3

Silenced and Split

This chapter explains how two transnational forces suppressed voice after exit in the Libyan, Syrian, and Yemeni diasporas before the Arab Spring. The first mechanism is what I call *transnational repression*, meaning attempts by regimes to punish, deter, undermine, and silence activism in the diaspora. While Yemenis reported some fears of transnational repression in their communities, the analysis shows that this phenomenon most forcefully impacted the Libyan and Syrian diasporas. This was because as dissidents escaped the totalitarian terror wrought by Gaddafi and the Assads, regime assassins and informants followed closely behind. Diaspora members learned through their personal experiences, observations, and rumors that regimes had the capacity to inflict real harm on activists and their relatives at home. Corresponding fears of being surveilled, threatened, and punished for using voice had detrimental effects on transnational activism. Although a small group of exiles made their grievances public, as Chapter 2 describes, transnational repression made activism for the home-country a high-risk endeavor for ordinary diaspora members. Because similar repertoires of transnational repression produced congruent effects in the Libyan and Syrian diasporas, this chapter discusses these cases together.

The second factor hindering transnational activism is what I call *conflict transmission*, meaning the reproduction of home-country conflicts within diaspora groups through emigrants' biographical and identity-based ties. The transmission of conflicts to the diaspora reproduced sociopolitical fault lines within all three national communities abroad, creating tensions and factionalism. In particular, conflict transmission split anti-regime members, drawing lines between anti-Gaddafi reformers and hardline revolutionaries, Syrian Kurds and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood members, and secessionist and pro-unity Yemenis. In addition to hampering solidarity, it also depressed initiatives for charity and development because efforts to distribute resources at home were perceived as tainted by parochialism and corruption. In short,

71

conflict transmission, working in tandem with transnational repression in some cases, undermined anti-regime diasporas' capacities to mobilize for political change before the Arab Spring.

3.1 TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION

The Gaddafi and Assad regimes deterred dissent in the diaspora through their institutions, agents, and informant networks in different ways (see Table 3.1). By imposing costs on activists abroad and on relatives at home, the threats posed by transnational repression had numerous, interrelated effects. First, they propagated fear, mistrust, and division between conationals in the wider diaspora community. Second, they limited or foreclosed individuals' abilities to speak openly about home-country politics. Third, they relegated public anti-regime mobilization to what were considered to be "fringe" exile groups. Individuals seeking to protect their loved ones in, or their access to, the home-country were thereby obliged to abstain from criticizing the regime in word and deed. These effects significantly constrained Libyans' and Syrians' transnational activism and shaped the character of their organizations and associations abroad.

The most direct form of transnational repression – lethal retribution and attempted assassinations – impacted the Libyan diaspora in the United States and Britain the most. For Gaddafi, dissidents abroad were enemies of the state warranting elimination, and characteristic of his braggadocio, he did not keep

TABLE 3.1. *Typology of transnational repression*

Lethal retribution	The actual or attempted assassinations of dissidents abroad by regime agents or proxies.
Proxy punishment	The harassment, physical confinement, and/or bodily harm of diaspora members' relatives in the home-country as a means of information-gathering and retribution against dissidents abroad.
Threats	Verbal or written warnings directed at diaspora members, including the summoning of individuals by regime officials to their institutions for this purpose.
Surveillance	The gathering and sending of information about conationals to the state security apparatus by informant networks comprised of regime agents, loyalists, and coerced individuals.
Exile	The direct and indirect banishment of dissidents (or suspected dissidents) from the home-country, including when the threat of harm and imprisonment prevents activists from returning.
Withdrawing scholarships	The rescinding of students' state benefits for refusing to participate in regime-mandated actions or organizations abroad.

his violent intentions toward Libya's "stray dogs" a secret (Bassiouni 2013; Pargeter 2012). Vowing that the regime would "follow these people even if they go to the North Pole" (Hilsum 2012: 81), revolutionary committee thugs "were hunting down and killing 'enemies of revolution' at home and abroad" by 1980 (Wright 2012: 208). Moussa Koussa, Libya's Intelligence chief and ambassador in London at the time, was expelled that year by British authorities after telling *The Times of London* that two dissidents had been murdered in the United Kingdom and that more killings were planned. By 1984, the regime was planting bombs at London shops run by Libyans who were "selling newspapers critical of the Qaddafi government" (Nordheimer 1984). Even after Libyan activism for groups like the NFSL died down over time, retribution remained a constant threat. As Mohamed of London recounted, the murder of former NFSL activist Ali Abuzaid in 1995 shook the community to its core. Ali's daughter Huda found her father's body in the early morning in the family's grocery store, where he had been stabbed and mutilated. "He was killed in the most gruesome way," Mohamed winced.

It was obvious the murder was to send out a message. It wasn't a robbery because nothing was stolen. It wasn't a shooting because that would be too clean [for Gaddafi]. We realized in the community, it was an assassination. Because similar murders happened in Malta where somebody would be killed and pretty much decapitated and left in the street. To make a show of it, a bit like the Mexican cartels.

In the United States, at least one murder was attempted in Colorado by a hired gun. Interviewees also attributed a second murder of a Libyan American dissident in California to Gaddafi's henchmen (Hilsum 2012). Speaking of his longtime friend who was killed in mysterious circumstances while working at the gas station, Gaddor recalled, "The word among Libyans here is that Gaddafi killed him." The incident was intended to look like a robbery, but nothing was stolen. "That story is well-known here," Gaddor told me with a grimace.

The Gaddafi regime also reacted violently to protest events abroad. On April 17, 1984, a group of peaceful demonstrators gathered outside the Libyan embassy in London, dubbed the "People's Bureau," to protest the hangings of students back home. These protesters, numbering seventy-two individuals according to *The New York Times*, wore masks to protect their identities (Nordheimer 1984). Suddenly, at least one official from inside the embassy leaned out of the window and shot at the demonstrators in broad daylight, killing a policewoman named Yvonne Fletcher and injuring almost a dozen protesters. Mahmud, who had become active in the anti-Gaddafi National Democratic Party after coming to Britain, was shot in the leg, and the few photographs I could locate of this shocking event show him being carted off into an ambulance while hiding his face under a mask. After a days-long standoff between the Bureau and British forces, Libyan officials were expelled and the embassy was closed. The incident severed diplomatic ties between the regime

and the British government for fifteen years. At the same time, even the closure of the embassy did not end Gaddafi's campaign of assassinations; as journalist Lindsey Hilsum writes, "As many as thirty-five Libyans were murdered in Europe over the next few years" (2012: 81).

