

The Vital Roles That Responsible for Keeping and Forming the Cultural Identity

Om-kalthoum Shaaban Elwaaer

Faculty of Human Sciences for Girls, Al-asmariya Islamic University

Adel Ghawalek^(*)

The Higher Institute For Sciences and Technology, Misurata

Abstract:

According to Nail smith" theory (1993), the cultural area has different distinct labels which include the body of an individual, home, society , city, region, national and global. Each of these distinct labels offers different characteristics when it comes to the formation and maintenance of one's cultural identity. Through a case on a region's travel website Cox and King's, a British travel company established in 1758 which classified Libya as a Middle Eastern country rather Mediterranean country ,although Libya has coastline on Mediterranean sea in north Africa and great Roman empire civilization which is related to European identity. this paper explores the idea's of smith which is region and nation by studying two on line brochures and how Libya presents itself as tourism destination to the world years ago and recently.

Key words: cultural identity, Middle East identity, Space and Nation.

Introduction:

The focus for this essay and case study was prompted by a visit to the website of Cox and King's, a British travel company established in 1758, with offices all over the world which specializes in tourism in Libya. Visitors to the website are asked to choose which region they want to go to on holiday from a list which includes Africa, the Far East, Europe, India, Latin America, Middle East, Australia and New Zealand. Coming from Libya, I was surprised to find that when I searched for information about my own country, it was not in the section relating to Africa which included North Africa as a sub-category, nor was it included under the Mediterranean section which relates only to European

*ghawalek@gmail.com

destinations. I finally found Libya in the section relating to the Middle East and there was no mention about Libya as being Mediterranean, although the country has a long coastline on the Mediterranean Sea, where there is clear evidence of the rich civilization of its past as part of the Roman empire.

In this essay I have decided to explore why this website decided to place Libya as a 'Middle Eastern' country, and to try to understand why it chose two contrasting images on its online brochure (see images later) to represent the country's cultural identity as a tourist destination in its promotional literature. This essay will firstly briefly outline the ideas of the cultural geographer and theorist Neil Smith about cultural space. More specifically, the essay will focus on two of these cultural spaces identified by Smith, namely the region and the nation. Secondly, this essay will contextualize the case study by looking at Libya's cultural identity both in terms of its historical Mediterranean background (Greek/Roman links) and its Islamic and Arab heritage/cultural traditions. Thirdly it will be discussing Libya's recent decision to promote itself as a tourist destination and the extent to which this has been successful. The fourth and final section of the essay presents the case study which uses a questionnaire to explore attitudes towards Libya, by examining what is popularly understood by terms like Mediterranean and Middle Eastern and the stereotypes which people associate with each of these two descriptors. The results of the questionnaire are presented and discussed and then related to a small sample of images of Libya which are used to promote the country as a holiday destination on the Cox and King's website. I will finally conclude by briefly examining what has been learned from the questionnaire results about perception of Libya's cultural identity in relation to regional space.

SMITH'S SCALE OF CULTURAL SPACE:

In his article *Homeless/Global: Scaling places' in Mapping the future: Local Culture, Global Changes*, Neil Smith identifies a number of cultural spaces. These he labels as body, home, community, urban, region, nation and global. Neil Smith refers to the region as the site of economic production: "Regional identity is constructed disproportionately around the kind of work performed there" (Smith, p.108). He argues that regional scale is closely bound up with the larger rhythms of the national and global economy and states that "If productive activities- specific forms of industry agriculture, tourism and mining, for example – define the broad contours of regional identity, the rhythm of daily, weekly, and seasonal life etch a distinctive cultural identity for some regions more than other" (Smith, p. 108). Two other cultural geographers, David Bell and Gill Valentine in their study of the importance of the links between food and cultural identity entitled *Consuming Geographies: We Are Where We Eat*

stress that issues of regional uniqueness are often “distilled to the iconic product of particular places”(1997,p.147) giving the examples of wine and cheese. In the case of the Mediterranean there are two “products” most closely associated with the region: one is an agricultural product, olive oil, and the other is a service industry, tourism.

