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# The Tribal Structure in Libya: Factor for fragmentation or cohesion?

**O**bservatoire du monde arabo-musulman  
et du Sahel

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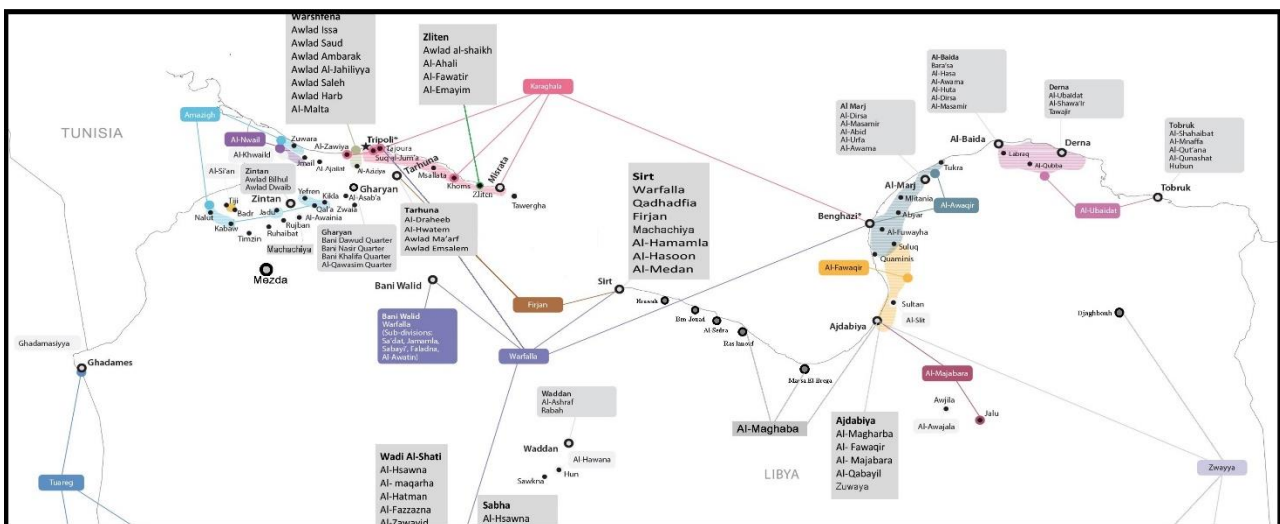
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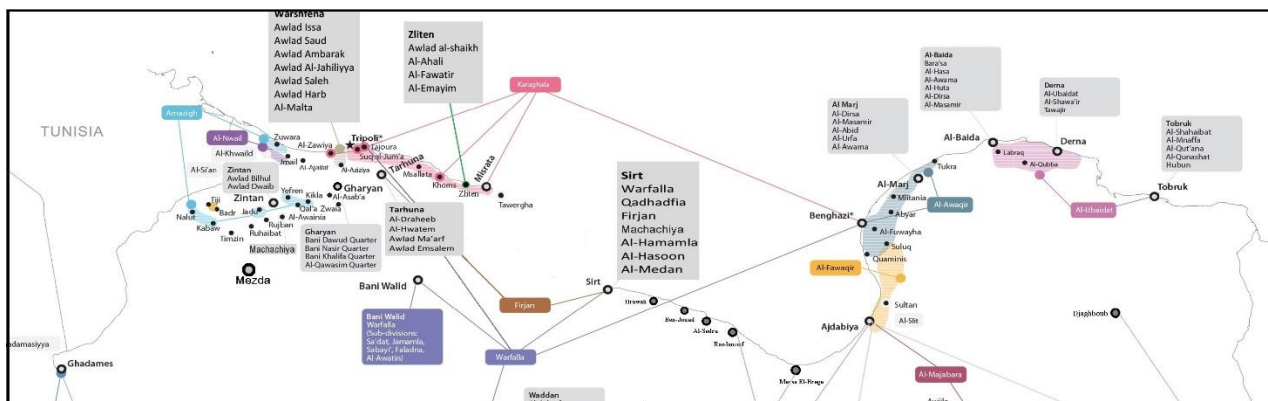
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# INTRODUCTION

Libya was built, for better or for worst, around a tribal and regional system. The tribe thus plays a key role in the formation of loyalty and affiliations. Indeed, all along the process of state-building by the colonising powers of Italy, Britain and France, then under the short-lived monarchy of King Sanusi and finally during Gaddafi's presidency, tribal structures have prevailed. They play a role that is more important than ever in the daily lives of Libyans. The Senussi brotherhood took its roots from the East of Libya at the time of the Ottoman Empire and then played a key role in the resistance to Italian colonisation. However, this was only possible as it was able to append itself to the existing tribal network.