This incident had a chilling effect on the diaspora across Britain. *The New York Times* reported after that incident, demonstrators "scattered" and broke off contact with everyone except their most trusted friends. Hashem Benghalboun, a member of the Manchester-based anti-regime group the Libyan Constitutional Union, summed up the grim situation by stating, "Since the Qaddafi regime moved terrorism outside of Libya and to the streets of Europe, the dissidents have endured a life of tension" (Nordheimer 1984). He reported that his brother, Muhamad, survived three attempts on his life by Gaddafi's agents and remained under police protection. Because the Gaddafi regime was keeping tabs on students, the Libyan government also proceeded to cut off scholarship funds for any persons believed to be working against the regime.

The costs of speaking out against Gaddafi for high-profile dissidents were particularly high, and émigrés' stories resembled Hollywood thrillers. Renowned Libyan writer Hisham Matar describes in his award-winning memoir *The Return* (2016) how not even children were exempt from the regime's hunt for its enemies. After Matar's father, a member of the NFSL insurgent group, escaped from Libya, Hisham's younger brother Ziad was sent to study at a remote boarding school in the Swiss Alps. Matar writes, "For two days running, Ziad noticed a car parked on the path outside the school's main gate. It had in it four men. They had the long hair so typical of members of Qaddafi's Revolutionary Committees" (2016: 7–8). Ziad received a phone call from a friend of his father's warning him to flee. After convincing a teacher to drive him to the train station, the men trailed in pursuit. Following him onto the train, they threatened him in Arabic laced with a Tripolitanian accent, "Kid, you think you are a man? Then come here and show us" (Matar 2016: 9). Thankfully, Ziad made it home to Cairo with the help of a sympathetic conductor and his father's colleagues. On another occasion, Matar met his father, Jaballa, at the airport in Geneva. They passed "two men speaking Arabic with a perfect Libyan accent: 'So what does this Jaballa Matar look like anyway?' one of them asked the other" (Matar 2016: 10). Again, they evaded Gaddafi's men. But in March 1990, his father was kidnapped in Egypt by local authorities and rendered back to Libya. He spent years in Abu Salim prison before disappearing from the face of the earth.

Syrians did not report being threatened with violence in the United States or Britain, although assassinations occurred elsewhere. As Paul (1990: 5) writes, "The Syrian government has almost certainly been responsible for killing, injuring, restricting free speech, and otherwise violating the rights of persons outside of territory it directly controls" in the Middle East. According to Conduit (2019), the regime attempted to murder dissidents hiding in Iraq in the 1980s, but they were protected by the Iraqi *Mukhabarat* (Intelligence).

However, the Assad regime succeeded in killing several dissidents in Germany and Spain, as well as thirteen persons in Jordan in 1981 (Conduit 2019). In light of these murders, respondents attested to the terror they felt when embassy officials summoned them and verbally threatened them and their families. For these reasons, interviewees reported avoiding regime institutions whenever possible. A common sentiment expressed in our conversations was that being inside the embassy to renew one's passport or conduct some other business felt like being back home in Syria. Worried about being interrogated and kidnapped from the embassy, Tha'er, a Kurdish Syrian youth activist, reported that he even told his family to call the police if he did not contact them within two hours of his appointment.[1]

In addition to being at risk themselves, activism abroad put both Libyans' and Syrians' relatives at home in danger. While some families had already made the moral and strategic choice to mobilize openly in spite of these costs, the *proxy punishment* of loved ones typically remained a constant source of anxiety for exiles and non-exiles alike. Respondents who were active before the Arab Spring explained that their relatives had been summoned by the dreaded Intelligence and threatened because of their opposition activities in the diaspora. Monem, a Libyan American from California, attested that "My father was harassed consistently while I was abroad." Sondes, whose father founded the one-man anti-regime group Libya Watch in Manchester, recalled, "We'd get calls from my grandfather through the government, who were pressuring him 'tell your son to stop it.'" Others were punished through imposed separations, as when the Assad regime "issued a travel ban on all my family members," according to Dr. Ziadeh, who escaped persecution during the Damascus Spring by gaining refuge in the United States. Those who were not already "on the radar" of regimes had to keep it that way, as a British Libyan named Sarah recalled, or else their parents, grandparents, siblings, and cousins might suffer in their stead.

Libyan and Syrian respondents on both sides of the Atlantic widely also reported that informants were embedded in their communities for the purposes of surveillance; some were known regime loyalists, while others were perceived as having been coerced to inform in exchange for scholarships to study abroad. Tamim Baiou, a Libyan American who was not politically active before the revolution, attested that "we knew that we were being watched and reports were sent on us." When Gaddafi's security apparatus was raided during the fall of Tripoli in 2011, this was confirmed; Tamim obtained his Intelligence file from a friend and recalled that it included "a report about all the details about my wedding" that had taken place years before in California. It was incidents

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[1] Gualtieri (2009: 162) mentions in her work on Syrian immigration that "under the current president of Syria, Bashar al-Asad, there is a new Ministry of Expatriates." Given that infiltration and repressive social controls permeated every aspect of Syrian governance at home and in the *mahjar*, this ministry undoubtedly took up surveillance of the diaspora as part of its mission.

like these that proved that fear of widespread surveillance was "not paranoia," as Hussam Ayloush, a Syrian American activist, emphasized. When his parents were told by officials in Syria that Hussam should stop going to his local mosque in Texas because anti-regime persons were in attendance there, he knew that "one of their informants was either at the mosque or at the college." Moreover, Syrians who had been summoned to the London embassy recalled that they had been questioned over matters that could have only become known to officials through local informants.

The regime also repressed the diaspora through their gatekeeping functions, as when respondents were forced into permanent exile *after* emigrating to the United States and Britain for speaking out, or even for being perceived simply as too pro-democracy. Some interviewees found themselves blacklisted after protesting or participating in covert anti-regime meetings abroad, meaning that returning home would likely result in being seized at the airport and imprisoned. Assia attested that after her father and his friend attended an NFSL meeting in the United States, her father's friend "returned to Libya and was jailed immediately" as a result of having been informed upon; her father was forced into exile thereafter. The regimes also held sway over students on state-sponsored scholarships, as when Libyan officials coerced students to demonstrate in support of Gaddafi during his speech at the United Nations in 2009 by threatening to withdraw their scholarships (Hill 2011).

