

Facebook Friendship Groups as a Space for Peace

A Case Study of Relations between
Libyan and American Citizens

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Series in Politics



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Table of Contents

List of Figures and Tables	v
Acknowledgements	vii
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
1.1 Background and context	1
1.2 Aim	9
1.3 Methodology	13
1.4 Structure of the book	20
Chapter 2 Public Diplomacy	25
2.1 Introduction	25
2.2 Definition of public diplomacy	26
2.3 Public diplomacy as a form of soft power	29
2.4 US public diplomacy	32
2.5 Shift from messaging to dialogue	37
2.6 Role of non-state actors	41
2.7 Importance of understanding culture	49
2.8 New media	52
2.9 Understanding the impact	59
2.10 Conclusion	60
Chapter 3 Friend or Enemy?	61
3.1 Introduction	61
3.2 Friendship as a bridge to peace	65
3.3 Friendships between people	68
3.4 Aristotle's friendship typology	70
3.5 The value of international friendships	75
3.6 Social media's impact on international friendships	78
3.7 Conclusion	81
Chapter 4 Historical Context	83
4.1 Introduction	83
4.2 Historical significance	85

4.3 Challenges to democratic transition	89
4.4 Travel ban	93
4.5 US Embassy public diplomacy efforts	94
4.6 Conclusion	95
Chapter 5 Findings from Focus Group Interviews	97
5.1 Introduction	97
5.2 Meaning of friendship	98
5.3 Differences between same-culture and cross-cultural friendships	99
5.4 Open-mindedness and respect are key	102
5.5 Online versus face-to-face friendships	104
5.6 Impact of media on views	106
5.7 Cultural exchange promotes understanding	109
5.8 Trust building and inclusive communication	112
5.9 Capacity-building and education programmes	113
5.10 Civil society programmes have more impact than government	115
5.11 US foreign policy is the problem	117
5.12 Conclusion	121
Chapter 6 Discussion	123
6.1 Introduction	123
6.2 Overview	123
6.3 Analysis of findings	126
6.4 Conclusion	147
Chapter 7 Conclusion	149
7.1 Introduction	149
7.2 Empirical conclusions	150
7.3 Recommendations	154
7.4 Recommendations for further research	154
7.5 Researcher's final reflections	157
References	159
Appendices	177
Index	185

List of Figures and Tables

Figures

Figure 1.1	People as agents.	3
Figure 1.2	Language escalation framework.	18
Figure 2.1	Public diplomacy processes.	29
Figure 3.1	International friendship as a social process.	70

Tables

Table 2.1	Multi-track diplomacy.	43
Table A.2	Data extracts from face-to-face focus group and Facebook focus group interviews, with codes applied.	177

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Chapter 1

Introduction

'Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?'

– Abraham Lincoln

1.1 Background and context

Historically, the study of International Relations (IR) was principally concerned with how to attain peace, security, justice and order between sovereign states, which many scholars conceived of as competing in an anarchic international arena. This state of anarchy is seen as fixed and unchanging. This book challenges the premise that anarchy is the natural state of international relations and instead contends that interactions impact the quality of relations. This book was inspired by years of working as a citizen diplomacy practitioner in Libya and a desire to understand what kind of impact citizen exchanges have. This is what led me to study friendships during my PhD program and this book is an edited version of my dissertation. The premise of this book is that, to some extent, world peace is dependent upon whether states and citizens of states view each other as friends or enemies. The central tenets of this book are that views of friend and enemy in international relations are socially constructed. This book builds upon existing scholarship, which problematises distinctions between friend and enemy. The most notable and earliest proponent of the socially constructed nature of relations within the international arena was Alexander Wendt in his book *Social Theory of International Politics*. In this book, Wendt (1999) argued that the language used and the way states relate to one another affects the quality of relations and that if states refer to one another as an enemy, then that language will likely result in enemy behaviour and conflict. He argued that views of friend and enemy are based on 'self' and 'other' distinctions and that these views are a social construct. However, Wendt limited his argument to relations between states in the context of security. In arguing as such, he avoided any discussion of the important role that people have in both causing conflict and facilitating peace. This is influenced by his support for the conventional perspective among many IR¹ scholars, which focuses on the state as agent in international relations. Oelsner and Koschut (2014) appropriately question the purely structure-focused definition of

¹ IR is used for the field of International Relations and international relations deals with the activity.

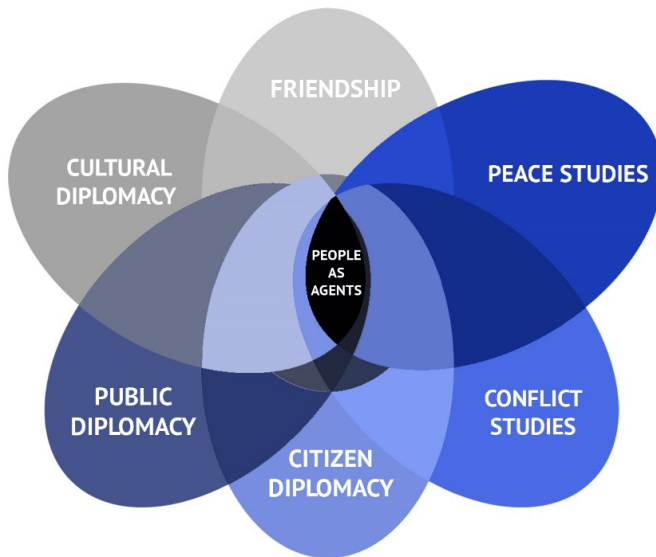
friendship that Wendt used. This book extends Wendt's arguments to relations between people, *as agents of states*, in international relations. This book argues that these 'self' and 'other' distinctions and the differences that exist between states and citizens of states do not necessarily have to result in conflict. Instead, if views are socially constructed, then people as agents of states should be able to choose to relate differently, which means that enmity is not inevitable between states, and it should be possible to reconstruct relations based on friendship. Nordin and Smith suggest that what is missing in International Relations is the constructivist view that relations can be transformed through interaction (Nordin and Smith, 2018b, p. 11). Viewing friendship this way requires an understanding of more relational approaches to friendship, which involve people. As such, this book diverges from Wendt's (1994) argument which suggests that the state is the primary facilitator of peace in international relations. Instead, it argues that people are the key agents in reconstructing relations, and the various ways and spaces they interact can provide useful insights into these relational processes.

