b><i>Form or Medium of Use</i></b>
Utilize Libya survey data as evidence of empirical research on Libyan women.			
<b><i>Describe Purpose and Use of the Works</i></b>			
<b><i>Attribution:</i></b> Libya Status of Women Survey Report - Rola Abdul-Latif			

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Term and Termination. This Agreement shall continue in full force and effect from its Effective Date for the term described above unless the Agreement is otherwise terminated by the acts of the parties in accordance with the terms of this Agreement or by operation of law. Licensee shall immediately cease all use of the Works upon termination or expiration of this Agreement.

Governing Law. This Agreement shall be construed under and governed by the laws of the District of Columbia. The parties consent to the exclusive jurisdiction and venue of the courts located in District of Columbia for all purposes related to this Agreement.

Entire Agreement. This Agreement contains the entire agreement between the Parties with regard to the subject matter hereof and supersedes all other oral or written statements and representations pertaining to the subject matter of this Agreement.

This Agreement may be executed in one or more counterparts, each of which shall be deemed to be a duplicate original, but all of which, taken together, shall be deemed to constitute a single instrument. IFES and Licensee have executed this Agreement as of the Effective Date.

International Foundation for Electoral Systems	Licensee:
By:	By:
Print Name: Kim Atsalinos	Print Name: Samah Elbelazi
Title: Chief Compliance Officer	Title: PhD. Candidate
Date: October 17, 2014	Date: October 17, 2014

Please send all requests for permission or questions to:

[Title of Person/Name of Department], International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 1850 K Street, NW, Fifth Floor, Washington, D.C. 20006 [Telephone] [Fax] [E-mail]



## Appendix D

### IRB Approval Letter



Indiana University of Pennsylvania

[www.iup.edu](http://www.iup.edu)

Institutional Review Board for the  
Protection of Human Subjects  
School of Graduate Studies and Research  
Stright Hall, Room 113  
210 South Tenth Street  
Indiana, Pennsylvania 15705-1048

P 724-357-7730  
F 724-357-2715  
[irb-research@iup.edu](mailto:irb-research@iup.edu)  
[www.iup.edu/irb](http://www.iup.edu/irb)

January 19, 2016

Samah Elbelazi  
366 Washington Street  
Indiana, PA 15701

Dear Ms. Elbelazi:

Your proposed modifications to your previously approved research project, "Theorizing Libyan Feminism: Poetic Representation of Muslim Libyan Women Experiences," (Log No. 15-021) have been reviewed by the IRB and are approved as an expedited review for the period of January 13, 2016 to February 11, 2016. This approval does not supersede or obviate compliance with any other University requirements, including, but not limited to, enrollment, degree completion deadlines, topic approval, and conduct of university-affiliated activities.

You should read all of this letter, as it contains important information about conducting your study.

Now that your project has been approved by the IRB, there are elements of the Federal Regulations to which you must attend. IUP adheres to these regulations strictly:

1. You must conduct your study exactly as it was approved by the IRB.
2. Any additions or changes in procedures must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented.
3. You must notify the IRB promptly of any events that affect the safety or well-being of subjects.
4. You must notify the IRB promptly of any modifications of your study or other responses that are necessitated by any events reported in items 2 or 3.

Should you need to continue your research beyond February 11, 2016 you will need to file additional information for continuing review. Please contact the IRB office at (724) 357-7730 or come to Room 113, Stright Hall for further information.

The IRB may review or audit your project at random or for cause. In accordance with IUP Policy and Federal Regulation (45CFR46.113), the Board may suspend or terminate your project if your project has not been conducted as approved or if other difficulties are detected.

## Appendix E

### Verbal Consent Form in English



INDIANA UNIVERSITY  
OF PENNSYLVANIA

#### VERBAL CONSENT FORM

Alsalam Aleikum (Peace be upon you/Saying Hello in Arabic):

My name is Samah Elbelazi, a Libyan PhD. Candidate in Composition and TESOL at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. I am conducting a study about Libyan Muslim women's experiences. My dissertation aims to facilitate voice of Libyan Muslim women and make their experiences recognized. I contacted you because you are a Libyan Muslim woman and I hope you agree to participate in my study.

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked few questions about your experiences as a Libyan Muslim woman. The interview will take approximately three hours through the phone. You will decide about the time of each interview during the period from March 2015 until December 2015. All interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed.

Your participation is voluntary. This means you can withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty, and all your data will be deleted. However, if you decide to participate, your identity will be protected and all your information is confidential. I will store all your data in my password locked personal computer in a password locked folder. I will keep your identity unrecognized by not having your real name and your personal information such as age and family information in the study. Additionally, I will not inform any of our mutual friends, or family members of your participation unless you choose to share your participation with them.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at +17244672764. You can leave a voice message and I will return your call; or contact my advisor Dr. David Hanauer at 724-357-2274; email [Hanauer@iup.edu](mailto:Hanauer@iup.edu).