3.1.1 Fear and Fragmentation

The threat of transnational repression spread fear, mistrust, and division because fraternizing with the "wrong" Libyan or Syrian could pose a serious danger. Fear was particularly pervasive among Libyan dissidents since exiles had been targeted directly in the past. Assia, the daughter of an NFSL activist, recalled ruefully, "We were very distrustful of Libyans we didn't know. We didn't *mingle* with Libyans we didn't know, and my mom would tell us, don't *talk* to a Libyan you don't know because you don't know their alliance." She continued, "If we heard Libyans speaking in the US and we don't know you, we don't talk to you. Can't risk that. It was a real danger." Respondents also concealed their Libyan identities from others out of fear. M., another NFSL descendant, described the situation:

We couldn't really say that we were Libyan a lot of the time, for safety precautions. So my parents were always on their toes, always looking over their shoulders, *who could that be? Is that somebody that we trust?* So when you meet another Arab, they never said that they were from Libya. They said that they were from Egypt or Tunisia, you know, so that way it doesn't put us in any kind of unsafe situation.

Adam from Virginia also recalled that when he was very young, "My dad would pull us aside and be like, look, if anyone asks you where you're from, say you're from Jordan."

The threats posed by the regime meant that few Libyans felt safe enough to be open in their opposition, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s when murders in Britain were more common. Those who did so were few in number, and they expected retribution for their troubles. Khaled, a second-generation exile whose father was a wanted man, recalled that the fear of being kidnapped or harmed by Gaddafi's men was "really at the forefront of our lives." His father used an alias abroad, and he and his siblings were instructed never to use their dad's real name in public. "There was no way around it for us," Khaled explained, describing how the children of the opposition had to live day to day with the assumption that Gaddafi's men could be waiting around the corner. Libyan American Ahmed echoed this experience, recalling that "If a Libyan just showed up out of the blue without an introduction from some trusted person, it was always viewed with suspicion." Out of fear of proxy punishment, dissidents like Nagi, who lived for many years in Britain, "kept everything incognito. When we did these demonstrations, we had these masks on. We didn't show our faces. The problem we had is not for ourselves, but for our families who were [in Libya] – because those are the tactics."

NFSL activists and their descendants additionally attested that the possibility of lethal retribution also affected where they settled. Heba, who was raised by exiles, reiterated just how fearful their family was of strange Libyans:

We lived in Michigan for a short time, and I remember my parents packing up one time in the middle of the night because an "antenna" had moved in next door. *Antennas* – that's what we called a Libyan spy. *Literally* in the middle of the night, we got picked up and stayed with some friends for a few days until we found a different place to live.

Problems like these motivated some NFSL dissidents to move together to the same neighborhood in Lexington, Kentucky; besides an affordable cost of living, there was safety in numbers. By residing together "in the middle of nowhere, [with] just white people," according to Khaled, the community could more easily identify threats and warn each other about the presence of strangers, should they come knocking. Activist Dr. Mohamed Abdul Malek, founder of Libya Watch, likewise reported that every morning he would ask his children to wait inside while he checked the underside of his car for bombs. He said, "I think that was being overcautious, but it is something that anyone, *any* Libyan, would *expect* from Gaddafi."[2]

Libyans and Syrians who were not part of dissident families reported experiencing the same anxieties. Nebal, a Syrian studying in London, explained that "the regime made us fear each other because you don't know *who* works for

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[2] Mohamed was not alone in being concerned about car bombings. Writer Hisham Matar (2016: 6–7) describes that his father would do the same: "Before getting into the car, he would ask us to stand well away. He would go down on his knees and look under the chassis, cup in his hands and peek through the windows for any sign of wiring. Men like him had been shot in train stations and cafes, their cars blown up."

the regime. Just saying hi to the old opposition is a crime." Malik, a member of a London-based exiled Syrian family, remarked,

Those who used to visit Syria regularly didn't want to associate themselves too closely with those who didn't in case the authorities found out and they get arrested in the airport or they get hassled.

Niz, a Libyan doctor from Cardiff, Wales, recalled that although his childhood memories of being around other Libyans were good ones, he developed a sense of unease and caution around community members as he grew older.

I had in me a paranoia of Libyans for fear of the regime's long tentacles, reaching out to the UK. You hear of informants, you hear of the foreign services and security services of Gaddafi being in different parts of the world. I certainly don't think it was a point *over*emphasized to us by our parents, but along the way I fell in line with the notion that Gaddafi was a bad person, and Gaddafi had bad people working for him, and that these bad people were keeping an eye on us abroad, and that I needed to be careful. I assimilated a lot of information along the way with news of assassinations abroad, news of Libyan family friends who had been killed, the realization that there were families out of Libya who weren't in the same situation as us – who were out of Libya for reasons of their personal safety.

Sarah, a British Libyan whose parents were deeply concerned about regime informants, developed a similar sense of fear even though, as she recalled, "In the early '80s, my dad just came here for work and it wasn't for political reasons. We lived outside of central London in order to remain independent, not get involved in politics because we'd always go back to Libya and my dad had family there." Because of their travels back and forth, it was imperative for Sarah and her family to distance themselves from anyone affiliated with Libyan politics, dissidents and potential regime agents alike. Sarah continued,

If you saw a Libyan on the street, you would cross over. You would never just talk to somebody you didn't know [or] make independent Libyan friends. It was always keep your head down, because you want to protect your family in Libya and you want to go back to Libya. You don't want to be on a watchlist, you don't want to be in anyone's peripheral vision on their radar. It was always understood that we're here for work or education and then we'll go back to Libya. So you'd just hang out with Libyans that you know – family friends, people that my parents knew from back in Libya and their children. You wouldn't make *independent* Libyan friends.

Just as longtime diaspora members were fearful of consorting with strangers, respondents reported that temporary migrants and students on scholarships were likewise terrified to be affiliated with residents. Because permanent residency abroad was often equated with being in political exile, some exiles attested to avoiding migrants out of concern that they would incriminate the newcomers. Dr. Abdul Malek of Libya Watch explained,

I tried to keep away from the Libyan officials and the students – unless they were somebody you really know from back home already. Otherwise, we don't mix.

Because if you have somebody coming to study in the UK and mixes with any of us who are the people who are really against Gaddafi, when they go back, they will be in trouble.

Likewise, Firas, a Syrian student in California, echoed this claim: "You stay away from the classic opposition because you know somebody is observing them!" The only way to overcome this estrangement, according to Sarah, the British Libyan mentioned above, was to do what she called a "background check." She recalled one incident that took place during her time at university:

People were like "I know this Libyan guy, I want to introduce him to you." [But] we were both very wary of each other. Our friends didn't understand; they were so keen to introduce us. But then it turned out that our moms knew each other. I told my mom what his surname was and she said "oh yes, I know his uncle," and he did the same thing, and then we both found out that the other was okay. You always did a background check.

