

# The Libya I Once Knew. A Meeting with Muammar Gaddafi

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In-depth Report: [NATO'S WAR ON LIBYA](#)



Nelson Mandela and Muammar Gaddafi

Translated from Portuguese

*The article below has been published on the [blog](#) of journalist and professor Georges Bourdokan who visited Libya once. While working for Brazilians largest TV network "Globo", he went on a mission to Libya to produce a special news program (which has not been aired), and since the beginning of the conflict he has been publishing articles expressing his vision on the Libyan conflict, which is a vision very different from most media outlets in Brazil.*

*The account of reading this only increases my overwhelming sense of melancholy and sorrow for what the "great nations of the world" have just done. A song by the rock band System of a Down says something like "you also pay for the war and the deaths, your taxes, your money will also finance the war."*

*The article below describes the nation that you just silently destroyed with an estimated casualty of 100,000 people, bombed and murdered in the name of protecting civilians. By action or inaction, collaborated with every death, every act of barbarism that today we have had enough evidence on the Internet. The announcement of the NTC to bring back a reactionary version of Sharia is the icing on the cake of all the bizarre and macabre massacres that nations and peoples of the world have just sponsored.*

[Juliana Medeiros](#)

## The Libya I Once Knew

By Georges Bourdokan



### Nelson Mandela and Muammar Gaddafi

I was in Libya in September 1979 on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Revolution that brought Gaddafi to power. I was accompanied by camera-man Luis Manse and operator

Nagra Nelson Belo (where would they be nowadays?). We were there to make the Special TV program for Globo, of which I was the director in Sao Paulo.

First surprise. The hotel where the government told us to stay was fully occupied by diplomats. I asked the ambassador of Brazil the reason for this concentration. The answer surprised me even more. In Gaddafi's Libya, rents were forbidden. Those Libyans who did not have a home, all they needed was to make a request to the government and it immediately arranged to start building one. The country was a huge construction site, by the way.

And more: A law in act, the **Law of the Mattress**. It determined that any Libyan citizen who knew of the existence of a rented house only had to throw a mattress in the backyard of the house to make it his own.

Many embassies were affected by this law, they happened to become owned by Libyans. The very ambassador told me then that even the Brazilian embassy was not immune to this law. A Libyan driver working there told a friend who did not have a home that the embassy of Brazil was rented. Immediately his friend threw a mattress and claimed the property (a mansion that belonged to an Italian who returned to Italy after the rise to power of Gaddafi). The Libyan government needed to intervene to avoid further troubles. Brazil ended up winning the Libyan Embassy and a new house.

This all happened in the 70's, when Libya was very rich and wealthy, with only 3 million inhabitants and nearly 1.8 million kilometers square of land.

Libyans, by law, were forbidden to work as employees for foreigners. The Libyan not willing to work would receive the equivalent salary valued today of \$ 7,000 USD per month. Plus, doctors, hospitals and medicines were all for free. Nobody paid for education in a Libyan school and whoever wanted to continue their education outside the country would receive a substantially good scholarship. I met many of those Libyans in France, Italy, Spain and Germany among other countries where I was as a journalist.



### **Tripoli before the NATO Invasion**

Tripoli, 1979. Tonight I almost could not sleep. In our hotel, besides diplomats and journalists were also delegations from African countries of Portuguese language such as Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, etc.

They would not let me sleep since - knowing that I would have a meeting with Gaddafi next day - they wanted me to ask him further explanations of the Libyan socialism. They said they had never seen anything like it. Not even in books. They were astonished by the **Law of the mattress** and the medical assistance, medicine and education which were all free. And because no one was forced to work in Libya and still got a "fantastic" salary, as the Angolans said.

I promised them an answer if I could in fact get to talk to Gaddafi, knowing that he was unpredictable and often left reporters waiting ad infinitum.

First, I need to clarify why the doors of the hotel rooms did not have locks. So everyone could enter any room, and thus the reason why our apartments were always "visited". I

asked the hotel manager the reason for the lack of locks. He told us that there were no more thieves in Libya as there were in the “era of Italian colonization and thus, the locks were unnecessary.” But one diplomat explained to me that the lack of locks was for the government officers who could come at any time of day or night to see if there were any women “invited” to the apartments. “The diplomat further explained that during the Italian colonization and the reign of Idris, the hotels served only for orgies.”