LIBYA’S CULTURAL IDENTITY:

According to Golino (1970) National identity is the identity of the individual or his sense of belonging to one state or nation. It is the sense of the nation as a whole coherent, as represented by distinctive traditions, culture, language and politics. National identity may refer to the personal feeling that an individual shares with a group of people around the nation, regardless of the person's legitimate nationality status. National identity is viewed psychologically as a "consciousness of difference", a "sense of recognition", "we" and "we". Expressing one's national identity in a positive light is patriotism characterized by national pride and a positive passion for love for the individual country. The national identity is the extreme expression of chauvinism, which refers to a firm belief in the supremacy of the country and strong loyalty to the country.

Libyan culture identity involves roots in Barber, African, Turkish and Arab cultures. Libyan was also an Italian colony for about three decades, which had a great impact on the culture.

The region being examined here is the Mediterranean and this adjective is used primarily to refer to the sea that is almost completely enclosed by the continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe. It is also associated with all those countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea which experience a similar climate with mild rainy winters and hot dry summers but have different cultural identities. Libya is one of those countries and is located in North Africa and divided into two regions, one being the coastal region along the Mediterranean Sea in the north, the other being the interior desert territory with Berber tribes still living west of the Nile. Lying between Egypt and Algeria, this country is considered to be the gateway of Africa to Europe. Like many other Mediterranean cultures, Libya has been occupied by a series of peoples, and at various times the Phoenicians, then the Greeks and the Romans have ruled over many parts of Libya.

Libya was associated with the Roman Empire for over 600 years beginning in 200BC and in Roman times it was divided into three geographical regions known as Cyrenaica, Fezzan and Tripolitania. Leptis Magna was one of the most populous cities of Tripolitania, which was the most important of Libya’s historic regions, and many buildings were constructed there in the classical

Roman architectural style. Today its numerous Roman ruins attest to the vitality of this region. Leptis Magna is a World Heritage, it consider one of the finest Roman city remains in the world.

Later Arab armies led by Amr Ibn al As carried Islam from Arabia into Libya in 642 and most of the indigenoues peoples there adopted this religion as well as the Arabic language and culture. The Ottoman Turks conquered Libya in 1551 and it remained part of their empire until Italy invaded in 1911, and after 23 years of resistance, they finally made Libya a colony. In September 1969 a group of army officers as they called themselves led by 27-year-old officer Al-Gaddafi staged a coup against the then ruler, King Idris, who was deposed. The current government structure in Libya was established in 1969 comprising so-called revolutionary committees and a 12-person revolutionary command council, with Gaddafi as Head of State. (rediscover Libya, on line). In February 2011, Libyan people refused Gaddafi's policy, so they finished his policy and they start new era.

LIBYA AS A TOURIST DESTINATION:

The tourism sector registered the highest ratio of investment opportunities in Libya at first 2008 year due to the volume of investment projects in this sector. There were some 77 projects covering areas such as resort villages, hotels and boats amounting to 512,443,3582 Libyan Dinars. (General People's Committee of Tourism, on line). According to the General People's Committee of Tourism, the number of tourists visiting Libya in March 2008 went up to 5700 and the following figure shows that the numbers of incoming tourists increased remarkably during this month compared with the previous two months for the same year, because tourism in Libya is now starting to sell in the world.