This vetting system was imperfect, but it was often the only option for determining who to trust. As a result, as scholar Alice Alunni writes,

The mistrust and suspiciousness among Libyans abroad resulted in relatively isolated and small networks of people tied by political ideology and/or kinship. This prevented the establishment of a diasporic public space where all Libyans could come together in the host countries to openly and freely 'imagine' their nation and discuss its characters collectively, something that should be facilitated by … the ability to communicate more easily and freely. (2019: 254)

This was also true for the Syrians, since – even if they did not fear for their personal safety – anti-regime diaspora members remained deeply concerned that one wrong move could put their relatives in danger.

3.1.2 Muted Voice

As suggested in the testimonials above, the threats posed by transnational repression constrained voice, literally and figuratively, in a number of ways. As a Syrian American speaking at a fundraising event I attended in late 2011 explained to the audience, "You would think that America's this free society, with freedom of speech, and we're comfortable speaking on things, but it has real ramifications back home." A young immigrant named Assad, who came to London from Libya to seek employment, affirmed this problem. Despite his opposition to the regime, when being around "other Arabs or other Libyans – the rare time I would come across them – I just wouldn't discuss it. Because you didn't know who you were dealing with." Hamid, a second-generation Libyan exile from Missouri, reported that broaching the subject of Gaddafi with non-exiled youth would be quickly shut down. "When we met Libyans, a lot of them were scared," he told me. "If I say hey, 'Gaddafi-this,' everybody was like, 'shut the hell up. I can't even hang around with you!' They're here in the US and they didn't even have free speech."

The limits imposed on diaspora members' speech reinforced the need to keep community events apolitical. Rafif, a Syrian American living in the Washington, DC, area, affirmed that the presence of informant networks in the community rendered gatherings into "shallow social events." Gaddor, co-founder of the Libyan Association of Southern California, remarked that rumors about who was informing for the regime made others "uncomfortable. Some people actually used to come to the Association and then decided not to because of these individuals." Ayman, a doctor who had settled in Manchester prior to the revolution, also affirmed that

[Pro-regime Syrians] would take part in our community affairs and gala dinners, but we would never have the confidence or relaxation to speak in front of them *openly* about anything to do with the regime. For fear for ourselves, because we were going regularly back home, or for our family back home.

Furthermore, unlike the Gaddafi regime, the Assad government sponsored Syrian organizations and social clubs that were understood as part of the regime's infrastructure of control. Sarab, an activist based in New York, attested that "most of the Syrian-associated organizations or entities had some sort of close connection with the embassy." Even purportedly apolitical humanitarian associations, such as the Syrian American and Syrian British medical societies, were not perceived by respondents as neutral or independent. Hasan, a second-generation exile in London, attested that these organizations "were based around what the *regime* wanted. You couldn't have an independent community of the regime." Kenan, a Syrian American activist, likewise reported that no organization "could operate independently of the Syrian government," and as a result, "we had no civil society."

Transnational repression continued to hinder mobilization during the so-called Damascus Spring in the early 2000s. Although the Syrian American Council (SAC) was founded in 2005 to support Syrian civil society and was not an anti-regime group by any means, Hussam recalled that recruitment into the organization was extremely difficult due to the threats posed by transnational repression. He explained,

In 2005, I was approached by a few Syrian Americans who I knew, mentioning to me that there's a new organization that was started called Syrian American Council. I can tell you it [was] a secretive process – not something they announced in the media or on Facebook, because there's so much fear that no one wanted to be associated with that publicly. [Only] through trusted sources, word of mouth, will they tell you about this meeting. On the day when [the first SAC meeting was held] somewhere in Orange County, that day I was traveling, but I told them you have my support. And I tried contacting a few people to encourage them to be part of it. *Not a single person that I know* who I contacted agreed to. The gathering was so small, maybe ten to twenty. And it didn't go anywhere, because everyone was afraid to even be part of something. But that's the irony of things. It was almost impossible to get a group of people to form a chapter in 2005 and '06 and '07 and '08. Every time they talked to people, people didn't

want to do it because they understood the consequence would've been very severe if you were visiting Syria or they might visit your family members in Syria.

The regime also punished Dr. Radwan Ziadeh, who had traveled from Syria to Chicago to give a speech at SAC's opening conference in 2005. Dr. Ziadeh reported that after returning to Syria, "I was interrogated by the security forces and been banned from traveling because of my traveling into Chicago to participate." (As referenced in Chapter 2, Dr. Ziadeh was forced to escape soon after to the United States.) SAC was the only organization in either the United States or Britain that attempted to mobilize the Syrian diaspora for both immigrant empowerment and political liberalization in the home-country, but it remained largely memberless and dormant before the 2011 revolution.

For some Libyans, the era of Saif al-Islam's purported reforms in Libya and a decline in known murders of dissidents abroad in the 2000s lessened the sense of threat. Other respondents, however, felt *less* safe, or just as unsafe, as they had before. During this thaw in Western relations with Libya, the United States and Britain both partnered with Gaddafi to render former members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group to Libya for interrogation and torture, just as Egyptian secret services had done with Hisham Matar's father in the previous decade. The regime also leveled accusations of terrorism against its opponents to pressure Western governments to give up wanted refugees, including against Ashur Shamis, a peaceful activist and refugee residing in London.

The organizers of regular demonstrations, whether in Manchester or New York, also recalled that participation in such events remained sparse during the era of Saif's so-called reforms. Ahmed and Khaled reported that when they went to New York in 2009 to protest Gaddafi's UN appearance, many of them – including Ahmed himself – covered their faces with masks, scarves, and sunglasses for fear of being identified and incriminating their families back home. Acting with the same caution as London protesters had done in 1984, past incidents of regime violence remained at the forefront of activists' minds. As Monem attested, "*everything* is possible. You can't trust a regime like that."

The public meeting of Libyan opposition members in London from across the diaspora in 2005 also reinforced, rather than assuaged, concerns about regime surveillance. Sarah recalled that after making friends with a "normal" Libyan named Ahmed, she invited him and his family to a family celebration at their home. But after telling her parents about the invitation,

a few days later, my mom said, "Is there any way politely to un-invite them?" It turns out that [Ahmed's parents] were in town because there was a big opposition conference going on, and my parents were paranoid that everyone's being followed. So you'd think that everything is more open at this time, but no. For sure, people *were* being followed during the opposition conference. Even though the situation wasn't as bad as the '90s, there were always reminders [that little had changed].