This book contributes to the study of the concept of friendship in IR by exploring the human side of friendships and how relations between people influence relations between states. To do this, this book focuses on the role of citizens as actors in IR and argues that just as citizens are often the ones perpetrating many recent international conflicts, citizens also have a key, although often neglected, role to play in facilitating peace in international relations. Part of the way citizens are engaged in fostering peaceful relations in international relations is through a variety of citizen diplomacy initiatives that promote understanding and trust, and which are designed to help people change the way they see one another and one another's states. These initiatives promote behavioural and language practices where citizens are actively engaged in the practice of redefining identity narratives that they have for one another.

As Figure 1 (see below) shows, this study sits at the intersection of several different research areas with their main connecting point being the agency of citizen actors in constructing peaceful relations between states in the international arena. Friendship studies is an interdisciplinary area of research which involves the 'investigation and theorization of horizontal ties of affinity, concern and action' (Amity, n.d.). Peace and conflict studies go hand in hand. Conflict studies have historically involved the process of exploring the concept of peace through the lens of preventing war, so-called negative peace (Beer, 1990). Peace studies involves studying the nature of conflicts and attempts to address these conflicts through peaceful solutions (Richmond, 2012). These efforts focus on what is described as positive peace, which deals with peace creation instead of conflict prevention exclusively (Galtung, 2012). Public diplomacy involves a variety of communication activities designed to inform and influence

public opinion in other countries. The purpose of public diplomacy is to influence views on both formation and execution of foreign policy (Cull, 2006). Public diplomacy also involves helping diverse citizens efforts to understand one another; this is sometimes called citizen or people's diplomacy (PD Alumni Assoc, 2008). Cultural diplomacy is a subset of public diplomacy and involves a variety of activities designed to promote cultural understanding between people (Lenczowski, 2011, p. 19). All these areas involve the role of people in attempting to prevent conflict and foster more peaceful relations between states.

Figure 1.1 People as agents.



Source: Author.

Epistemologically this book draws upon three critical approaches: critical social constructivism, critical peace studies and practice theory to explore how citizen agents engage in the practice of reconstructing relations between both citizens and states in international relations. All three of these approaches recognise the agency of people in constructing international relations. These critical approaches are valuable because 'critical contributions to IR theory provide a more sophisticated conceptualization of peace' (Richmond, 2008b, p. 121). They also offer a more normative and emancipatory view of peace, where transformation should be the objective (Richmond, 2008b, p. 126). All three of these approaches involve some exploration of the role of behaviour and language in understanding social reality. They also use similar methodological approaches to understand how collective sense is constructed by actors. As such, they

emphasize the importance of language and suggest that social facts exist only because of ‘human agreements manifest as collective understanding of discourse’ (Wallis and Richmond, 2017, p. 424; Searle, 1995). To understand social reality, it is necessary to uncover the social facts that are constructed by and through language, rules and speech acts (Onuf, 1998, p. 66 and Kratochwil, 1989).

The first approach, critical social constructivism, examines how cultural processes are used to construct meaning between actors (Das, 2009; Cho, 2009). There are positivist and interpretivist variants of constructivism within IR. ‘Critical constructivism focuses on narratives, discourse and texts as well as everyday micropolitics and practices’ (Wallis and Richmond, 2017, p. 423). Constructivists challenge the perception that relations in the international system are fixed with unchanging interests and defined in terms of power. They do not believe conflict and enmity are inevitable (Wendt, 1999). Instead, they see relations in the international system as being socially constructed and continually changing through social processes (Cho, 2009, p. 90). Ideational factors such as culture, norms and ideas play a role in the way actors define their interests (Wendt, 1994) and their policy decisions. Pouliot argues that social facts are central to constructivism. Therefore, social facts constitute the only foundation of reality upon which knowledge can be understood in global politics and social life in general (Pouliot, 2004, p. 320). Critical constructivists see theory as practice and they support research approaches that seek not only to understand the world but to change it. ‘By disturbing comfortable understandings of the world and revealing their arbitrariness, can open up an awareness of new possibilities—of our ability to make the world anew’ (Gusterson, 1993, p. 8; Weldes et al., 1999, p. 21).

The second approach, critical peace, also focuses on the role of communication and is described as ‘post-sovereign peace’ which transcends realist notions of territorial sovereignty and which revolves ‘around forms of communication designed to facilitate emancipation for both the individual and for others’ (Richmond, 2008b, p. 129). This form of emancipatory peace involves communication designed to facilitate empathy between actors through dialogue, ensuring that no person is excluded (Richmond, 2008b, p. 452). Critical peace studies recognise the agency of citizens in reconstructing identity narratives (Richmond, 2008a; MacGinty, 2019). Most of the current scholarship on critical peace explores intrastate conflicts, but it also applies to interstate conflict. Critical approaches ‘point to everyday practices, local and social dynamics and other discursive formations of order’ (Wallis and Richmond, 2017, p. 424). Critical peace and conflict studies involve ‘the role of citizens to reconfigure citizenship rights in order to overcome dominant narratives within relational space’ (Williams, 2015, p. 1). This view of peace focuses on care, empathy, solidarity and reconciliation (Jabri, 2007; Keller, 2006; Richmond, 2008a). It is