The next day I prepared for the meeting with Gaddafi. Manse, with his camera and Belo with his Nagra tape recorder next to me were waiting for the elevator. With sleepy faces, they complained that their apartments were “invaded” three times at night and each time they got scared.

The government car was awaiting us downstairs, but Manse wanted to have another coffee. I entered the car and waited. Five minutes later Manse arrived with his inseparable camera. I asked him about Belo, but he thought Belo was with me. Immediately I asked the hotel staff if they had seen Belo. A very friendly boy said he saw Belo walking out with two police officers towards the square nearby the hotel. I was really worried and imagined the worst. At least in Brazil, a journalist walking accompanied by police was not a good sign.



### **Nasser, Egypt ex-president and Muammar Gaddafi**

Belo and the two policemen were standing next to a really nice brand new Mercedes Benz. I asked Belo what was going on. One of the policemen told me that Belo kept pointing to the key inside the car and they did not know what he meant, since Belo did not speak Arabic. That’s the reason they left the hotel together, nothing to worry, a relief.

Belo then explained to me. I translated to the policeman that once he saw the key inside the car, he worried that someone would steal the Mercedes Benz car. The two policeman started to laugh and said it was just an abandoned car.

It was a habit in the country that if someone did not like the car anymore, he only had to abandon the car with the key inside. This was the era of Libya. A lot of wealth, no poverty; wealth for everyone. This could be seen in the people. The elder ones, who had lived during the colonization, before Gaddafi and the monarchy and had no wealth, did not look healthy and were usually very thin. The teenagers and youth looked very healthy and happy.

Just to have an idea about Gaddafi’s Libya, everything sold was about the same price, \$3 USD. There were gigantic supermarkets, but nothing was sold at retail. Anyone wishing to buy rice, for example, would pay \$ 3 for the 50 kilo bag. Everything was sold on that basis.

We visited the industrial park of Tripoli, and I asked to see a weaving factory. I asked how was the relationship with customers and a German coach, who was there to set up the machinery, began to laugh. “The Libyans are crazy,” he told me. Then he added: “they do not sell anything here by the meter, just the whole piece. Anyone coming to the factory to buy, it would be \$3 for the 50 meters “piece”.

But if you wanted to buy a tie for example, at minimum the price would be the equivalent of \$200. A pipe, \$300. That is, every product that reminded of the settlers and, accordingly, represented or suggested a superfluous consumption, was highly taxed.

Alcohol, don't even think about it. It meant immediate arrest. As a matter of fact, it actually happened to two Argentine journalists. They went to the port and there bought a bottle of whiskey from a freighter. One of the hotel staff smelt the alcohol breath and denounced them. They were not arrested because they were guests of the government. But they could no longer interview anyone, and of course not Gaddafi himself...

And we knew this because the ambassador of Brazil, a very friendly figure, one night invited us to the Embassy and there, he invited us to try his very old whiskey (guarded in a safe), which Manse and Belo found delicious. Of course I also had a sip, though I hate whiskey, whether it's a good brand or a really old one, does not matter. It always reminded me of the taste of iodine. Of course I could not afford to deny the Ambassador invitation to try his whiskey.

Before we left, the ambassador gave us a gallon of milk for each one, because he believed that the milk would disguise our alcohol breath. At the door, I asked the ambassador if he could give us a testimonial about Gaddafi. "Gaddafi is a genius," he said. Surprised, I asked him, "Do you really consider Gaddafi a Genius?" "Yes! A Genius!" he said.



### **Gaddafi authorized the enlistment of women in the military**

"So, why do think Gaddafi is a Genius?" "Tomorrow you will have a proof of it," said the Ambassador. I did not understand what he meant. "Tomorrow there will be a parade to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Revolution. Watch and see if I'm wrong." The next day was a glorious shining day. And I was worried because if the country stops to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Revolution, would Gaddafi find time for my interview?

The streets where the parades would be held were crowded with people. One thing caught my attention. There were thousands of teenage girls in military uniforms ready for the parade, smiling a smile that only teenagers have. It was impressive to see that joy.