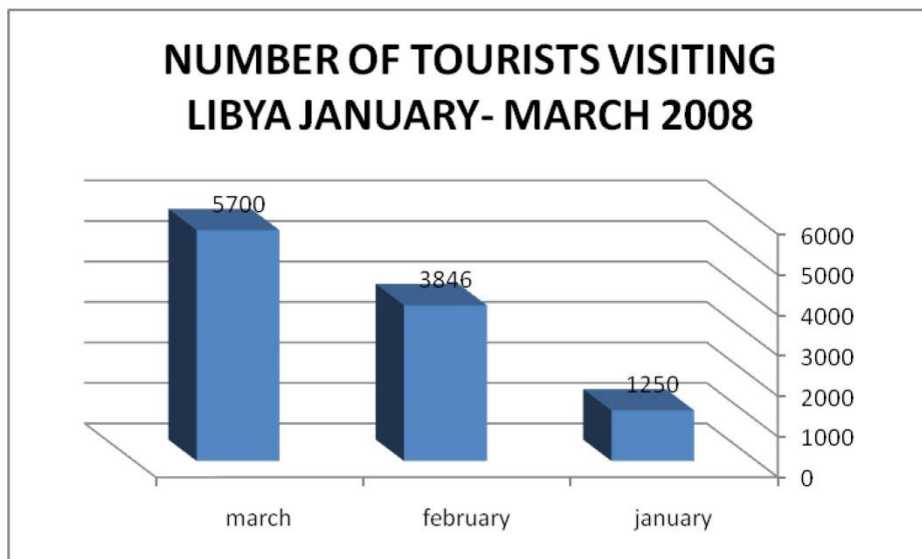


Figure one: Number of tourists visiting Libya January-March 2008

Source: <http://www.libyan-tourism.org/BasicItem.aspx?ID=890>

In considering Figure Two, we can see that there was a notable increase in hotel and tourist village occupancy and in the level of Libyans and visitors from other parts of the Arab world and non-Arab tourists as the number of hotel rooms occupied during the month of spring (March) 2008 was 62522.



Figure two: Occupancy numbers spring 2008

Source: <http://www.libyan-tourism.org/BasicItem.aspx?ID=890>

Figure Three shows the different source markets for tourism in Libya. The highest number of tourists came from France (2596), followed by Italy (2445), and Germany (1356). Britain, with 932 tourists, came in fourth place followed by Austria (665), Spain (645), Australia (297) and Japan (246), as illustrated below:

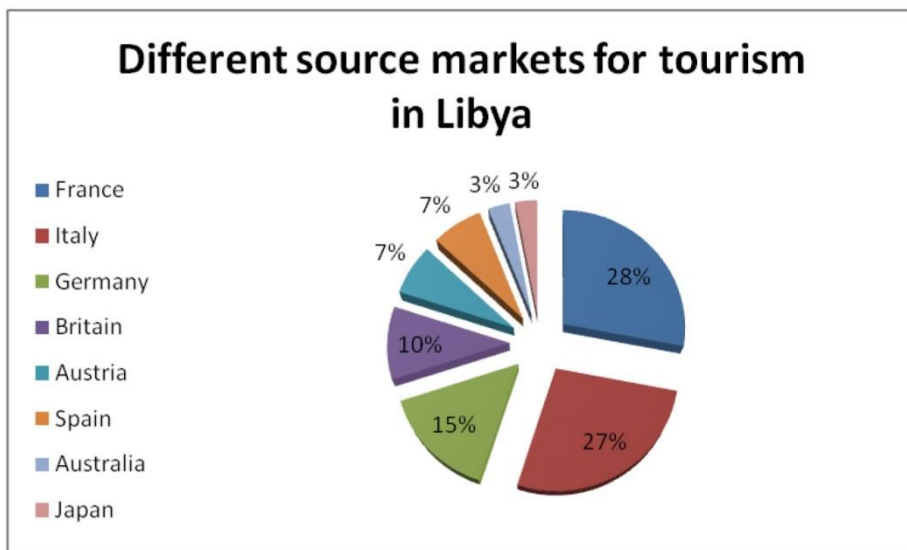


Figure three: nationality of tourists spring 2008

Source: <http://www.libyan-tourism.org/BasicItem.aspx?ID=890>

CASE STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE METHODOLOGY:

Questionnaire Design and Delivery

The questionnaire consists of four sections, the final section simply asking respondents to provide their nationality. The other sections focus on the concept of ‘Mediterranean-ness’ in relation to Libya. Section One consists of a grid make up of four columns. In column one, there is a list in alphabetical order of all the countries which have coastlines bordering on the Mediterranean Sea, some 24 countries in total. (The list also contained Palestine which, as one of the respondents pointed out, is not an officially recognized state.) Portugal has also been added to this list even though its coastline is on the Atlantic Ocean because it is often thought of as a Mediterranean country. The next three columns are labeled “Mediterranean/NOT Mediterranean/Unsure” respectively. This section had two purposes: (a) it was intended to find out which of these countries respondents considered to be Mediterranean or not and (b) more specifically, whether respondents thought Libya was a Mediterranean country. Respondents were asked to indicate with a tick whether they thought each country on the list was Mediterranean or not or whether they were unsure about this.