Having said that:

Do you have any questions regarding the study or the verbal consent form?

Do you understand the consent verbal consent form and agree to participate in my study?

The participant should respond by saying:

Yes, I understand and agree to participate.

No, I do not agree to participate in the study.

If the participant agrees to participate in the study, I will ask her if I may proceed my first question. However, if the participant does not agree to participate, then I will delete the recording and any relevant information about her.

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone 724-357-7730)



## Appendix F

### Verbal Consent Form in Arabic



INDIANA UNIVERSITY  
OF PENNSYLVANIA

نموذج الموافقة في بحث دراسي  
لفظي

السلام عليكم

اسمي سماح البلعزي، طالبه ليبية ادرس الدكتوراه في جامعة انديانا في بنسلفانيا قسم تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية والكتابة. حاليا اعمل على اطروحة الدكتوراه بعنوان "النظرية النسائية اللببية: استعمال الشعر في تجسيد تجربة المرأة اللببية المسلمة". دراستي تهدف لإعطاء صوت للمرأة اللببية. اتصلت بك لأنك امرأة مسلمة ليبية وأتمنى أن توافق على المشاركة في دراستي. إذا وافقت على المشاركة في الدراسة، سوف يطلب منك بعض الأسئلة عن تجاربك كامرأة مسلمة ليبية. دقيقة من خلال الهاتف. وعليك أن تقرر عن وقت كل مقابلة. 90 سوف تستغرق المقابلة حوالي مشاركتكم طوعية. هذا يعني أنه يمكنك الانسحاب من الدراسة في أي وقت وسيتم حذف جميع البيانات الخاصة بك. ومع ذلك، إذا كنت ترغب في المشاركة، سوف تتم حماية الهوية الخاصة بك وجميع المعلومات الخاصة بك هو سري. وأنا لن استخدم اسمك الحقيقي وسيتم تخزين جميع البيانات الخاصة بك في جهازي الشخصي في مجلد مؤمن بكلمه سر. إذا كان لديك أي أسئلة أو استفسارات، يرجى الاتصال بي في +17244672764. يمكنك ترك رسالة صوتية وسأعود مكالمتك.

أما وقد قلت ذلك:

هل لديك أي أسئلة بخصوص هذه الدراسة أو استمارة الموافقة اللفظية؟

هل تفهم استمارة الموافقة اللفظية وتوافق على المشاركة في دراستي؟

يجب على المشاركين يستجيب بقوله:

نعم، أنا أفهم وافقت على المشاركة.

لا، أنا لا أوافق على المشاركة في الدراسة.

## Appendix G

### Written Consent Form in English



### WRITTEN CONSENT FORM

My name is Samah Elbelazi; I am a Libyan PhD Candidate in Indiana University of Pennsylvania/ Composition and TESOL major. Currently I am working on my dissertation about Libyan Muslim women's experience. My study aims to give voice to Libyan women. Therefore, I am seeking your participation.

Research on Muslim women shows a very clear absence of Libyan Muslim women's experiences from the world of academia and feminism. By conducting this research through having your voice in the work, you will give access to people in the English language community and Libyan Muslim female community to read your experiences. Also, the research results will help other educators in different majors to benefit from the study. For example, such methodology can be used in EFL writing classroom to empower students through their experiences and their voices. Also, the results will contribute to the growing body of research about Muslim women experience in the world. Moreover, by doing a poetic inquiry, my dissertation will give you voice by turning your narratives into poems. Finally, by your participation, we, Muslim Libyan women, state to the world that we exist.

The study includes interviews that will be recorded, transcribed and stored in password folders. The purpose of the interview is to collect information about different moments in your life. The initial interview can take different formats according to your preferences of time, place and media. We can do phone calls or face-to-face interviews. All the interviews will last for three hours in total depending on your time frame from March 2015 until December 2015. You have the option to choose whether the interviews will be conducted in English or Arabic or Libyan dialect. After, I finish all the interviews, I will transcribe all the data but first I need to translate the Arabic version into English.

Participation in the study is voluntary. You have ultimate freedom to decide whether you want to participate or not without any penalty. If you decide to withdraw from the study at any time, all the recoding data and transcription will be deleted. I will keep your identity unrecognized by not having your real name in the study and will not inform any of our mutual friends, or family members of your participation unless you choose to share your participation with them. However, your name will remain anonymous in the study. The information gained from the study might be published in academic journals, conferences and workshops and your identity will be kept confidential by using pseudonym in any journal publications of conference presentation.

If you are willing to participate, please send me an email to [s.a.elbelazi@iup.edu](mailto:s.a.elbelazi@iup.edu). I will send you two copies of the consent forms to sign, you keep one of them and I will keep the other copy. If you decide to withdraw from the study at any time, please contact me or my advisor: Dr. David Hanauer at [Hanauer@iup.edu](mailto:Hanauer@iup.edu).