Characteristic of the regime's paranoia, the social groups formed by community members also came under suspicion. Zakia, who founded the Libyan

Women's Association in Manchester in 2003, attested that becoming a public face of this nonpolitical "society" put her family at risk back home in Benghazi. She said,

I thought, because it's a *social* organization, you know, it's not about politics, I wrote my name and gave a [local] talk. So everyone knows me in Manchester. But at that time, my brother-in-law phoned me from Libya and said *Zakia, what you did do*? He said the *Mukhabarat* [Intelligence] come to me and said "your sister-in-law made a group which appears like a social group, but inside we *believe* it's a political group against Gaddafi."

Accordingly, Zakia refused an invitation to participate in the 2005 conference over fears that the regime "will go after my parents."

The regimes also continued to hold sway over Libyan and Syrian students through their state-sponsored scholarships. Zakia from Manchester attested, "Those who come to study from Libya, they're scared to contact us if they are a relative. Because they sign a paper there that says if you want to come to study, you agree that 'I will not contact my sister or my brother-in-law when I go' – like a contract." By threatening to withdraw their scholarships, Libyan officials paid for and coerced students to demonstrate in support of Gaddafi during his appearance at the United Nations in 2009 (Hill 2011). So just as the regime forced the masses in Tripoli to perform their loyalty, migrants were forced to do the same.

For all of these reasons, being "publicly anti-regime was fringe," as Syrian American Sarab from New York recalled. Abdullah, a Syrian who became active after moving to Boston in 2008, explained that only "a few people, using aliases [online], were comfortable talking about things that no one dared to otherwise." While small groups of Kurdish Syrian and Arab Syrian exiles in London periodically held protests, these events were considered to be high-risk because Syrian officials filmed the demonstrators and blacklisted those who were not already in exile, preventing participants from returning home. These fears were realized in some cases. When one first-generation Kurdish Syrian youth named Tha'er found out through his contacts at home that he was wanted by the regime for participating in a protest outside the London embassy, he was forced to remain in Britain thereafter.

These threats plagued Libyan commemorative demonstrations as well. Dr. Abdul Malek's daughter Sondes mused, "We'd done demonstrations for Libya in the past, but they always had limited numbers because of fear of what the regime would do. A lot of the time, people who went to these demos would wear masks for fear of what would happen to their family members if they were recognized." Hamid reported that his father and some other members of the US-based Libyan Human Rights Commission, a small group active in the mid-1990s, used aliases in the media "because they were scared for their family back home." Accordingly, anti-regime movements remained small and estranged from the broader community. Mohamed S. of London lamented that because "everyone was [so] scared, they got no support."

The reproduction of repression abroad meant that diaspora activists were unable to fully deploy their resources and exploit their political opportunities to wield voice after exit. Until the unthinkable (Kurzman 2004) occurred in 2011, the majority of anti-regime members in the diaspora remained silent in their views. Dissent networks remained isolated, and no member-driven organizations existed in the United States or Britain.

3.1.3 Weak Threats from the Yemeni Regime Abroad

For the Yemenis, a relatively weak authoritarian regime at home meant that the anti-regime diaspora felt a comparatively weak sense of threat abroad, although concerns about transnational repression and the hazards of surveillance were not entirely absent. According to Halliday (2010[1992]: 142), Yemeni authorities engaged in the "monitoring of exiles' political loyalties," and several pro-secessionist southerners reported the fear of being exiled because of their activism. Many of those interviewed also attested that embassy officials effectively meddled in the affairs of the diaspora and attempted to undermine or co-opt organizing efforts. Ragih, a community leader in Sandwell, mentioned that the Yemeni government had paid people to demonstrate on behalf of Saleh in London, providing for their travel and giving them sandwiches and *qat*, a tobacco-like leaf that is chewed recreationally in Yemen (and was legal in Britain at the time). Additionally, another respondent in northern California accused their local consulate of undermining the work of the American Association of Yemeni Scientists and Professionals by meddling in its affairs. While I could not independently verify these accusations, it appeared to be a common belief that the Saleh regime officials acted as a saboteur in the community from behind the scenes.

Unlike their Libyan and Syrian counterparts, however, none of the southern anti-regime Yemeni activists in Britain reported hiding their faces or their identities during protests or in petitions. This suggests that while Yemen's weak authoritarian regime attempted to surveil and intimidate the diaspora, it lacked the necessary capacity to enforce compliance and deter mobilization. Others believed or knew that they had been surveilled but believed that this was more of a distraction than an actual threat. For example, Hanna Omar of the US-based South Yemeni American Association recalled,

Constantly, *constantly* in our rallies, we would have one, three, four pro-Ali Abdullah Saleh [guys] coming in and seeing what we're doing, coming to our meetings. It was just something we had to live with. The only thing I didn't like about that is that it would take away the focus on what we were doing. Our own activists [would] concentrate on, well, this guy is pro-Saleh and what are we going to do about him? And then finally we were just like, it doesn't matter. *There's nothing to hide*. Everybody's out here, everybody's face is out in the open, everybody's names are out in the open. It's not like we're going to hide this from the government there. So it doesn't matter who's pro, who's not. Let's just focus on our main goal and that's it. That, of course, was easier said than done.

Additionally, most respondents did not take the threat of exile seriously, arguing that their families at home lived in rural, tribal areas largely outside of the regime's jurisdiction, or that they could bribe their way back into Yemen were there to be a problem at the airport.

3.2 CONFLICT TRANSMISSION

While transnational repression deterred voice in the Libyan and Syrian communities, *conflict transmission*, which was caused by the reproduction of divisive homeland conflicts in the diaspora, plagued community organizing in all three national communities across the United States and Britain. As conflicts and mistrust of politics traveled abroad through emigration and were inherited by 1.5- and second-generation youth, home-country fights divided conationals and undermined their mobilization potential. These divisions constrained the formation of movements for regime change and depressed initiatives for charity and development, even when organizers intended for these events to be apolitical affairs.

3.2.1 Factionalism during Libya's Era of "Reform"

After years of crippling economic sanctions and the fall of the Soviet Union, Gaddafi's anti-Western façade crumbled. As the Clinton administration initiated secret talks with the regime, Gaddafi began to settle his international debts by agreeing to pay settlements to the victims of its terrorist attacks, including the 1988 Lockerbie bombing. The subsequent attacks of September 11, 2001, also worked in the regime's favor. After the invasion of Iraq by the US-led coalition in 2003, Gaddafi declared himself an ally in George W. Bush's so-called War on Terror and agreed to give up Libya's weapons of mass destruction. Libya was able to reopen its embassies and consulates, and by 2004, Prime Minister Tony Blair was flashing a toothy grin for the media while shaking Gaddafi's hand.