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Section Two consists of two questions which asked respondents what they are associated with two different adjectives – Mediterranean and Middle Eastern. This section had two purposes: (a) to establish what stereotypes respondents had in relation to the concept of “Mediterranean-ness” and (b) to establish what stereotypes respondents had in relation to the concept of “Middle Eastern-ness”.

Section Three consists of two images showing different aspects of Libya. Image one (source: Cox and King’s website) shows a ruined temple in the area of Leptis Magna, which is situated on Libya’s Mediterranean coast in the north of the country. Leptis Magna is one of the most well-known tourist sites in Libya. Image two (source: Cox and King’s website) shows a Bedouin man in traditional dress leading a string of camels in the Sahara Desert, which is to be found in the south of Libya. Respondents were asked to identify which country they thought each photograph had been taken in. This section was intended to link to the previous section in terms of establishing which countries respondents associated with stereotypes of “Mediterranean-ness” and “Middle Eastern-ness”.



In Section Four respondents were asked to identify their own nationality but they were not asked to give their names. This question was asked in order to see if there were particular stereotypes which corresponded with particular national/cultural origins.

Questionnaires were distributed by a member of staff in the Language Resources Centre in the Department of Languages and European Studies,

University of Bradford. The questionnaire was distributed in the Resources Centre because many students of different nationalities, studying different subjects use these facilities and a range of opinions was sought. Instructions about how to fill in the questionnaire were provided on the questionnaire itself and respondents were not told that the study was about Libya in order to try to keep answers as impartial as possible. The questionnaire were submitted by a friend who is studying in University of Bradford.

Questionnaire analysis

Section one:

As hoped, the sample contained a range of respondents from different nations and cultures. The nationality of the respondents was British = five¹, Taiwanese = two Lithuanian = two, Indian = two, Libyan = 1, Saudi = 1, Congolese = one and French = one. One respondent wrote “Asian” as their nationality.

When the countries were grouped by the number of responses to the questions and the following observations were made. The countries which made up the former Yugoslavia namely, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Croatia all received low scores in terms of “Mediterraneanness”. A possible explanation is that respondents did not know where these countries are located. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that many respondents said they were “unsure” about whether these countries were Mediterranean or not. On the other hand, the North African countries i.e. Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco received high scores. However, the highest scores went to the European countries of Italy, Greece and Spain probably because they are the most well known tourist destinations in the Mediterranean. A fairly similar pattern emerged when respondents were asked to identify the countries they did not consider Mediterranean. The highest score in the “not Mediterranean” category went to Portugal which geographically speaking is correct, since it has a coastline on the Atlantic Ocean. However, Portugal is often considered to be Mediterranean because in the south the climate is good and it also has a cuisine which uses olive oil. In addition, it is also a well known holiday destination, particularly the Algarve.

The responses to this section of the questionnaire were then collated and each response was given a numerical value. For each response to whether respondents thought the country on the list was Mediterranean or not a score of

¹ One of the respondents specifically referred to themselves as “Cornish” showing the importance of regional identity for some individuals!

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one point was given. For each response when respondents were unsure a score of 0.5 points was given. The totals for each of these responses for each country are shown in the Scale of Mediterranean-ness table and these were added up to calculate the final ranking.

This is the final version of the Mediterranean-ness scale which shows how the countries rank when all the results of the questionnaires are considered. It is noticeable that on this scale, Libya has a very low score, meaning that many respondents either considered it not to be a Mediterranean country or were unsure about this. When we look to Libya's neighbouring countries like Tunisia, Algeria, and Egypt it can be seen that all have comparatively high scores as Mediterranean countries, suggesting that respondents do not only consider the geographical location of a country when classifying it as Mediterranean or not.