described as an 'everyday form of peace, offering care, respecting but also mediating culture and identity, institutions and customs, providing for needs, and assisting the most marginalised in the local, state, regional and international contexts' (Richmond, 2011, p. 4). The concept of everyday peace moves beyond negative forms of peace towards everyday diplomacy and people-to-people activities (MacGinty, 2014, p. 550). 'Everyday peace is dialogic in the sense that it relies on interaction, social recognition and social responses' (MacGinty, 2014, p. 554; Skeggs, 1997, p. 4). Critical peace theorists emphasize the need for 'bottom-up and people-centric approaches to peace that are contextually sensitive and aware of the possibilities of local agency' (MacGinty, 2019, p. 5). The concept of local includes the diversity of communities and individuals within political society beyond liberal perspectives of elites and civil society (Richmond, 2011, p. 14). This approach desires to understand citizens' perspectives and analysis of conflicts that 'emphasise emotional intelligence, adaptability and agency' (Fregonese, 2012; Mitchell, 2011; Williams, 2015). This is a more sociological and human-focused approach to peace and conflict (MacGinty, 2014, p. 549; Brewer, 2010). Critical peace and conflict studies are 'primarily concerned with the quality and nature of peace in cultural, social, economic, and political terms, ranging from the international system to the state and communities' (ECPR, 2010). This kind of peace draws upon notions of hybridity where there can be multiple identities and ideas presented which are not delineated by states (Walker, 1994; Richmond, 2008b, p. 457). Hybrid peace recognises that multiple ideas can be developed in alternative spaces, including the internet, and through social movements which are not 'patrolled by the state' (Walker, 1994, p. 669-700; Richmond, 2008b, p. 147). As a result, theorists believe that gaining local perspectives requires using ethical, ethnographic and active research methodologies that allow someone to research people where they live and do life (Richmond, 2011, p. 15). This can include everyday activities that happen in the online world.

The third approach, practice theory, suggests that the way actors relate to one another in regard to ideas, culture and norms plays a significant role in how relations are constructed (McCourt, 2016). The practice turn in IR is consistent with the move toward more interpretivist methods of research because it is a reflexive approach, which sees knowledge as socially constructed (Cornut, 2015). The premise of what is considered practice is quite broad and can look at states, social movements and even 'personhood as practices' (Cornut, 2015, p. 1). Central to the practice theory is agency. The concept of agency deals with the ability of people to act independently and make their own choices (Barker, 2005, p. 448). It also recognises the capacity of agents to construct and reconstruct their worlds (Gauntlett, 2004, pp. 93-96). Historically, the dominant perspective among IR scholars is that states are the primary actors in world politics. However, others contend that 'ontologically only

individuals can express agency and therefore states are structures rather than agents' (Wallis and Richmond, 2017, p. 424; Wight, 1999; Wight, 2006). As members of political societies, citizens are seen as having agency to be involved in political life. In his book *Politics As a Vocation*, Max Weber recognised the agency of citizens to engage in political activities and took a behaviourist approach to determine whether someone was engaging in politics (Weber, 1919). It is not a person's job description or title that determines whether someone is involved in politics, it is what they are doing. This same idea can be applied to people engaged in international political practices and is often positioned within what is called the 'practice turn in IR'. This approach recognises that not only is the personal political but that the political is also personal (Humphrey et al., 2019). Studies show that a variety of non-state actors have agency to engage in the practice of socially constructing international relations (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Keck and Sikkink, 1998). It is the purpose and practice of the relations and interactions that determine whether there is agency rather than the source of those actions (Bially Mattern, 2011, p. 72; Duvall and Chowdhury, 2011, p. 337-43). Previously, these behavioural approaches were positioned in constructivism by theorists like Wendt, Kratochwil and Onuf and given only peripheral investigation, whereas under practice theory it is the practice of constructing relations that is put front and centre (Cornut, 2015). It is through the practice of interaction and dialogue that one can observe 'socially meaningful politics of action, which in being performed more or less competently, simultaneously embody, act out, and possibly verify background knowledge and discourse in and of the material world' (Adler and Pouliot, 2011 p. 4; Braun, Schindler, Wille, 2018, p. 795). It is through the practice of interaction and social communication that actors promote shared understandings (Risse, 2000; Wallis and Richmond, 2017). These practices of interaction among people are described as a 'social artefact' (Navari, 2011, p. 614; Cornut, 2015, p. 5) that is 'always linked to a collective' (Bueger and Gadinger, 2014, p. 19; and Cornut, 2015, p. 5). These collectives consist of groups of citizens within societies that engage in the practice of international relations through social processes of knowledge creation.

In this study, I show that citizens are using transnational Facebook friendship groups as a forum to reconstruct the narratives they have of one another and one another's states with the hope that these activities will foster more peaceful relations. If it is true that the language used and the way states relate to one another can have an impact on the quality of relations between those states, then it is beneficial to explore how constructs of friendship can result in improved relations between states and citizens that historically have engaged in conflict. The best way to explore whether constructs of friendship result in improved views of a state and citizens of a state is to explore relations between

people. Since states are not just institutions but also collectives of their citizens, there is a need to explore whether constructs of friendship between citizens result in improved relations between states. Therefore, a useful way to explore a social construct of friendship is through studying a friendship group between citizens that are from countries that have a history of conflict.

It is my argument that transnational citizen-led friendship groups can serve as a kind of diplomacy. In international relations, diplomacy is one of the main tools used to foster peaceful relations between states. Many things fall under the auspices of diplomacy. This includes everything from formal negotiations to more soft power initiatives like cultural exchanges and public diplomacy. At the heart of diplomacy is promoting goodwill. Acts of goodwill help to foster understanding and trust, which are foundational to good relations between states and citizens of states and can mitigate conflicts. Thomas More said that 'men are bound more adequately by goodwill than by pacts, more strongly by their hearts than by their words' (More reproduced by Wolfers and Martin, 1956, p. 6). There is likely no better gesture of goodwill than friendship. Transnational citizen friendship groups can be a forum for promoting understanding and goodwill between citizens and states.

Public diplomacy is one method used to promote goodwill between states and involves efforts to influence foreign publics' views of states. Views are influenced by language and narratives. In recent years, public diplomacy has been seen as more akin to propaganda (Pigman, 2010). However, it also includes efforts to help people understand a country's history and culture with the hope that it will result in better views and improved relations between the people of those states (Schneider, 2005, p. 147). In recent years, there has been a shift from purely state-centric one-way messaging forms of public diplomacy to two-way dialogic forms of public diplomacy involving a variety of non-state actors, including individual citizens (Nye, 2004). These two-way approaches focus on cultural exchanges and activities that foster conversations between people from different countries. However, there is still little research into what impact these activities have on improving the way transnational citizens view one another and the governments of foreign countries. There has been a lot written about what public diplomacy is, how states are using public diplomacy and how public diplomacy is evolving from a purely one-directional messaging-centred format to a two-way dialogic process. However, there seems to just be an assumption that public diplomacy does what it is designed to do, namely improving a foreign public's views of states and the people of those states. Therefore, there is a need to study what meaning foreign publics give to public diplomacy-type activities and how it impacts them. In recent years, scholars and governmental leaders have begun to question the effectiveness of public diplomacy efforts and call for performance indicators and a means of measuring

impact (Carter, 2005; LBJ School, 2010; Banks, 2011). The most helpful way to understand how public diplomacy initiatives affect foreign publics is to ask them. This book seeks to understand what meaning citizens give to transnational citizen-led friendship groups, whether they see these activities as a helpful diplomatic activity and in what ways these activities affect their views.