This system survived until the Libyan independence of 1951 and Idris' rule that was reliant on tribal alliances to gain legitimacy. The Gaddafi regime has worked to reinvigorate the efficiency of the tribal alliances at the same time it strove to utilise ideology by remoulding not only the political structures, but also the tribal system. The Libyan conflict of 2011 begs the question of the place of tribalism and more generally that of primary solidarity networks. In addition to the institutional system, the tribe has played an important part in the organisation of links of solidarity to insure the protection of individuals when the structures of governance of the old regime have collapsed. It has retaken and reinvented its role in the public sphere including in the justice and security realms, in the management and resolution of conflicts.





The contextualisation of Libyan tribalism is thus important for a good understanding of the current events, the events to come and the historical signification of tribes in the structure of the Libyan State and Colonel Gaddafi’s inheritance of respect for tribal identity. The vital questions relate to whether the tribal structures have prevented the construction of the Libyan state. What is the role of the tribe in the new Libya? This subject is especially crucial as international society, gambling on a fragile government of national unity, seems to be struggling to understand the major role that tribal composition plays in Libya. Nonetheless, it is an undeniable fact. In a Libya that needs to be entirely rebuilt, nothing seems to be achievable if it fails to take into account this peculiarity.

This study is an analysis of the way that tribal structure in Libya favours or prevents the creation of a new State after the fall of the Gaddafi regime in 2011 and attempts to develop the understanding in the importance and limitations of tribal politics in post-Gaddafi Libya.

## I – Tribalism in Libya

The structure of Libyan society is principally tribal. It should not be forgotten that the name of Libya comes from the millenary tribe of the Libu.<sup>1</sup> Tribalism or “qabaliya” in Libya, refers to the methods of social organisation through lineage and through a common ancestry. However, centuries of history have developed the characteristics of tribal society in Libya and it has evolved in its complexity. The country is rich with tribes spread out throughout the country with many small tribal enclaves. The successive wave of migration of Arab tribes and clans have confounded its ascendance throughout time.

<sup>1</sup> Libya owes its name to the tribe of the Libu. The Greeks called the region west of the valley of the Nile, Λιβύη and it stretched all the way to the ocean according to certain texts. The Romans called the province Tripolitania. It became the Regency of Tripoli under the Ottoman Empire. Since always, the main framework organisation of Libya was the tribe and Gaddafi’s long reign changed little. To find out more: Mohamed Troudi, « La Libye: une composition tribale complexe » 30 Mai 2011 <http://www.makaila.fr/article-mohamed-trouidi-la-libye-une-composition-tribale-complexe-75126536.html>

Families that have become bound to one another through marriage, geography and trade have equally been considered as new tribes, creating distinction and hierarchies amongst the tribes and between them.<sup>2</sup> This communal organisation has even allowed Libyans to maintain multiple links with Tunisia and Egypt. Such ties are also made up of solidarities, marriages, economic exchanges, migration and even downturns as tribal affiliations exceed the boundaries of the Libyan State. This is the reason why the events that took place in Libya in 2011 had such profound repercussions.<sup>3</sup>

Libyan society, like many Arab societies, is based on traditional identifications such as family, tribe, religion and town. In such a society, the actions of individuals can bring reputation or collective shame to the family and to the tribe. The good or bad reputation of a family or tribe thus decidedly influences the lives of individuals on social, political and economic levels.

Tribes in Libya offer a system of social and cognitive reference in which a wide range of corporate networks, of differing sizes, can organise themselves. As in all forms of human social organisation, flexibility and innovation are equally important as creation and tradition. The tribe is a powerful vector to obtain privileges, accelerate administrative processes, obtain authorisations or protect oneself against violence. Each tribe is different according to its strength and the degree of proximity or loyalty it possesses towards the regime in power.

In this way, belonging to a primary community (in the way of 'asabiyya), whether it be ethnic, tribal, regional or local is a central part of the majority of Libyans' lives. It defines their identity but also insures their protection in times of crises, as was demonstrated in the war of 2011.