SCALE OF MEDITERRANEAN-NESS		
Names of countries in the questionnaire	Mediterranean-not mediterranean- not sure	Totale
Slovenia	0-7-4	-11
Bosnia & Herzegovina	3-8-3	-8
Palestine	4-7-3	-6
Portugal	5-10-1	-6
Libya	9-3-2.5	-4.5
Montenegro	3-4-3	-4
Croatia	5-7-1.5	-3.5
Albania	5-4-4.5	-3
Syria	6-6-2.5	-2.5
Lebanon	7-6-2	-1
{Israel}	7-5-2.5	-0.5
France	10-5-1	4
Algeria	11-4-2	5
Monaco	10-2-2.5	6.5
Tunisia	11-4-1.5	6.5
Turkey	12-3-1	8

Morocco	13-2-1	10
Egypt	13-3-0.5	10.5
Cyprus	13-0-2	11
Malta	13-0-2	11
Spain	14-2-0.5	12.5
Italy	16-1-0	15
Greece	16-0-0.5	15.5

Analysis of section two:

All the answers from the questions were collated and examined to find common themes or clusters and as a result five of these were identified, namely climate, sea, geographical location, tourism and food. Another two descriptors did not seem to fit in any of these categories. These were “exotic” and “physical appearance”.

The category of climate is perhaps not surprising because there is a particular type of climate within this region, which is characterized by hot, dry summers and cool, wet winters and sixteen respondents used climate-related words in connection with Mediterranean-ness. Because the Mediterranean coast and climate are ideal for beach holidays and have been a key tourist destination for package holidays since the 1960s several respondents associated the region with tourism and one specifically associated the region with beaches.

A large number of respondents viewed the Mediterranean specifically as a geographical location. Many specifically associated the word Mediterranean with the sea itself. Others linked the term “Mediterranean” to the land surrounded by Mediterranean Sea, which includes three continents with coastlines on Mediterranean Sea. The list of geographical places mentioned includes both countries and places namely Rome, Greece, Italy, Spain, Morocco, Syria and Lebanon. Some of these suggest that respondents are thinking about the past cultural history of the region, particularly the mentions of Rome and Greece.

It is perhaps surprising that only one of the respondents associated the word “Mediterranean” with food as in recent years, much publicity has been given to the concept of the Mediterranean diet which was promoted because the people who live around Mediterranean tend to live longer and be healthier than other people. The respondent refers to fresh tomatoes and olive oil. All Mediterranean countries (with the exception of Egypt) have olive trees, and olive oil is produced in all these countries.

Analysis of Section Three:

All the answers from the questions were collated and examined to find common themes and as a result seven of these were identified, namely geographical location, conflict, Arabic, natural resources, religion, climate and tourism.

As with the previous analysis of “Mediterranean” it is perhaps not surprising that the category of climate should appear because there is a particular type of climate within this region, which is characterized by hot conditions producing desert. Three respondents used words which included “desert”, “camel”, and “hot”, specifically mentioning the image of a man with a camel in the desert in connection with the phrase Middle Eastern.

A large number of respondents viewed the Middle Eastern specifically as a geographical location and associated the term with countries in different areas. The list of geographical places mentioned includes Arabic countries, countries in north-east and south-west Asia and countries which in the words of one respondent “used to be part of the Russian empire”. Some of the countries named included Iraq, Pakistan, Ukraine (?) and Kazakhstan. Some of these suggest that respondents are thinking about locations which have desert regions. Others appeared to link the term Middle Eastern to countries which are conflict spots, specifically Israel and Palestinian.

Two of the respondents associated the term with Arabic, showing they are thinking that the Middle Eastern region consists of mostly Arab countries. Two respondents related Middle Eastern to natural resources naming oil and gas specifically, probably because several countries in this region are best known as oil producers. The religion, Islam, was also cited by two respondents in relation to Middle Eastern. Most interesting was the fact that only one respondent thought of tourism in relation to this region.