As Saif al-Islam made gestures of goodwill, some regime opponents in the diaspora decided to take the opportunity to reconnect with their homeland. For Mohamed Shaban in London, "The first trip I and the family made to Libya was around 2004. That was partly because Saif was trying to be open, trying to attract Libyan talent back to Libya, so we started visiting, dipping our feet back in." Adam of Virginia also recalled that Saif sent some of "his people" to Los Angeles to coax the second generation to meet with regime representatives in 2010. Adam attested that Saif's reforms appeared to be the only plausible inroad to help the homeland at the time.

I looked at it like, let's see what they have to offer. I'm willing to sit at the table and talk. At the end of the day, it's a free trip to LA. So, I came out and I sat with [Saif's right-hand man] and I told him, look, I know you're part of the Gaddafi family. I don't care.

My dad is anti-Gaddafi, I have best friends that are anti-Gaddafi. That's not what I'm looking at. You said you want to open up a window, a door for us to help the Libyan youth, I'm there. And I told him about a [Libyan] scholarship fund that I started [here in the US]. He loved that idea.

A Washington, DC-based exile named Fadel explained, "That was a big debate – because is my problem the regime's policies, or the regime itself? Can I work to change the regime's behavior, or I just have to work until I get rid of the head?" For Fadel, dialogue seemed like a logical pathway to liberalization.

Isolation is better for dictators. They love it because they just can live and control their own people, and you don't have any leverage over them. Look at North Korea! So I was against the isolation. I was more for constructive engagement, to make a change. So that was part of the divergence in thinking about can I make real change – if the regime has five thousand political prisoners, if I can get five hundred out, is that good? Or is it five thousand or nobody? Ask for [Gaddafi's] head, or nothing else?

Likewise, the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood-in-exile represented by Dr. Abdul Malek in Manchester joined the reformist camp out of what he characterized as "pragmatism." He explained that during this time, "Gaddafi was a fact of life" and "if we can get something for the people and at the same time Gaddafi is still there, then we will work on that. That is why we had dialogues with Saif and others in the government hoping that we could carry out some serious reforms in Libya. But the opposition did not see that."

Saif's efforts to woo Libyans back home and incorporate them into the reform process divided the dissident community. Some came to believe that the campaign was a complete shill, and a dangerous one at that. Amr Ben Halim, the son of a prominent political figure from the time of King Idris, recalled,

A lot of us thought that there was some hope in [Saif's reforms] because we never hoped it was possible to remove Gaddafi from power. He was so entrenched, he was so pervasive, that the idea of him being removed from power in a peaceful way or normal way was just not possible. Clearly, his son is preparing himself, so let's see what can be done with the son. He speaks the right language, he says the right things. But then after the fact, over time, we found out that it was not legitimate. It was really more a manipulation that allowed him to the point where he was set to take over. He had some very bad dictatorial instincts that he would hide when he would meet the foreign press, the foreign politicians. But when he came back here [to Libya], he was a very brutal kind of person, very much in his father's mold.

Others condemned the normalization of relations with Gaddafi without preconditions for human rights reforms. Hamid, a young activist who had grown up in exile in the United States and whose relatives had been executed by the regime, explained that he and his friends remained strongly opposed to Saif's half-hearted measures. "We always tried to educate the other Libyans [about] what was really happening," he remembered. "We were like, no, you *can't* side with the devil. Our parents and our great grandparents are expecting

us to carry this torch." Adam attested that his trip to LA estranged him from others in the exile community. "When I came back to Virginia and called up a few friends and told them what had happened, I got a lot of negative feedback," he said. "Some people cut me off completely. Someone went as far as to say that's blood money that's on your hands. Hold on, blood money from who? Who did I kill? Who died because I went to LA? They were like, no, because you sat down at the same table."

Owing to conflict transmission, anti-regime diaspora members from Libya were deeply divided. Split over whether to negotiate directly with the regime for reform or remain steadfast in demanding that the regime pay for its crimes, the eve of the 2011 revolution was a time of strong disagreement among those few who were working for change in Libya.

3.2.2 Syrian Divisions

Conflict transmission was likewise a problem for Syrian activists in exile. Though Syrian Kurds and Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated activists shared deep histories of repression, these groups remained split internally and with one another over the solution to their common foe.[3] As a persecuted ethno-religious minority facing region-wide threats of ethnic cleansing, Kurdish activists viewed secession and the establishment of an independent Kurdish state as the solution to regime repression. Arabs with Muslim Brotherhood affiliations, on the other hand, looked toward a political transition that would give their representatives and the Sunni majority a dominant role in government. Regime opponents were therefore divided in significant ways over their goals such that they not only opposed the regime, but each another as well.

Furthermore, second-generation-exile activists were also highly discontented with the opposition politics of their elders.[4] The Syrian Justice and Development Party, for example, sought to distance itself from what co-founder Malik al-Abdeh described as an outmoded opposition. "The Muslim Brotherhood," Malik explained, "are not really effective, like old fogies. They're not doing anything. We need[ed] to do something to re-galvanize the opposition scene. And we need to have young people involved. It's a new generation." However, this stance isolated them in the opposition community due to a sense of competition and threat from other groups.

We came under a lot of pressure from the Brotherhood because they saw us as a threat, [and] that we're going to draw away their youth to us. And the whole point of the

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[3] Raphaël Lefèvre's important book *Ashes of Hama* (2013) describes in detail how the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood was and continues today to be factionalized by city of origin, anti-regime strategy, and leadership. See also Dara Conduit's work (2019) for more details on intra-Brotherhood fissures.

[4] I was told that the "elder"-led movements also included "classic" communist opposition groups based primarily in France.

Movement for Justice and Development was to have some sort of classic-liberal party, which is pro-business, free market, that isn't Islamist. We also came under fire from a lot of these old communists who thought, who are these new kids on the block? A lot of them thought we were like a Trojan horse for the Muslim Brotherhood, which wasn't true. And funny enough, the Muslim Brotherhood thought we were a Trojan horse for *another* Muslim Brotherhood breakaway faction. We couldn't please anybody!

Thus, organizing done independently of established factions was met with suspicion and criticism by many older exiles and elites.