Yet, this sense of belonging to a community is not necessarily incompatible with other identities. It does not automatically pose a challenge to issues pertaining to belonging to a national community which is equally important in the definition of individuals' identities.<sup>4</sup> The increase in identification to a town or tribe is by no means new. Libyans have found refuge in tribal structures since the start of Gaddafi's rule. Nonetheless, this process accelerated during the revolution of 2011 when the central authority collapsed and many Libyan tribes gained experience in weaponry and combat.

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Colei, Fiona Mangan, « Tribe, Security, Justice, and Peace in Libya today », Peaceworks, the United States Institute of Peace, (N°118), August 2016, p.6.

<sup>3</sup> Olivier Pliez, « Est-Ouest, État-tribus... La Libye ne peut-elle échapper au mode binaire ? », pp.235-248. <http://books.openedition.org/ifpo/7016?lang=fr>

<sup>4</sup> Virginie Collombier, « Nouvelle Libye » ou « fin de la Libye » ? Les chemins tracés par la transition post Qadhafi, dossier : Vers un nouveau Moyen-Orient ? États arabes en crise entre logiques de division et sociétés civiles, March 22nd 2016, pp.261-275.

Tribalism is a key component of the social and political arena no matter how much importance it is attributed. Loyal tribes were an instrument of power for the tight and rigorous control of society and the geographical cohesion of areas where tribal sheikhs were present. Such leaders, in the name of centralised power, took on the fight against the diverse opposition forces on their own territories. The Libyan guide even leant on the tribe, which can be defined as a non-institutional force, to impose his political legitimacy. Gaddafi wanted to grant additional responsibility to tribes and hence coerce them to enforce the rule of law of a central government that would no longer need to take a party in tribal conflicts. Indeed, such conflicts are often complex and difficult to resolve in a society where the tribe is still socially dominant. These processes drag tribes into violent fragmentary logic. Such an evolution, which has asserted itself whilst Gaddafi consolidated his personal power and marginalised institutional cogs (seen as potential spaces of “technocratic resistance”), came to fruition from the start of the 90s. At that time, the difficulties of the embargo intensified and reduced central government’s grip on society. The most striking grip of this evolution is the creation of the Social People’s Commands (CPS) of 1994. This created a Code of Honour in which chiefs promised to guarantee the loyalty of members of their tribes.<sup>5</sup> However, loyalty was not guaranteed in all cases. It is clear that tribes could also enter into rebellion and bear arms against the regime. This was the case of the Zinten tribe in 2011 which emancipated itself of all obedience to the regime. The regime did not realise that the sheikhs of the Zinten tribe, often illiterate and easily swayed by a regime that held money or immediate interests, were no longer influential. The alliances amongst families and clans were put into question and the balance of power which had allowed Gaddafi to maintain his power was broken. In the same way, the tribe itself had lost the influence that had been an inherent part of Libya in the last decades, in particular amongst familial and social hierarchy. New generations were reluctant to bend themselves to the rules of a society strongly anchored and structured by outdated values.<sup>6</sup>

The tribe is one of the strongest social organisations and tribalism always plays an important social role. The tribe is, for example, given the role of putting an end to the relative problems of the question of land property and to intervene to impose justice. Since 2011, in the judicial sphere, the tribe is considered as efficient at conflict resolution between individuals by acting as a local referee and mediator. In particular, this form of settling differences is considered to be beneficial in property conflicts, family matters such as marriage, inheritance and complaints as well as rapes and murders. After an initial process of protection, such cases are usually left to the judicial system. Such tribal intervention is only motivated by a desire to help the judiciary more efficiently. The tribes are certainly interested to profit from the current situation by turning the cases

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<sup>5</sup> Ali Bensaad, « Changement social et contestations en Libye », dossier « La Libye révolutionnaire », politique africaine, (n°125), January 2012, pp.5-22.