This study explores people-to-people friendships in the context of transnational Facebook friendship groups and the ways these groups serve as a form of public diplomacy. This book uses the Aristotelian friendship typology to explore what friendship means in the context of transnational citizen Facebook friendship groups and how friendship can serve as a social process of identity construction used by people to foster peaceful relations in the international arena. This book shows that the Facebook friendships in this study have both personal and political purposes and draw upon attributes of utility and pleasure of friendships and can serve as a medium to bridge the differences that exist between people of different cultures by promoting understanding and trust. Seeing friendships this way allows one to observe how efforts to facilitate friendship between states can have a transformative effect. 'The process of building and maintaining friendships actually transforms small pockets of the international system by revealing alternative forms of order as well as alternative patterns of interaction among particular actors' (Koschut and Oelsner, 2014, p. 1).

This research is necessary because the study of friendship in IR is still in its infancy. Alexander Wendt argues that, 'relative to the "enemy", the concept of friend is undertheorized in social theory, and especially in IR where substantial literature exists on enemy images but little on friend images, on enduring rivalries but little on enduring friendships, on the causes of war but little on the causes of peace, and so on' (Wendt, 1999, p. 298). Since Wendt first problematised the prominence of enemy themes in IR, scholars like Smith (2014), Nordin (2018), Oelsner (2014), Koschut (2014), Eznack (2013), Berenskoetter (2014), Van Hoef (2017) and others have begun to research friendship in IR. Most of the literature is still largely theoretical and focuses on reconceptualising and applying the views of 'classical' theorists like Aristotle and Kant to the concepts of friend and enemy in international relations. In addition, much of the literature on friendship in IR still takes state-centric views of friendship. 'Friend' in IR is discussed in much the same way that alliances and security communities are, or in reference to 'special relationships' such as that between the US and the UK. There are still very few scholars exploring the role of citizens in promoting good relations between states. Ignoring the role that citizens play in international relations overlooks the increasing role that citizens have in both perpetrating conflicts and promoting peace between countries. However, more critical and post-structuralist scholars like Nordin and Berenskoetter have led the way in focusing on friendship as a social process involving people

as agents. This book extends the boundaries of current scholarship on friendship in IR by exploring the agency of citizens in defining and facilitating positive relations between states and citizens of states. In this capacity, citizens are exercising a complementary agency to states in fostering peaceful relations.

As the nature and types of actors involved in international conflicts change, the types of actors involved in peace and diplomacy must also change. Conflicts in international relations are no longer perpetrated only by sovereign states. The increasing role of non-state actor groups, such as global terror networks, in conflicts all over the world indicates that borders and state sovereignty can no longer be the only focus of IR. Large multinational organisations like the United Nations are struggling to foster peace in the global sphere on their own as is evidenced by ongoing conflicts around the world. Instead, there is finally a recognition that the world is changing and as a result so must the types of actors involved in facilitating peace in international relations.

In this book, critical peace theory is being drawn upon to study bottom-up and people-centric approaches to fostering peaceful relations in interstate conflicts while arguing that the process of reframing identity narratives is happening through a kind of citizen-led public diplomacy in the context of Facebook friendship groups. The findings show that these groups serve as a kind of virtual cultural exchange where people socialise and learn about each other's culture with the intention of countering negative stereotypes, promoting understanding and trust. The goal is to promote more peaceful relations between Libya and the US.

1.2 Aim

This book explores the role that citizens have in improving relations between states through citizen-led friendship groups. In particular, it investigates constructs of friendship between states that historically have been in conflict. If the system is socially constructed rather than fixed, it should be possible to reconstruct relations based on how actors relate. Constructivists see both structure and agency as being important factors in understanding how the international system is constructed (Wendt, 1987). This book is most concerned with the role of citizens as agents in constructing relations between states, rather than focusing on structural relations. It does this by exploring the role that citizens have in improving relations between states through citizen-led friendship groups. This book argues that these citizen-led friendship groups serve as a kind of citizen-led public diplomacy where actors attempt to promote understanding and redefine identity narratives that they have for one another. It is through this process of reframing identity narratives that more peaceful relations are developed. These relational processes are positioned

under the umbrella of public diplomacy, because these activities focus more on improving views and images rather than on any negotiation or formal conflict resolution. However, the purpose of improving views between people is not only to give foreign publics a good image of states but ultimately to improve relations between citizens of those states. Improving the foreign publics' image of the US and relations with its people was the main rationale for the US government ramping up its public diplomacy efforts following the terror attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on 9/11 and specifically encouraging citizen diplomats to be a part of the process. The US government recognised the need to counter extremist and anti-American narratives. Enlisting the assistance of citizen diplomats showed a recognition that people have a role in how identity narratives are framed between states. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

This book involves a case study of relations between American and Libyan citizens and what impact citizen-led Facebook friendship groups have on Libyans' views of the American people and US foreign policy. The practice of engaging in public diplomacy is not done simply to improve foreign publics' views for its own sake, but instead, there is a belief that improved views should translate into improved relations. A study of relations between Libya and the US is interesting because these countries' recent history has been marred by conflict. The country of Libya has historically held an important place in US foreign relations. Years of sanctions against Libya precipitated by Muammar Gaddafi's involvement in state-sponsored terrorism caused years of strained relations between Libya and the US and impacted the views of Libyan citizens. Following the Libyan revolution and the people's overthrow of Gaddafi, there was a hope that relations between Libya and the US would be improved. However, following the revolution, there was a disintegration of the security situation in Libya with the country spiralling into more internal conflict. After the attack on the US Consulate in Benghazi and escalating violence, the US Embassy moved its location to Tunisia and significantly decreased its engagement in Libya.