And that is how Gaddafi liberated the women, who previously could not go out through the house door and were not able to take off any of the clothing that covered their body up and down, the ambassador told me. Isn't he a genius then? These teenagers leave home very early using the military uniform and return to their homes later in the day. They just do not sleep in the military compounds. And they do not have permission to remove the uniform. After they leave the military service they will never have to dress like they used to before joining the military. So that's why Libyan women somehow dress as they please. But occasionally we would come across women in traditional clothing.

After the parade, a government official told me that Gaddafi is no longer in Tripoli, but in Benghazi, the beautiful Mediterranean city. And at dawn we would make the journey of 600 kilometers that separates the two cities.

That day I learned that the electricity that powered the country was free. Nobody receives an electricity bill, whether at home or at a business. And whoever have desires to make a business can get all the resources from the state bank and not pay a penny of interest. ***The division of wealth in the country with its population in the name of Islam has created a serious problem for other Muslim countries, especially Saudi Arabia.***

And since then, Gaddafi never spared the Saudi leaders that he accused of taking possession of a country that never belonged to them and of being “infidels who defiled the true Islam.”

“They exchanged the Prophet for oil.” For the first time the Koran was used against those said to be its advocates. The Saudis, cornered, could only say he was “communist.” Gaddafi replied that he was merely following the Koran to the letter.

Several riots began to erupt in Saudi Arabia and other countries in the Gulf. United States and associated media began to roll up their sleeves. It was necessary to defend Saudi Arabia and take Gaddafi down.

On the way back to the hotel, I stumbled upon a revolutionary South African. They were in Libya seeking funds to fight against [Apartheid](#).



## **The beautiful Benghazi before being destroyed by NATO**

### **Let's talk frankly.**

I was trying hard to make a program that would be unlikely to be displayed on TV. At that time the “Globo Reporter” program had a large audience, between 50 and 65, peaking at 72 points. Besides, we lived under the heel of dictatorship in Brazil. But since we were there, let's just get down to business and see how it goes.

At night in the hotel, someone opened the door and asked me if I could talk for a moment. He was the head of the delegation of Guinea-Bissau and was quite excited. He had never imagined knowing and being in a country like Libya. He asked me how was my meeting with Gaddafi. I replied that the meeting would be the next day in Benghazi.

As we talked, a government officer enters the room and greets us with a smile. She takes a quick look and gives us the smile of a flight attendant, she thanks us and just leaves. Hardly 10 minutes passed and the door opens again, my Brazilian journalist neighbor enters the room desperately saying:

“I need a Coca Cola for God's sake. I'm going down to the lobby, someone needs to tell me where I can buy a Coke in this nuts country.”

So I left and took the stairs even.

“Crazy that neighbor of yours, huh?” said the Bissau-Guinean.

He then reveals to me that he had met many revolutionaries from different countries who were in Libya in search of resources. Even South Africans. They handed a letter from Nelson Mandela to Gaddafi asking him not to forget their African brothers, he said happily, implying that they were satisfied.

Again the Government “Officer” with the flight-attendant smile enters our room. This time to invite us to watch in the hotel lounge a movie about the “horrors” of the colonial legacy. In fact it was not a movie but a documentary of 15 minutes and if the idea was that the audience would be angry, the effect was actually the opposite.

The documentary showed the former nights of Tripoli. Half naked girls walking the streets looking for customers, 'private clubs', cabarets, liquor, many drinks, and so on. Worse, after the movie display, applause came from the audience, mostly journalists, asking for the return of the settlers... Now, that was good times, said the journalist from Rio.

At four in the morning we woke up. From Tripoli airport we headed for Benghazi, where we would finally get to interview Gaddafi.

When we landed in Benghazi, Benghazi looked beautiful, palm trees adorned its beaches, standing there like the coconut trees on the beaches of northeast Brazil.

A Swiss journalist who arrived in Benghazi a week before told me that I should not miss any wedding ceremony. "I was really impressed with the party, but what more impressed me was that after the ceremony the bride and groom would receive an envelope from the government with the equivalent of \$ 50,000 as a gift", he said.

Well, that was the real Libya a few people knew about. The Western media did not want to show it. And could not; how would they explain to the readers that a young colonel who ascended to power did not use the wealth for his own benefits? On the contrary, he had shared the wealth with the country's population and did not want to see anyone homeless, hungry or uneducated among many other things.