Analysis Section Four :



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In section four, the question related to two images which have been taken from the Cox and King's website where they are used to represent aspects of the Libyan tourist experience. When asked to place these images in terms of their geographical location respondents produced a range of answers which are recorded in the analysis grid below.

IMAGE ONE	TOTAL NUMBER	IMAGE TWO	TOTAL NUMBER
History	1	Egypt	6
"No idea"	1	Desert	1
Greece	9	Sahara (desert)	2
Libya	2	Libya	2
{Israel}	1	Morocco	2
Tunisia	1	Middle east	1
Anywhere in Mediterranean	1	Southern Mediterranean	1
Nil response	7	Africa	1
		North Africa	1
		Syria	1

In relation to image one, showing Roman ruins in Leptis Magna which is situated on Libya's Mediterranean coastline, nine respondents believed that this showed somewhere in Greece thinking possibly of this country's historical heritage and the ancient architecture to be found there. (For comparison, this image of ancient buildings from the same Cox and Kings' website is used to sell Greece.) Another respondent thought in more general terms and wrote "anywhere in the Mediterranean". Tunisia and Israel were also mentioned.



Perhaps misunderstanding the question, one respondent gave a general answer stating “history”, possibly because this is a representation of ancient buildings in ruins, and seven respondents failed to provide any suggestion. Two respondents correctly identified that the image had been taken in Libya, one of these being the respondent from Libya and the other being from India.

In general, two different kinds of answers were provided for the second image. The first type of answers were specific in terms of naming particular countries citing Egypt (six respondents), Morocco and Syria (one respondent each). Libya again received two responses. Other responses were more general, naming the continent of Africa (one), or regions, namely Middle East (one), Southern Mediterranean (one) and North Africa (one). Three responses focused on the main feature of the image, referring to desert, two specifying the Sahara.

It is worth noting that an image featuring a desert landscape, camels and men in traditional dress features in the representations used to promote other countries on the website. The two images below are used for Morocco and Egypt respectively. In contrast, many of the images used for Mediterranean countries feature representations of buildings associated with the heritage of the country in question.



CONCLUSION:

judge by the results of the questionnaire, despite attempts to develop its tourist industry, Libya is still not perceived by the respondents as a Mediterranean country. Firstly, the results of section one show that it received a score of -4.5 on the scale of Mediterranean-ness. Analysis of the responses to sections two and three showed that Mediterranean-ness is associated with positive things such as good weather whereas Middle Eastern-ness is associated with negative things such as conflict. The responses to section four show that only two of the respondents associated these images with Libya specifically and in general terms, this broad range of respondents associate history and architectural heritage with Mediterranean-ness and desert and camels with Middle Eastern-ness. It is clear that Cox and King's is attempting to change ideas about Libya by showing the two aspects of the country on its promotional website but I now understand why it chooses to place Libya in the Middle East, since that is undoubtedly where most potential travelers will still place it on their mental map.

المخلص:

للمنطقة الثقافية علامات مميزة مختلفة تشمل الفرد، المنزل، المجتمع، المدينة، المنطقة، الوطنية والعالمية. كل من هذه العلامات المميزة تقدم خصائص مختلفة عندما يتعلق الأمر بتشكيل الهوية الثقافية للفرد والمحافظة عليها. من خلال موقع لشركة سياحية تسمى Cox and King's، وهي شركة سفر بريطانية تأسست عام 1758 صنفت ليبيا كبلد في الشرق الأوسط بدلاً من البحر المتوسط، على الرغم من أن ليبيا لديها شاطئ طويل على البحر الأبيض المتوسط في شمال إفريقيا، وحضارة الإمبراطورية الرومانية العظيمة ذات الصلة بالهوية الأوروبية، يدرس هذا البحث فكرة سميث التي هي المنطقة والأمة لتحديد هوية المكان. من خلال دراسة اثنتين من كتيبات دعائية سياحية لليبيا عبر الإنترنت وكيف تقدم ليبيا نفسها كوجهة سياحية للعالم قبل سنوات مضت ومؤخراً.

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