Although the US government continues to provide limited security assistance in the ongoing conflicts within Libya, there is a significant need for both the government and non-state actors to engage in more effective practices of promoting peaceful relations between people of these states, including activities which confound stereotypes, promote understanding and focus on reframing identity narratives between citizens. The kinds of activities that are utilised in practice should be informed by research and what is seen as most beneficial by the people in that country. While we know very little about what works in terms of state-centric public diplomacy, we know even less about what works in terms of citizen-led public diplomacy. As will be discussed in the

coming chapters, the US government recognises that citizen diplomats have an important role to play in improving the views of foreign publics. There is also a perception that citizen-led public diplomacy should be focused on promoting an understanding of values and showing that American values are not necessarily different from the values of people in the Middle East and North Africa. However, there seems to be an assumption that the process of citizens interacting and sharing about one another's culture, religion and history will automatically translate into improved views of the US government and its foreign policy. This book suggests that this is not necessarily the case. However, this book does argue that everyday peacemaking activities like friendships between citizens can and do have some impact on changing the way participants see one another. As such, this research study answers the following questions:

1. What meaning do Libyans give to Facebook friendships?
2. How and through what modes of reasoning/narratives do transnational citizen-led Facebook friendship groups between Libyans and Americans affect Libyans' view of Americans?
3. How and through what modes of reasoning/narratives do transnational citizen-led Facebook friendship groups between Libyans and Americans affect Libyans' views of US foreign policy?

The rationale for exploring these questions is that historically, the US has been one of the forerunners in public diplomacy, partly because as the perceived hegemon in the world arena, it has been the object of criticism and anti-American sentiment around the world. Since 11 September 2001 and the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, American leaders and critics have suggested that America has an image problem, especially in the Middle East and North Africa (Peterson, 2002). As a result, there has also been a recognition that the US needs to do more to improve its image abroad, especially in the Middle East and North Africa. Following 9/11, the US government began to increase its public diplomacy efforts after allowing them to lapse following the end of the Cold War. Much of the increase in public diplomacy funding in the US happened during the George W. Bush administration. President George W. Bush believed that US image problems, especially in the Middle East, were because America was perceived to have different values than the people of the Middle East (Bush, 2001). Previous surveys of people in the Middle East and North Africa have not confirmed these suspicions. Instead, researchers have found that values were less important than US foreign policy to people's image of the US (Zogby, 2004). Despite these findings, the US government continues to focus its efforts on improving its image abroad. The US State Department is leveraging the soft power of a variety of non-state actors, including individual citizens, for this task. A former undersecretary for the US Department of State, Jim Glassman, was one of the leading proponents

of engaging a variety of actors in public diplomacy efforts. 'It is a lot easier to be influential if other people are making the pronouncement and joining the conversation' (Glassman, 2011). He believed the role of the US in convening conversations about different views was a way to 'influence to meet strategic goals' (Glassman, 2011). As a result, the US government began a shift from messaging-centred public diplomacy to more relational-centred public diplomacy, involving citizens and civil society leaders.

With the increasing focus on public diplomacy in recent years has come a shift from what scholars call 'old' public diplomacy to 'new' public diplomacy (Melissen, 2005). Old public diplomacy was characterised by one-directional messaging, while new public diplomacy involves two-directional dialogue and involves citizens and civil society actors. At the centre of this two-directional dialogical approach are efforts to build relationships between citizens through a variety of cultural, educational and business exchanges. Through these exchanges, both face-to-face and virtual, citizens wield a form of soft power. A country's soft power rests with its culture, its political values and its foreign policies (Nye, 2011, p.84). As such, relationships are the new currency of public diplomacy.

If relationships are now seen as an important component of public diplomacy, then fostering friendships between people of different nations could have more impact on the public's views than existing efforts. Friendship groups are a powerful mechanism of goodwill. However, building friendships between people from different countries was much more difficult before the advent of the internet. In addition, social media, in particular, has changed the way friendships are made and has helped to bridge the geographical divide that previously existed between people from different countries (Saudi Gazette, 2012; Digital Age, 2017). Through social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and others, the world truly is within people's reach.

It is not uncommon for people to have Facebook friends and other social media connections with people all over the world. In these online worlds, people can explore, socialise and develop friendships with people who live a world away. But how beneficial are these connections? Are Facebook friendships the same as face-to-face friendships? If not, how are they different, and what value do people place on these online friendships? Do they help promote understanding between people from different cultures, and if so, in what way? In the end, as an IR scholar, one also must ask, what impact do these friendships have on relations between states? This is the rationale for conducting this research project. Research needs to be done into understanding what meaning participants give friendship diplomacy efforts between people of different states, especially with those that have a history of strained relationships like the US and Libya. Exploring friendship diplomacy in the context of everyday

activities like transnational citizen-led friendship groups provides rich insights into how social media platforms are being used as both a messaging and dialogic form of public diplomacy. It also provides insights into the value of citizen-led initiatives and how these initiatives impact the way people view another country, its people, its values and whether these cross-cultural friendships translate into better views of a country's foreign policies.

1.3 Methodology

This research is designed to explore how Libyans understand friendship in the context of Facebook friendship groups with Americans and the ways that discussing things like history, religion, current events and culture improve relations. There is also an interest in determining the way in which these everyday social activities are viewed by participants as a form of diplomacy which translates to improved views among participants. This study is interested in what meaning Libyan citizens give to their interactions with American citizens in the context of Facebook friendships, especially Facebook friendship groups that were specifically created to foster more positive and peaceful relations between Libyans and Americans. The intention is to see in what ways the narratives that take place in these groups impact on the attitudes and views of Libyans toward the American people and US foreign policy and whether the participants see these activities as impacting relations between their states.

