

# A Spaniard's Testimony from Libya

## an interview of *Eloy Pardo (EP)* with *Leonor Massanet (LM)*\*

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**IJD Note:** As this interview took place just before the launching of the NATO military attack against Libya at the end of March, it can be taken as a third party's testimony reflecting the feelings of most of Libyan people just before the western aggression.

**Leonor's note:** First of all, I want to note that my testimony is my personal opinion and I don't have any economic or political interests. My only wish is to talk about the country and about the people who live in it because I think there's a lot of ignorance about it. In fact, all the mass media information is being focused on a particular man (Gaddafi) in a very biased way.

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**EP:** *What are the big powers (US, NATO...) seeking in Libya? Will they invade the country, following the UN resolution?*

**LM:** For sure, if Libya didn't have oil nobody would care and now it wouldn't be on the front page of newspapers. For what I've heard, when oil started to become exploited during the time of King Idris, 80% of the profits went to foreign hands and only 20% was for Libya. With the uprising of the tribes against the King and the Gaddafi's taking power, the beneficiaries were inverted and Libya is now keeping 80% of profits and just 20% is allocated to foreign companies. Also, they have many oil wells closed because, as they say, oil belongs not only to present but future Libyans as well. In my view, these are very important factors explaining why this man is a very big annoyance to the big powers and this is the reason they want to take him out, rather than because of the way he is ruling. Since Gaddafi came to power, Libya and Libyan people have been punished initially with bombing and then with a 30-year isolation. In addition to this, a terrible defamatory campaign against the man has been carried out, so that people come to believe that he is the devil himself.

**EP:** *Do you see fear in the population? Who do they fear the most?*

**LM:** Until now people were very carefree because they were living very good times. They say that what they fear most is a foreign intervention of the kind that happened in Iraq, and Afghanistan, where, following a US intervention, the countries are totally destroyed. Anyway, it is important to take into account that Libya is a big country and that in the south and the west the people really are calm and free of trouble and that everything is happening in the region of Cirenaica, at the northeast of the country. The majority of Libyan people live the events from the outside, through TV "reality". They are very worried but they trust that the

situation will soon get resolved. They all know that the foreign intervention has been crucial in creating all the huge problems (in Iraq and Afghanistan), and they fear that foreign intervention will happen in Libya too.

*EP: Can we talk of brief civil war in Libya?*

**LM:** This is something that I don't dare to say, although this word is very much used by the western media. In fact, it is a revolt by a group of people that were unhappy with the existing government for long, a revolt that was instigated from the outside. Thus, from the outside, the "civil war approach" is used to explain the situation, and, at the same time, instigate a revolt, whereas, within Libya, there has been a call since the beginning of the conflict to leave aside the weapons, and sit (with the tribes) to try to resolve the differences which have always existed with the region of Cirenaica. Libya being a tribal country, there is a lot more of fear for losing somebody from one's own tribe. I know there is a big movement that tries to reach an agreement inside Libya between the tribes. These days, while the army was moving forward across the east, many tribes from the east have talked publicly saying that they are with the present government and that if nothing has been done yet, it was because of fear, as the rebels were very well-armed. People have told me that more than 80% of the people are with the existing government.

*EP: Two weeks ago, Gaddafi appeared corralled and alone. Was that view right?*

**LM:** As far as I know, the Libyan government has never been corralled. I think that what was happening within the country were not as it was reported abroad. I think, this was because the media reports which reached us (abroad) originated from the people of the east and therefore they gave a very biased version. If it was true that the government massacred the people in Benghazi, with the weapons available to the government, they could have easily destroyed the centre of the insurrection as from the first day, when the rebels started burning buildings and stealing gunpowder. The government knew about the preparations for the rebellion six months before it happened and they have tried until the very last moment to avoid it, through the tribes, and I sincerely think that, without foreign intervention, it all would have ended by now and surely it would have opened the way towards dialogue.