<sup>6</sup> Cristiano Tinazzi, « Tribalisme, politique, guerre », *Outre-Terre*, (N° 29), 2011/3, pp.263-268.

implicating their members of the formal judicial system. Tribal intervention is thus not generally considered as an alternative to the processes of a justice system of State or formal institutions. Usually the role of the tribe is social mediation rather than interference in judicial aspects. It is important to underline that the forms of tribal refereeing and mediation do not make up a parallel justice system to the State. The advantages of calling upon the informal institution of the tribe and its justice system are that the latter is more accessible, faster, more transparent and less corrupt than those of State tribunals.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the tribal mediator or the sheikh are considered to be better equipped to guarantee the application of tribal decisions. Such decisions are closer to the community's collective beliefs and are enforced by social pressure

Al-Marbua is considered the physical location of tribal justice and politics. It is an area for a mixture of homogenous spheres but also a platform for the appropriation of local and national policies by the local political arena. The political culture of these meetings is shaped by a process centered on a consensus of moderation and negotiation anchored in tribal traditions. However, it is also directed by education and by the experience of governance and business.

Nonetheless, the normative orientations remain principally conservative and traditional. Indeed, tribal society has difficulties in integrating the urban youth in full growth. The tribal system is dominated by principals of seniority. Authority and organisation belong to senior tribal leaders. Traditionally, young men with political ambition must belong to a senior politician's surrounding.<sup>8</sup> In Cyrenaica, the "politics of Marbua" has been a key factor in the production of order, of conflict resolution and of the offer of basic services for the population in 2011 and even today. Despite perspectives considering tribes as an obstacle to development, tribal politicians have succeeded in managing the balance of interests amongst over ten tribes and have thus created regional integration amongst the agitation of the revolution.

Libya, in the image of other countries in the region has experienced a demographic change which has translated in major social change. Even if urbanisation (85% from 1995 as opposed to 45% in 1964) seems to have been sent to the background in relation to tribal reality, it is still prevalent. The Libyan population is predominantly young and uneducated. The level of female education, after the positive advances of the Jamahiriyya in this area is nonetheless satisfactory.<sup>9</sup> However, the great majority of Libyans still talk of "tribal affiliation." Such points of view can be attributed to what is known as the

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<sup>7</sup> Amal Obeidi, « Role of the Tribe in Libya: Making the Informal Forma », Searching for Justice in Post-Gaddafi Libya, pp.189-194.

<sup>8</sup> Hüsken, Thomas. « Tribal Political Culture and the Revolution in the Cyrenaica of Libya. », Orient, Vol. 53, (No.1), 2012, pp.26-31.

<sup>9</sup> Jean-François Daguzan, Jean-Yves Moisseron, « La Libye après Kadhafi : essai de prospective géopolitique du conflit libyen », Hérodote, (n° 142), 2011/3, pp.78-97.

“ruralisation” of the town. Nonetheless, the tribe is still present today in the minds of a great deal of city dwellers. It is particularly important to note that instead of integrating to the life of the town and adopting the ways and modes of urban life, rural people entered the towns over the last forty years as conquerors and have imposed upon the town and its inhabitants the peculiarities of rural life. This persistence with tribal loyalty has had an impact on the entirety of the process of modernisation and the strength of tribal loyalty has contributed to “obstruct societal transition towards the stage of modernity.”

The Libyan social strata is made up of Arabs, Amazighs, Touaregs and Tebus. It is also important to note that Libya encapsulates over a hundred tribes, with thirty key players. They form the real economic and social framework of the country. The majority (90%) of Libyans are a mixture of Arab or ethnic Arabs and Berbers. The population nonetheless counts a few minorities in the nomadic Touareg tribes, the Tebus in the south and the Berbers (Amazighs).<sup>10</sup> At present, around 90% of the total population is linked to a tribe, whilst only 10% are not tied organically to a tribe, notably in the northern Libyan cities.

Islam is the official State religion of Libya and Islamic law is the main form of legislation. The provisional constitution protects religious liberties. Nonetheless, despite these laws, the government does not have the means nor does it want to apply such legislation. Certain individuals have been targeted because of their beliefs. In 2013 a Coptic church in Benghazi was fire-bombed and at the start of February 2016 there were several attacks against sufi sanctuaries as well as the assassination of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians by jihadists. This highlights an increase in religious intolerance inside the country, fed in part through the rise of extremist, jihadist groups.