Following the Libyan revolution, two Facebook friendship groups were started by Libyan and American citizens to promote understanding and friendly relations between Americans and Libyans. These groups are the Libya American Friendship Association and Libyan and Americans United for Friendship and Peace. These groups, and similar friendship groups between people of other cultures, serve as fora for a kind of virtual cultural diplomacy. However, what is unique about these groups is that they are not created under the auspices of any governmental organisation. Some things shared in the group, like information about holidays and exchange opportunities, are similar to the kinds of things that the US Embassy posts on their Facebook page as part of their public diplomacy efforts. However, the difference seems to be the dialogic nature of the friendship groups and the lack of any overt governmental political agenda. The purpose of these groups is more about promoting cultural understanding and friendly relations and a sense of solidarity between Libyans and Americans. This research study involves conducting exploratory qualitative case study research into how Libyans construct meaning around their history of strained relations with America and their purposes for participating in Facebook friendships with Americans. This case study was chosen because there is a need for a better understanding of how public diplomacy impacts the

views and attitudes of foreign publics, which would allow state and non-state actors to engage in public diplomacy initiatives from a more informed perspective. We know very little about what kinds of activities are most beneficial in influencing attitudes of foreign publics and cultivating more peaceful relations. In addition, there is even less known about citizen diplomacy, and there are currently no known empirical studies attempting to understand how Facebook friendships between citizens can be used as a form of public diplomacy to improve relations between states in international relations.

This research uses a qualitative research design with a critical social constructivist and interpretivist approach because central to this research is the view that actors have a role in constructing meaning about others, including states and their citizens. This is sometimes referred to as 'meaning-making'. This idea suggests that meanings are negotiated and identities are elaborated through the process of social interactions between people (Hare-Mustin and Marecek, 1990; West and Zimmerman, 1991). This study is interested in what meaning Libyan citizens give to their interactions with American citizens in the context of Facebook friendships, especially Facebook friendship groups that were specifically created to foster more positive and peaceful relations between Libyans and Americans.

The intent of qualitative research involving human subjects is for the researcher to examine a social situation or interaction by allowing the researcher to enter the world of others and attempt to gain a holistic understanding (Merriam, 2009; Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015; Bloomberg and Volpe, 2016). Qualitative research allows for deeper exploration of a phenomenon and the meaning that participants give to that phenomenon through a process of extracting and interpreting the meaning of experience (Merriam, 2009; Denzin and Lincoln, 2013a and 2013b). Within social science more broadly, qualitative research is most closely aligned with the social constructivist paradigm. However, within the discipline of IR, constructivism can be both positivist and rely upon quantitative methods or interpretivist and use qualitative methods in its research. Interpretivist researchers tend to prefer qualitative research methods that foster conversation and reflection, which allows the researcher and participants to reflexively explore the nature of things. This research uses an interpretivist methodology to understand how actors engage in identity construction. Interpretivists see meaning as being constructed socially and experientially through a dialogic process (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012). Interpretivists emphasize the role of language and discourse in understanding how actors construct meaning together. Interpretivists desire to explain and understand the social meanings that 'underpin political activity, especially "how the processes of social representations are formed and internalized" in the realm of the international' (Bevir and Daddow, 2015, p. 275). Part of the way

PAGES MISSING
FROM THIS FREE SAMPLE

Index

A

Abedi, Ramadan, 93
agency, 5
al Megrahi, Abdel Basset, 86
Al Qaeda, 93
Al Senussi, Idris, 85
Algeria, 93
Allan, G., 69
al-Sarraj, Fayez, 92, 93
Arendt, H., 73, 75, 138
Aristotelian friendship typology, 8,
21, 70
Aristotle, 77, 126, 127, 128, 129,
132, 133, 135
Arsenault, A., 38, 39, 40, 135, 139
authentic dialogue, 39

B

Barbour, R., 16
Belmokhtar, Mokhtar, 93
Benghazi, 86, 113, 117, 120
Berenskoetter, F., 8, 63, 67, 68,
125, 138
Blanchard, C., 88, 89, 90, 92
Bollier, D., 52
Boyd, D., 139
Boyd-Judson, L., 40
broadcast-focused activities, 32
Brown, K., 59, 60
Burns, T., 69
Bush, George W., 11, 33, 117, 124,
143

C

capacity-building programmes,
113, 142, 152
Chan, D., 80
Cheng, G., 80
citizen diplomacy, 41, 43, 44, 48
citizen-led Facebook forums, 138
citizen-led Facebook friendship,
51
citizen-led friendship groups
states relations through, 9
citizen-led public diplomacy, 10,
20, 22
civil society programmes,
importance, 115, 152
clicktivism, 52
Clinton, Hillary, 47, 54, 141
close-mindedness, 102, 103, 151
Cocking, D., 71, 80, 131
Colonomos, A., 48
communication
as post-sovereign peace, 4
cross-cultural, 33, 55
importance, 37, 38, 76, 145
inclusive, 112, 147, 152
networks and, 41
online, 53, 54, 78
promoting understandings, 6
relationships and, 31
transnational, 52, 56
constructivist approach, 63
Cowan, G., 38, 40, 135, 139
critical peace, 3, 4
critical social constructivism, 3,
4

cross-cultural friendships, 75, 99,
102, 130, 150
cultural diplomacy, 43
cultural exchange
and friendship groups, 110
benefits of, 109
programmes, 114, 152
culture, importance of
understanding, 49
Cyrenaica, 112, 113, 152

D

D'Hooghe, I., 42
de Kooning, Willem, 32
democratic transition, challenges
to, 89
dialogic public diplomacy, 37
dialogue
importance, 38
long-term dialogic forums, 50
public diplomacy and, 38, 39,
40, 41
role of, 41
technical and real, difference
between, 38
Digennaro, 79
digital forums, 54
diplomacy, 7
peacebuilding and, 63
public diplomacy, 7
direct services by non-state
actors, 46
discourse analysis, 15
discussion, 123
Dolan, F., 76
Dutton, 79