*EP: Does Gaddafi suffer an exaggerated demonization, or is it fair to describe him negatively?*

**LM:** My comments are about what is happening now and maybe I don't know too much about this, but I'm convinced that they are demonizing him with very determined goals. I think that to judge one person and one country you have to know them directly and also know the historical background of what's been happening. Since I have a close contact with Libya, I see changes and a genuine intention of improving the country, the laws and all its structure. But it has to be taken into account that a country that has been isolated for so long can't be changed overnight. If there were impartial observers of the changes in Libya during the last years, who were committed to analyze what was really happening in Libya, instead of criticizing it —as if its leader were in war with them— possibly we wouldn't see the Libyan government with the hardness it's now seen.

*EP: Can the rebels be qualified as revolutionaries, like the Spanish media define them?*

**LM:** For what I know the Libyan rebels would be in part coming from the Libyan political elite against the Gaddafi kind of politics, which distributed the benefits of oil among Libyan people and gave them the responsibility of the public life, as well as paying for schools, public health, etc. In addition to this fact, which by itself has created powerful enemies against the existing government, there is also the problem that some Benghazi tribes feel that the government is not afraid of them and that they have been marginalized. I've heard Libyans saying that this region has tried to become independent because the majority of people there come from Egypt and they are not "true/old Libyans". I think that those are the real reasons, on top of the external help and anti-regime movements abroad, of which I don't have personal knowledge but I think they do exist, as in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, etc. I don't think that there is some sort of contagion of revolt, as the media is reporting it. Just a week before the revolt I was in Libya and I was moving through lots of places and there were no indications of anything like that, neither demonstrations nor discomfort. In fact, what was happening was the opposite, as we saw when we were visiting the thousands of houses that were almost finished and were going to be given to the Libyans. I remember that I was told that what happened in Tunisia or in Egypt could never happen in Libya because the majority of the people were happy there.

**EP:** *Have the rebels received money and weapons from abroad?*

**LM** That's what's told in Libya. To begin with they assaulted the Libyan arsenals of the (Benghazi) zone and they stole the weapons. When it was reported that the Libyan government fired peaceful demonstrators, that wasn't true because the rebels started from the beginning very aggressively.

**EP:** *In what things has the management of the Libyan government failed?*

**LM:** It's difficult for me at this moment to talk badly of the government, because they (the media) are already saying lots of defamatory things of it and I don't want to contribute to this campaign. It is clear that nobody is perfect, including the Libyan government, but it has been in a very difficult situation. Libyans are very proud and never hide their head if not treated well, that's one of their characteristics and it has brought them trouble in the past. Libya needs now to improve lots of things and to establish rules to limit the government powers, stop the corruption, etc. And in fact, what I've seen in the recent past, as I have close contact with Libya, is that they have been constantly improving the situation, changing laws, etc., and, although people outside Libya don't know it, Libya has moved a lot lately for the benefit of the Libyan people and the tribes.

**EP:** *Does a welfare state or women's rights exist in Libya?*

**LM:** As far as I know, Libya is the only Muslim country in which laws are equal for men and women. Women go to university, as men, and government pays for their postgraduate studies abroad as well as for those of men. What I mean with that is that there's a movement for change and, of course, changes are widespread between one and another generation in Libya. Precisely this huge change is what I've been studying. Of course, after explaining the theory, I have to say that we also have problems of gender inequality in Spain, perhaps even

more so than in some places in Libya. The truth is that this is a subject I'd like to talk about another day, because I've never seen in practice women having more power than in Libya. As regards the welfare of Libyans, I'd say that they live better than we do because they haven't entered yet to the consumer society and they all have a basic income. They are calm people, living for the community, first for the family, then for the tribe. Nobody suffers from hunger, although for the moment there are not many luxuries or many varieties of consumer goods to consume.

**EP:** *Would you stay at the country?*

**LM:** Yes, definitely, yes. I like very much the country and its people. They are people with very good values. I hope to be able to return as soon as possible to visit all my beloved Libyan family. I hope and wish that the present problems get solved as soon as possible and my dream would be that we dedicate ourselves to mediate in order to solve the present problems, instead of instigating and promoting the revolts, or looking for excuses to "intervene".

Eloy Pardo

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\* This interview of Eloy Pardo with Leonor Massanet was first published in the YouTube (in Spanish) on 23/03/11. It was taken about a week before that date. The above text is an edited translation of the interview from Spanish. The responsibility for the translation and its editing belongs to IJID and we would be glad to make any corrections required either by the interviewer or the interviewee. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-0YYIMz4j6k>