By signing below I certify that I understand the purpose, the benefits and the potentials of the study.

Participant Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone 724-357-7730).**

**Interviewer:**

Samah Elbelazi, PhD Candidate  
English Department  
Composition and TESOL  
2170 Lazor street # 104  
Indiana, PA 15701  
Personal Phone: (724) 467-2764  
E-mail address: [ytsr@iup.edu](mailto:ytsr@iup.edu)

**Research Supervisor**

Dr. David Hanauer  
Professor in English Department  
215D Leonard Hall  
Composition and TESOL  
Phone number: 724-357-2274  
E-mail address: [hanauer@iup.edu](mailto:hanauer@iup.edu)

## Appendix H

### Written Consent Form in Arabic



INDIANA UNIVERSITY  
OF PENNSYLVANIA

#### نموذج الموافقة في بحث دراسي

السلام عليكم

اسمي سماح البلعزي، طالبة ليبية ادرس الدكتوراه في جامعة انديانا في بنسلفانيا قسم تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية والكتابة. حاليا اعمل على اطروحة الدكتوراه بعنوان "النظرية النسائية الليبية: استعمال الشعر في تجسيد تجربة المرأة الليبية المسلمة". دراستي تهدف لإعطاء صوت للمرأة الليبية. البحث العلمي حول النساء المسلمات يظهر غياب واضح جدا عن تجارب النساء المسلمات الليبية في الأوساط الأكاديمية والنسوية. عن طريق إجراء هذا البحث من خلال وجود صوتك في العمل، سوف تمنح متحدثي اللغة الإنجليزية والمجتمع الليبي و النسائي الإسلامي لقراءة خبراتك. أيضا، فإن نتائج البحوث تساعد غيرهم من المربين في التخصصات المختلفة للاستفادة من الدراسة. على سبيل المثال، هذه المنهجية يمكن استخدامها في كتابة المناهج الدراسية لتطوير اداء الطلاب من خلال خبراتهم وأصواتهم. أيضا، فإن النتائج تضاف الي الأبحاث المتزايدة بشأن تجربة النساء في العالم. وعلاوة على ذلك، عن طريق القيام بإجراء تحقيق الشعري، ورسالتي تعطيك صوت من خلال تحويل الروايات الخاصة بك الي قصائد. وأخيرا، من خلال مشاركتكم، نحن، المرأة الليبية المسلمة، نقول للعالم اننا موجودين.

وتشمل الدراسة على عدد من المقابلات التي سيتم تسجيلها وتخزينها في مجلدات محفوظة بكلمة سر. والغرض من المقابلة هو جمع المعلومات حول لحظات مختلفة في حياتك. المقابلة الأولية يمكن أن تأخذ أشكال مختلفة وفقا لتفضيلاتك من الزمان والمكان وسائل الاتصال. يمكننا أن نجري مكالمات عبر سكايب او مكالمات هاتفية أو وجها لوجه. سوف تستمر المقابلة لمدة ساعة تقريبا اعتمادا على إطار وقتك. لديك الخيار لاختيار ما إذا كان سيتم إجراء المقابلات باللغة الإنجليزية أو العربية أو اللهجة الليبية. وعند الانتهاء من جميع المقابلات، وسوف اقوم بنسخ جميع البيانات ولكن أولا أنا بحاجة لترجمة النسخة العربية إلى اللغة الإنجليزية.

وسوف اوفر كتاب الشعر شخصي. ربما سأطلب منك لاحقا تقديم صور من الأماكن عن ذكرياتك لضمها إلى قصائدك.

المشاركة في الدراسة طوعية. لديك الحرية المطلقة في اختيار ما إذا كنت تريد المشاركة أم لا. أيضا، يمكنك الانسحاب من الدراسة في أي وقت وسيتم حذف جميع البيانات. وسوف ا حافظ على هويتك بسبب عدم وجود اسمك الحقيقي في الدراسة ولن يعرف اي من الاصدقاء مشتركون، أو أفراد الأسرة من مشاركتكم ما لم تخبرهم. ومع ذلك، سيبقى اسمك المجهول في الدراسة. لاحقا سأقوم بنشر المعلومات المكتسبة من الدراسة في المجالات الأكاديمية والمؤتمرات وورش العمل وسيتم الاحتفاظ هويتك سرية باستخدام اسم مستعار في أي منشورات.

إذا كنت على استعداد للمشاركة، الرجاء ارسال لي رسالة بالبريد الالكتروني إلى [elazi@iup.edus.a.elb](mailto:elazi@iup.edus.a.elb). سأرسل لك نسختين من استمارات الموافقة على التوقيع، عليك أن تبقي واحد منهم عندك وسأبقي نسخة أخرى معي. إذا قررت الانسحاب من الدراسة في أي وقت، في [edu.Hanauer@iup](mailto:edu.Hanauer@iup). يرجى الاتصال بي او بمشرف البحث : الدكتور ديفيد

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