E

Eden, Anthony, 27
e-diplomacy efforts, 54

educational programmes, 113,
115, 152
Egypt, 91
Elder, A., 79, 80, 134
Ellison, N., 139
Emirates, 114
empirical conclusions, 150
capacity-building and
education programmes, 152
civil society organisations
importance, 152
cultural exchange programmes
importance, 152
internet and social media
changes, 151
negative views of US foreign
policy, 153
open-mindedness and mutual
respect, 151
same-culture and cross-
cultural friendships, 150
traditional and social media
impact, 151
trust building and inclusive
communication, 152
value of friendships, 150
empirical recommendations, 156
*Ethics and Information
Technology*, 79
everyday peace concept, 5
Executive Order 13780, 93
Eznack, L., 8

F

Facebook focus groups, 17, 97,
112, 116, 149
Facebook friendships, 53
as public diplomacy forum, 55
between Libyan and American
citizens, 81, 97, 106, 143, 147,
149, 150, 156, 158

- characterisations of, 129
 citizen-led public diplomacy
 and, 9, 10, 20, 25, 26
 Libyan perspectives on, 17, 47,
 126
 transnational, 6, 8, 11, 65, 135
 value of, 139
 virtual exchange in, 59
- face-to-face
 interactions/friendships, 12, 17,
 21, 22, 23, 30, 39, 48, 52, 80, 97,
 105, 106, 108, 109, 121, 128, 134,
 139, 140, 141, 142, 149, 151, 155,
 156, 157, 158
 Facebook friendships and, 12,
 17, 21
 importance of, 105, 128
 online versus, 21, 23, 53, 57, 66,
 104, 129
- Farrands, C., 68
 Fezzan, 112, 152
 Fhimah, Al Amin Khalifah, 86
 findings analysis, 126
 Fisher, A., 138
 Fitzpatrick, K., 129
 focus group interviews, 33, 111
 findings from, 97
 media impact on, 106
- focus groups
 benefits of, 16, 17
- Frangonikolopoulos, C., 50
 Friedman, M., 72
 friend or enemy, question of, 61
- friendships
 Aristotle's friendship typology,
 70
 as a bridge to peace, 65
 as a relational process, 66
 as a social practice, 65, 68
 as normal part of social life, 98
 between people, 68
 cross-culture friendships, 75
 definition, 69
 harmony and, 69
 in building trust, 67
 in international relations, 2, 77
 in IR, relational views of, 69
 Kant's conceptualisations of, 72
 meaning of, 98
 people-to-people types of, 69
 personal, 73
 pleasure, 71
 political, 73
 same-culture and cross-
 cultural, differences between,
 99
 same-culture friendships, 75
 types of, 71
 utility, 71
 value of, 75, 150
 virtue, 71
- Fullerton, J., 33
- ## G
- Gaddafi, Muammar, 10, 21, 83, 84,
 85, 86, 87, 93, 103, 109, 112, 117,
 118, 119, 122, 125, 132, 139, 141,
 144, 145, 152
- Galtung, J., 65
- General National Congress (GNC),
 90
- Glassman, Jim, 11
- global networks, 41
- goodness, 76
- goodwill, 76
- Government of National Accord
 (GNA), 92
- guanxi concept, 68
- Gullion, E., 27, 28, 60, 137
- ## H
- Habermas, J., 38, 40, 138

Haftar, Khalifa, 90, 92
 Hain, P., 53
 Hayden, C., 58
 Helland, E., 56, 134
 historical significance
 of Libya and the US relation, 83,
 85
 Hocking, B., 41, 44
 Hughes, Karen, 54
 hybrid peace, 5

I

inclusive communication, 112,
 152
 information and propaganda, line
 between, 27
 Informational and Educational
 Exchange Act, 46
 Instagram, 12, 54, 156
 international friendships, 66, 77,
 131
 social media impact on, 78
 value of, 75
 international relations, 67
 socially constructed nature of, 63
 International Visitor Program in the
 US, 115
 internet and social media, 107
 internet changes, 151
 interpersonal contact theory, 67
 interpersonal friendship, 63
 interpretivist methodology, 14

J

Jankowski, N.W., 56
 Jolie, Angelina, 44
 Jordan, 91
 Josselin, D., 48

K

Kant, I., 72, 77, 127, 128
 Kennett, 131
 Khattala, Abu, 90
 Kim Jung Un, 44
 kin type relationships, 69
 King, P., 69
 Kirkpatrick, K., 138
 Kitzinger, J., 16
 knowledge exchange
 programmes, 114
 Koschut, S., 1, 8, 62, 63, 65, 125,
 130, 137, 146
 Kratochwil, F., 6

L

LaBelle Disco bombing, 21, 86
 LAFA forum, 134
 language escalation framework,
 18, 19
 LAUFP forum, 134
Lectures on Ethics, 72
 Leonard, Mark, 38
 Libya American Friendship
 Association, 13
 Libya Dawn, 90
 Libyan American Friendship
 Association Facebook group, 47
 Libyan and American Friendship
 Association, 20, 66
 Libyan and Americans United for
 Friendship and Peace, 13
 Libyan National Army (LNA), 90
 Libyans and Americans United for
 Friendship and Peace, 20, 47
 light footprint approach, 87, 146
 Linklater, A., 39, 40, 61
 Lockerbie bombing, 21, 86, 117,
 118
 London Underground bombing, 94

Lyotard, J., 39

M

Manchester bombing, 94
 Marshall, J., 46
 Mattern, Bially, 144
 McClory, J., 30, 46, 143
 McHale, Judith, 27, 136
 Mead, G., 62
 media, 52, *See also* new media
 Melissen, J., 28, 138
Metaphysical Principles of Virtue,
 72
 methodological
 recommendations, 155
 Montville, Joe, 42
 More, Thomas, 7
 Motherwell, Robert, 32
 multi-track diplomacy, 43
 Muslim ban, 30, 93

N

Nasser, Gamal Abdel, 85
 negative peace, 2
 Nelson, B., 39
 new media, 52
 new public diplomacy paradigm, 26
 1967 Six-Day War, 85
 non-state actors, 49, 53
 critique of, 49
 direct services by, 46
 global events influenced by, 46
 in public diplomacy, 41, 45
 in soft power, 31
 role, 25
 Nordin, A., 2, 8, 64, 68, 131
 Nye, J., 30, 35, 45, 138, 143