As a result of conflict transmission, various members of the community were constantly accused of trying to dominate the opposition on behalf of the Brotherhood regardless of whether they were personally affiliated with the movement or not.[5] As such, the anti-regime movement as a whole suffered from a significant degree of mistrust about who-was-who and working-for-whom, as well as splits with Syrian Kurds who had lost faith that they could ever attain freedom in the Syrian Arab Republic.

3.2.3 Yemeni Divisions

Conflict transmission hindered the transnational mobilization of the Yemeni diaspora before the Arab Spring in several ways. As referenced in the previous chapter, "Yemenis have divided along fractures imported from their home country" (Halliday 2010[1992]: xiv) in the diaspora since their first major wave of emigration to the United States and Britain in the 1880s. Because anti-regime activism was dominated by calls for southern autonomy following the surge in secessionist activism and regime repression in 2007, opposition to the Saleh regime became a partisan issue that divided Yemenis along pro- and anti-unity lines.

Interviewees also reported being generally mistrustful of community elites with political ties to the homeland due to cronyism, corruption, and a general state of institutional dysfunction in Yemen. Yemenis from North Yemen were divided by political party and the issue of meddling by Saudi Arabia. Halliday (2010[1992]: 56) likewise observed that "division between the mainstream of the community and a newer grouping derived from *Al-Islah* (Reform), a party in Yemen itself which received support from Saudi Arabia and was propagating an Islamist politics," was prominent in British Yemeni communities by the early 1990s. As a result, many of the youth interested in mobilizing their communities before the Arab Spring perceived community elites as part of a corrupt

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[5] Lefèvre (2013: 189) argues that such accusations are also due partly to the mischaracterizations made by outsiders in their discussions of exiled Islamist groups; he writes, "The landscape of political Islam has become highly heterogeneous and complex since the Brotherhood was forced out of Syria in the early 1980s. Many opposition figures classified as 'Islamists' . . . actually do not belong to the *Ikhwan* and are even personally and politically hostile to them, if not ideologically so."

system who were highly suspect and incapable of promoting genuine social change. This suspicion extended to *any* person associated with home-country politics writ large. Because being associated with politics in the Yemeni diaspora was inherently problematic, the mobilization efforts of non-secessionists were focused on immigrant empowerment, such as literacy, in a "nonpolitical" way.

The Yemeni Community Associations (YCAs) in Britain, for example, had been impacted by authoritarianism in Yemen since their founding. In the Liverpool and Birmingham YCAs, respondents claimed that pro-Saleh individuals had corrupted the organizations and rendered them impotent to help their local communities. Respondents viewed the YCA in Liverpool, for example, as an insular crony organization that provided no benefits to its constituents because of its regime-like functioning. Omar Mashjari, a Liverpudlian youth, explained,

They'd been a corrupt and incompetent body for a long time. They never actually *did* anything. They never hosted any organizations, any dialogues, any parties whatsoever. They host elections once every ten years. A ten-year term! Most of them supported Ali [Abdullah Saleh].[6]

Respondents had similar complaints about the YCA in Birmingham. Several interviewees involved in the leadership confirmed that there had been no elections held there before 2007, and that the former president had run the organization like an autocrat. Nageeb, the subsequent head of the YCA, recalled of this period that "They'd pretend to have elections and cancel them at the last minute." He argued that the former heads had personal relationships with Saleh and that the Yemeni government helped to fund a legal case for the old leadership to retain the property after they ran the organization into the ground (which they eventually lost in court). Nageeb assumed leadership of the Birmingham YCA in 2007 to reform the organization and immediately set about instituting elections every two years. However, he lamented that they were still far from being the fully functional organization that their community members were calling for.

Furthermore, constant fighting between North and South Yemen, especially during the civil war of 1994, led to antagonisms between these communities and a separation of their organizations. As Halliday (2010[1992]: xi) writes, "On a visit to Birmingham in October 2007, I was particularly struck by the chasm between the two, each with their own buildings and social centres – the Northerners in one part of town, the Southerners in another." I observed the ramifications of this division myself in 2012. According to interviewees on

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[6] At Omar's encouragement, I interviewed the chairman of the YCA in Liverpool named Abdul Alkanshali. He did not deny being affiliated with Saleh, and he concurred that the organization had significant solvency problems.

all sides of this dispute, the YCA in Birmingham was plagued by a feud with southern members over the use of the building. Nageeb explained,

A lot of the friction, the problems, that have happened between the Yemeni Community Association and the separatists were around that building, around that resource. No Yemeni woman in the last ten, fifteen years [had seen the inside of that building]. We were trying to change all of that but we came across so much opposition from those people.

"Those people" he was referring to were southerners who had become vehement supporters of separation in 2007. On the other hand, Ali, one of the outspoken leaders of the southern secessionists in Birmingham during this period, argued that northern and corrupt Al-Islah Party–affiliated elites[7] controlled the YCA and the local Amaneh Center, a community institution that served the wider Muslim community. Ali described a crisis in 2010 when "they," referring to the northern YCA leadership, "caged up" the South Yemeni building. Southern Yemenis had to break down the bars with the help of the police. "That's the only thing that we had left [and] they stole it," he decried, adding, "The same ideology they use in Yemen, they implement it *here*, in the UK." While Nageeb felt that the YCA should be used for everyone and that he had been wrongly slandered as a northern "Islahi," Ali felt that the pro-unity Yemenis were attempting to appropriate what little resources the southerners had left.

Haashim, Nageeb's successor and head of the YCA in Birmingham at the time of my fieldwork in 2012, attested that these forms of conflict transmission had made it very difficult to provide services for the community. He believed that southerners were "blaming the unity of Yemen for all of the problems" that had been plaguing Yemen for decades. But Haashim also sympathized with the southern people "who feel let down." If the community was not so divided over political problems in Yemen, he explained, "we would have been able to build a strong institution." Instead, he lamented, "We at the YCA haven't done nothing, even though we [Yemenis] are the oldest immigrant community in Britain."

Because community organizers perceived that home-country politics had polluted diaspora organizations, and community cohesion more generally, leaders credited successful civic efforts with the firm dissociation of their initiatives from politics. The YCA in Sandwell was widely cited by respondents across England as a counterexample to the dysfunctional associations in Liverpool and Birmingham because their leaders had successfully *insulated* their organization from politics. Saleh, an organizer who grew up in the Sandwell Yemeni community, reported getting together with his friends in the 1980s to try to "do something about the situation about the Yemeni diaspora."

[7] Al-Islah is Yemen's ("reform") opposition party and includes the Yemeni branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. For more detailed analysis of the Islah party, see Schwedler (2006).