Libya benefits from a strategic position in between the Maghreb and Mashrek, Africa and Europe and at the intersection of two seas. One of water in the Mediterranean and one of sand in the Sahara. The country is also the beneficiary of strategic advantages. It is considered to be the gateway to North Africa with 1900 km of Mediterranean coast. It's central position on this coast makes it an important relay between the Western Arab world the Middle East. Moreover, it constitutes the first point of passage of Europeans to the North West of the African continent. Situated in the middle of the Old World, it is one of the crossroads of communication between the Mediterranean and Sahel Africa. Libya has a surface of 1 759 540 km, the fourth largest of any African country after Algeria, the Sudan and the Congo. It is limited by the Mediterranean in the north at the

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<sup>10</sup> Arturo Varvelli, « The role of tribal dynamics in the Libyan future », Analysis, ISPI (No.172), May 2013, p.6.



33<sup>rd</sup> parallel and by the Tropic of Cancer, south of the oasis of Kufra, near the 20<sup>th</sup> parallel. Libya is in the middle of North Africa, between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> East Meridian.<sup>11</sup>

Libya has traditionally been split into three geographical entities. First, Tripolitania where one can find Tripoli, the current political and economic capital. As it benefits from a port whose commercial and strategic importance go back to antiquity, it has prospered from the favours of the fallen regime. Around the town, the vast agricultural plain of the Juffara, dominated by the long and high plateaus of Djebel Nefousa (mountain range in the West, dominated by the Berbers). In the south, the region stops in the outskirts of the important border town of Ghadames.<sup>12</sup>

Then, Cyrenaica occupies the whole western part of the country. The main town, Benghazi, ex-political capital under the monarchy is key to the north-east, which includes several towns, including Toubrouk, one of the rare natural, closed ports with deep water in the country. The levelled plateaus of Djebel Akhbar (which reaches 600m) dominate the sea and are divided by small agricultural plains. This region has been turned towards Egypt and the Machrek since Antiquity. It incorporates the south-east, where the very unwelcoming Libyan desert stretches. Nonetheless, it is an area of great economic and strategic importance as a transit zone to Sudan. This vast desert area is organised around the Kufra oasis. Libyan oil geopolitics grants an advantage to the eastern regions. The map of deposits is in fact very predominantly dominated by the Syrte basin which possesses 85% of petrol reserves and 70% of gas reserves. The remainder comes from the basins of Ghadames and Mourzouq (south-west) as well as the Pelagiab offshore in the north-west. Reflecting this supremacy, five of the six Libyan terminals are located in the East. Four come from the petrol crescent (Al-Sidra, Ras Lanouf, Brega and Zoueitina) and the last one is situated in Toubrouk, not far from the Egyptian border. In total, 64% of Libyan exported crude oil is loaded into these eastern terminals. Moreover, four out of the five refineries are located in Cyrenaica.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, the Fezzan is a wide transit road towards the Sahel (current states of Chad and Niger) and towards Algeria, coveted by France since colonial times. The region is dotted with oases, with a main town of Sebha (200 000 inhabitants). This century-old commercial center is also the administrative center of the region and harbours some very important military installations. Since the Kadhafi fled there to escape Italian colonisation, a part of this tribe lives there, which has contributed to making it one of Gaddafi's fortresses. Somewhat smaller, Ghadames has lost its splendour with the decline of

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<sup>11</sup> Ben Lamma Mohamed Faraj, « Immuable et changeante : la géopolitique libyenne de l'après Kadhafi », *Maghreb-Machrek*, n° 214, 2012/3, pp.147-158.

<sup>12</sup> Patrice Gourdin, « Géopolitique de la Libye », *Diploweb.com*, September 18th 2011.  
file:///Users/benlamma/Downloads/article\_824.pdf

<sup>13</sup> Frédéric Bobin, « En Libye, l'incessante bataille du pétrole », *Le Monde*, September 26th 2016.

caravan trade but remains an important strategic zone at the meeting of Algeria and Tunisia, equally like Ghat, further in the south, in the Touareg heartlands.<sup>14</sup>

Figure n° 1 : MAP OF THE GEOGRAPHIC SITUATION OF LIBYA



Source : Les manats du Roi. <http://archives.lesmanantsduroi.com/articles2/article32400.php>

<sup>14</sup>Patrice Gourdin, op. cit. file:///Users/benlamma/Downloads/article\_824.pdf

## 2 – Tribal composition

The tribe is considered as a key component of Libyan society where it plays a key political and socio-economic role. The tribal system is complex and very difficult to decipher due to the closed nature of the Libyan society. The two most important Arab tribes and the most influential come from the Arabic peninsula. The Beni Salim tribe installed itself in Cyrenaica and on the western coastal region of Libya whereas the Beni Hilal historically occupied the western region around Tripoli. For the Al-Amazighe, it is difficult to estimate the number of people who belong to the confederation. Nonetheless they can be estimated at around 200 000 and they mostly inhabit the mountains of Djebel Nefoussa and the coastal town of Zouara. Identity claims, notably Amazighe, are now re-emerging.<sup>15</sup> Claiming to have been unfairly marginalised and targeted during Gaddafi's forty-two-year rule, the Berbers are looking to obtain political representation as well as acknowledgement of their culture (language, books and television channel.)