I, of course, would undoubtedly guide my interview based on these points. But before the interview, we went to three Arab parties with musicians from different countries. And there were so many sweets, and so much food and juice. But not even a drop of "whiskey," lamented some journalists who, I sincerely think, were in this country without knowing why and for what. The parties ran in Bedouin tents, something that Gaddafi always enjoyed.

Finally face to face with Gaddafi. In his tent, he looked tired.

These are some of topics we discussed:

- 1 - Libyan Socialism**
- 2 - Education**
- 3 - Land Reform**
- 4 - Housing**
- 5 - Alignment**
- 6 - Arabism**
- 7 - Chinese, Soviet and Cuban Socialism**
- 8 - Support for Revolutionary Movements**
- 9 - Che Guevara**
- 10 - United States**
- 11 - Brazil**
- 12 - Women's Liberation**
- 13 - Reincarnation of Omar Moukhtar**

The interview, which was said would be 40 minutes, lasted over two hours and I believe we would have spent all night talking if he hadn't been interrupted with a request every few minutes.

Of course "Globo" thought it best not to put it live on air because it could offend the dictatorship. We had a proposal to make it a 15-minute program which would be aired on

the “Fantastic” Sunday program. We re-edited for the 15-minute version, but the program ended up being banned by the official censorship staff from the dictatorship.

All because of the dictatorship. Right?

Oh dear! O Earth! When will we get rid of this rotten system?

### **What was Gaddafi’s biggest mistake?**

I don’t have the slightest idea.

Was it to believe in the Europeans/Americans and give up on the atomic bomb? Pacifists please forgive me on this. This is not about encouraging the production of nuclear warheads, but of plain persuasion.

Brazil better get your heads up and start making your own. Otherwise, the Brazilian media itself, associated with the Empire, will do anything for the country to be invaded and occupied.

Gaddafi did not get rich as the Gulf oil producers did. Instead he divided the wealth of the country among the population.

He supported all leftist revolutionary movements in the world. Including the Brazilian. At no time did he forget the black population of Africa. In South Africa, in gratitude, a grandson of Nelson Mandela is named Gaddafi.

When Nelson Mandela became the first president of South Africa in 1994, the then U.S. President Bill Clinton did everything to stop Mandela with the almost daily thanks to Gaddafi for his support for the struggle of African revolutionaries.

“Those who are irritated by our friendship with President Gaddafi can jump into the lake,” said Mandela in response to Clinton.

President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda said that “Gaddafi, whatever his faults, is a true nationalist. I prefer nationalists to the puppets of foreign interests.”

And he said, “Gaddafi made important contributions to Libya, for Africa and the Third World. We must remember that, as part of this independent way of thinking, he expelled British and U.S. military bases in Libya after taking power.”

Moreover, the Libyan leader also played a role in the formation of the [African Union \(AU\)](#). The main coordinator of the war against Libya, Hillary Clinton went to Africa openly preaching the murder of Muammar Gaddafi. Unsuccessful, she began recruiting mercenaries. By the way, these mercenaries, including Colombia’s death squads, were the ones fighting in Libya as rebels. And they were not decimated thanks to the [North Atlantic Terrorist Organization \(NATO\)](#) and the USA which protected them by air power. If you want, research about when Gaddafi nationalized the oil companies and banks. The Western media referred to him as ‘the Arab Che Guevara’.

Before being raped by the mercenaries under the command of NATO and U.S. terrorist, Libya had the highest rate of human development in Africa, and even higher than Brazil.

What few people know: in 2007 he inaugurated the largest [irrigation system in the world](#). He transformed the desert (95% of Libya) into food-producing farms. As soon as he took power in Libya, any Libyans who wanted to produce food received land, equipment, seeds and a \$50,000 bonus to survive until harvest. [Agrarian Reform was completed and unrestricted](#).

He also pushed for the creation of the [United States of Africa \(USA\)](#) to rival the U.S.A and EU. He fought for an Africa united: "We want African troops to defend Africa. We want a single currency. We want one African passport." Unfortunately forgot the Atomic Bomb. And paid for it. Those nations intending to empower themselves too had better think about it.

Below in the video you can hear the presidents Hugo Chavez, Evo Morales, Rafael Correa and Fernando Lugo singing ... "Hasta Siempre", in honor of Che Guevara. They'd better watch their back.

*Translated by [Frederico](#)*

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