O

Obama, Barack, 47, 88

Oelsner, A., 1, 8, 62, 63, 65, 125,
 130, 137, 146
 online communication, 53
 online friendships, 23, 80
 face-to-face versus, 104
 offline and, comparison, 80
 through social media, 106
 online social networking, 59
 Onuf, N., 6
 Open Dialogue, 54
 open-mindedness, 102, 103, 131,
 151
 relations and, 102
 Operation Odyssey Lightning, 91
 Ottoman Empire, 85

P

Pan Am flight 103 bombing, 86,
 117
 Papacharissi, Z., 58
 Patsias, C., 79
 Patsias, S., 79
 peer-to-peer approach, 54
 people as agents, 3
 people-to-people
 interactions/friendships, 8, 27,
 68, 69
 Pigman, G., 27
 pleasure friendships, 71
 political friendships, 69, 73, 75
Politics As a Vocation, 6
 Pollock, Jackson, 32
 Pouliot, V., 4
 Powell, C., 51
 practice theory, 3, 5
 practice turn in IR, 6
 Proedrou, F., 50
 public diplomacy, 7, 25, *See also*
 dialogic public diplomacy, *See*
 also virtual public diplomacy,
 See also US public diplomacy,

See also citizen-led public diplomacy
 activities, 32
 and friendship, 22
 as a soft power form, 25, 29
 as a top-down process, 28
 as state-centric activity, 27
 cultural diplomacy as vital component to, 32
 definition, 25, 26, 42
 dialogic form of, 40
 evolution of, 20, 25
 importance of understanding culture, 26
 in diverse cultural contexts, 28
 networks role in, 26
 NGOs in, 45
 non-state actors in, 45
 processes in, 29
 purpose of, 26
 relational-centred public diplomacy, 12
 relationship-centred approach in, 37
 shift from messaging to dialogue, 25, 37
 since 9/11, 117
 social media role in, 26
 state-centric public diplomacy, 10
 traditional diplomacy versus, 26
 two-way dialogic forms of, 7
 understanding the impact of, 59
 US government's approach to, 40
 virtual exchanges between citizens role in, 26
 Public Diplomacy 2.0, 55

Q

Qadhafi coup, 121
 Qatar, 91
 Quartet, Brubeck, 32

R

real dialogue, 38, 39
 recommendations, 154
 empirical recommendations, 156
 for further research, 154
 methodological recommendations, 155
 theoretical recommendations, 155
 Regan, Ronald, 86
 religion, 131
 as a barrier to relations, 100
 relations and, 101
 respect, 131
 and relations, 102
 importance, 151
 Responsibility to Protect (R2P), 87
 Rice, Condoleezza, 47
 Richmond, O., 141
 Rodman, Dennis, 44
 Rothko, Mark, 32

S

Salame, Ghassen, 90
 same-culture friendships, 75, 150
 cross-cultural friendships and, 99
 Saudi Arabia, 91, 114
 Saunders, F., 37
 Schmitt, C., 61, 69
 Schneider, C., 33
 Schultz, A., 16
 Seeds of Peace camp, 67
 self and other, distinction, 2

- Senussi, Idris, 21, 143
Shanahan, Patrick, 91
shared life, 79
Shared Values Initiative
 campaign, 33
Sharp, P., 28
small talk, 58
Smith, G., 2, 8, 64, 68, 131
Smith, L., 54
Snowball sampling, 19
social artefact interaction
 practice, 6
social forums
 in building friendships, 79
social media
 about relationships, 55, 56
 benefits of, 104
 changes, 151
 competing narratives in, 57
 critics of, 58
 friendships, 140
 impact of, 151
 impact on focus group
 interviews, 106
 impact on international
 friendships, 78
 internet and, 107
 online relationships through,
 106
social networking sites, 59
social power, 31
*Social Theory of International
 Politics*, 1
society-centric diplomacy, 137
soft power, 29, *See also* US soft
 power
 building networks and fostering
 collaboration as, 30
 non-state actors role in, 31
 norm advocacy in, 31
 public diplomacy as a form of,
 29
state actors, 53
states and citizens of states,
 relations between, 123
Stevens Initiative, 116
Stevens, Chris, 47, 55, 84, 110, 116
- ## T
- technical dialogue, 38
technology
 in communication, 133
 influence, 151
Telfer, E., 74
territorial sovereignty, 4
Thebaud, J., 39
theoretical literature
 main streams of, 125
theoretical recommendations, 155
13 Hours, 76
Thomlison, T., 37
total communication, 54
Track I diplomacy, 42, 43
Track II diplomacy, 42
translation software, 105
transnational citizen-led
 Facebook friendship groups
 reasoning/narratives modes,
 135, 143
transnational citizen-led
 friendship, 7, 13
transnational Facebook
 friendship, 6, 65
travel ban, 93
Tripoli, 86, 117
Tripolitan War in 1801-1805, 117
Tripolitania, 112, 152
Trump, Donald, 30, 31, 34, 37, 83,
 93, 94, 120
trust, 67, 98
 building, importance, 112, 152
 in friendship, 67
Tunisia, 113

Turkey, 91, 114
Twitter, 12, 54
two-way dialogic process, 7

U

United Arab Emirates, 91
United States Information Agency
(USIA), 32
US Embassy public diplomacy
efforts, 94
US foreign policy, issues in, 117
US public diplomacy, 25, 32
criticism of, 36
post-9/11 period, 34
since 9/11, 33, 36, 83, 124
US soft power
decline of, 30
US travel ban, 144
utility friendship, 71

V

Van Ham, P., 35, 36
Van Hoef, Y., 8, 67, 68, 125, 130,
138
Veltman, 127

virtual cultural exchange, 124
virtual exchange programmes, 54
virtual public diplomacy, 26
virtue friendships, 71

W

Waldhauser, Thomas, 91
Walhof, D., 69
Wallace, W., 48
Weber, Max, 6
Wendt, A., 1, 2, 6, 8, 61, 62, 63, 136
Whelan, M., 34
World Social Forum project, 79

Y

YouTube, 56

Z

Zaharna, R., 35, 38, 41, 44, 50, 134,
138
Zhao Tingyang, 68
Zogby, 153
Zweerde, Van Der, 73, 130