They felt that because their parents came from rural areas with little education, the Yemeni children were at a huge disadvantage in terms of their socioeconomic status, education, and potential for social mobility. He said, "We knew as a community that we weren't doing well." Saleh further explained,

The politics of Yemen, north and south – that got in the way. After unification, we managed to unify our efforts in the UK. And the younger generation was saying, you know what, leave the politics aside, the UK is our home. Yemen is our beloved and cherished heritage, but we need to get things right here, our home, and help set up something that will establish ourselves as a successful community. We set up the YCA to support Yemenis here with *the principle of no politics*, and that's been a very successful ingredient in moving us forward. The benefit has meant that we have now been able to deal with the challenges that the community has faced – social, education, religious, health, recreational. All of the things you expect a community [association] to address.

These sentiments were echoed by Afraf and Ragih, a wife-and-husband team who ran the YCA in Sandwell in 2012. While Ragih was from the South, he attested that they maintained the association as a strictly nonpolitical organization because of the turmoil surrounding the issue of southern secession. Even celebrations of national Yemeni holidays, such as Unity Day, were banned within the Sandwell YCA because commemorations of the 1990 unification process were controversial to many southerners. Like Saleh, Afraf and Ragih credited their association's success in implementing social welfare programs to their strict dissociation from home-country politics. They acknowledged that politics were discussed in the Center, particularly during the once-weekly permitted qat chews. However, members were banned from distributing political materials or hosting political gatherings on-site. In order to combat accusations of cronyism, they published annual reports on their finances and held regular elections.

In a parallel example, Saleh A., former head of the YCA in Sheffield, also credited the organization's functionality with its insulation from politics. Saleh explained that he maintained neutrality in running the organization, but that the 2007 uprising in the South produced a notable degree of conflict. As a result, his role as head of the YCA eventually clashed with his sympathies for the separatist movement. He explained,

Whilst I was clearly in support of the southern movement, and I made it clear that was my *personal* view, I was also conscious of the fact that I was the chairman of the Yemeni Community Association. I didn't want the politics to get involved with the work that we were doing at the time. I remembered the day that the National Board of South Yemen was established that year, and standing in the meeting saying, please, we can express our politics and views, but let's not allow it to divide the community – and automatically we should separate personal views or political activities from the Community [Association].

After four years as chairman, Saleh came to feel that "it was wrong of me not to be, not to offer my abilities as simple as drafting letters and petitions to governments" on behalf of the southern cause. He then resigned from the

YCA and joined the National Board. But because separation was maintained between home-country politics and the YCA, Saleh stated that they managed community "coherence [with] less conflict, fewer problems" than in the Liverpool and Birmingham YCAs.

The reproduction of home-country conflicts influenced the anti-political character of diaspora mobilization in the Yemeni American community as well. My request for an interview with representatives of the Yemeni Association of Scientists and Professionals – the only functioning organization I could locate at the time – was politely declined because representatives viewed my research as political, and therefore outside the purview of their organization.

The British Yemeni youth who had formed new groups on the eve of the Arab Spring also reported that their initiatives were plagued by divisions from home-country politics. For example, Awssan, co-founder of the Yemen Forum Foundation, aimed to mobilize the broader Yemeni-British diaspora for the purposes of domestic empowerment, and specifically "to bring the youth together first because they don't have the politics or the [boundaries] or the sectarian ideologies some of the elders had. So we traveled to most of the cities in the UK and tried to bring them together." To that end, they had planned to partner with the Birmingham, Brighton, Liverpool, and Sheffield communities. At the same time, Awssan and his colleagues' status as "independent youth" also paradoxically hindered their mobilization efforts because they lacked legitimacy among the "elders" with ties to the Yemeni political establishment. He explained,

We weren't in touch with Yemen, which made our lives a lot harder. The community organizations were in touch with the ambassador or the embassy at the time. For us, it's difficult [because we're] not known. It was like, who are these three young guys with this radical ideology of bringing Yemenis together?

Though a southerner, Awssan was not a secessionist, and he had a difficult time convincing southerners in Birmingham to get on board with their plan while they were involved in a conflict over the YCA. The Yemen Forum Foundation, he explained, was just getting off the ground as an incorporated organization when the revolution began in 2011.

In sum, Yemeni diaspora mobilization before the 2011 uprisings was hindered by conflict transmission stemming from regionalism and corruption in the homeland. Community leaders correspondingly viewed the infiltration of home-country politics as toxic to their efforts to empower local communities. As a result, leaders involved in YCAs and development had to avoid appearing political in any way, including eschewing any mention of the very events and practices that *made* the diaspora a national community, such as Yemen's Unity Day. Other associations remained dysfunctional or sites of contention. So even though Yemeni Community Associations might have served as vehicles for collective action, these organizations were either undermined by crony politics or kept strictly apolitical. Furthermore, youth organizers who were motivated

to overcome the divisions that plagued the diaspora were paradoxically hindered by their status as independent youngsters. Lacking social and political clout with older elites, their initiatives were sparse and largely informal. In all, like their counterparts in the Libyan and Syrian diasporas, Yemeni activism in the United States and Britain was rife with fissures before the Arab Spring.

3.3 CONCLUSION

As Chapter 2 elaborated, exiles and émigrés from Libya, Syria, and Yemen capitalized on political opportunities to mobilize on behalf of home-country affairs from their places of settlement and refuge. However, this chapter has demonstrated that diaspora members' transnational ties also acted back on them to constrain and contain voice. As elaborated above, diaspora members' ties to the home-country subjected them to transnational repression and conflict transmission, both of which mitigated opportunities to protest, lobby, and organize from abroad. In line with Alunni's research on the Libyan diaspora (2019: 258; 2020), "divisions in the diaspora together with the regime's policies at home and persecutions abroad were overall detrimental to the establishment of an all-Libyan diasporic public space." Syrians experienced the same problems. While the Yemeni regime was not strong enough to enforce the same degree of threat abroad, all three communities were subjected to conflict transmission. As a result, the use of voice immediately preceding the Arab Spring was considered a highly partisan, if not downright risky, political endeavor.

At the same time, it is precisely because of members' simultaneous embeddedness in home-country conditions (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004) that the disruptions wrought by the Arab Spring had such powerful mobilizing effects on diaspora activism. As the revolutions disrupted the normative, everyday effects of transnational repression and conflict transmission, diaspora members became motivated to come out and come together for home-country change as never before. The next chapter elaborates how disruptions to social control and conflict at home had far-reaching effects on the diaspora, leading to a new wave of mass, public transnational contention against authoritarian regimes.