To simplify an extremely confusing subject, we will focus on the most influential tribes through their constituency and dominant geographical position. Naturally, the most important tribes have an increased influence on vast areas and an increased capacity to impose their central authority.

### 2.1 – *The most influential tribes in the West of Libya (Tripolitania)*

In Tripolitania, the biggest and most influent tribe in the East of Libya is that of the Warfalla. Indeed, it has traditionally played a central role in the region. The Qhadhadfia, a smaller and more insignificant tribe which is located on the fringes of the Syrte region at the heart of the country, only took a central political position and real power when Gaddafi, one of its own, came to power. Alliances were necessary to consolidate his position in power. The Zinten tribe became a political and military player only after Gaddafi's death. It should not be forgotten that a certain number of important tribes in this region, including the Tarhuna and the Warshafana, played a key role in Gaddafi's tribal system. These tribes, situated next to Tripoli, are strongly integrated within the Libyan army.

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<sup>15</sup> Hélène Bravin, Kamel Almarache, « Le temps des milices et des gangs », *Les Cahiers de l'Orient*, (N° 111) 2013/3, pp. 107-146. Voir aussi, Salem Chaker, Masin Ferkal, « Berbères de Libye : un paramètre méconnu, une irruption politique inattendue », *Politique africaine*, (N° 125), 2012/1, pp. 105-126.

### 2.1.1 – The Warfallah tribe

The Warfallah tribe is the most important tribe in Libya due to its number and geographical spread. It is the dominant tribe of Tripolitania. It counts around one million individuals. Members of this tribe live in the West of Libya where the town of Bin Waled has been called the “fiefdom of the Warfalla tribe.” Members of the tribe also live in the East and in the South.

During eighteen years (1975-1993), the Qadhadfa and Warfallah alliance progressively transformed itself into a hegemonic force. Benefitting from the new tribal alliance, the Warfalla have prepared the ground for its members to infiltrate State institutions in administration, the army, diplomatic structures and notably the security and revolutionary committees. As they had the feeling that the tribe was too implicated alongside Gaddafi, the Warfallah sheikhs started to think of change. More importantly, a division split them in two camps. On the one hand, the chiefs and sheikhs who appeared to remain loyal to the alliance. On the other, young Warfallah officers who occupied strategic posts in the heart of the army. The latter led a military insurrection against the Guide in 1993. This uprising ended in failure. The regime reacted with a level of violence previously unseen. Trials, executions of high ranking military figures, hanging of civilians, demolition of the houses of officers implicated in the plot in the presence of the concerned families who were deprived of attending school, water and electricity. This provoked a backlash amongst the Warfallah of Bin Waled. In retaliation to this attempt at forced destitution, the regime had engaged in blind repression which led from that moment to the progressive disintegration of tribal alliances (Warfallah, Qadhadfa and Magariha) on which the Gaddafi system relied. Why did the Gaddafi regime use such excessive violence when the crisis could have been the object of normal judicial treatment? It is precisely because the dominant logic was essentially tribal.<sup>16</sup>

The tribes are not considered as collective governed actors in an authoritarian and hierarchical sense. On the contrary, each tribe is divided into “sub-tribes”, with family lines and extended families.<sup>17</sup> In 2011, the Warfallah did not act as a unified actor. The important figure of the Bani Walid helped to mobilise a support for the regime amongst the tribal districts. During the conference of Libyan tribes in May 2011, the president Ali Al-Ahwal and his deputy, the religious dignitary Muhammad al-Barguthi, both came from Bani Walid. Bani Walid also remained amongst the last bastions of the regime with Syrte and only fell in October 2011.<sup>18</sup> The Warfallah in the East were predominantly

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<sup>16</sup> Moncef Ouannès, « Composante endogène de la résurgence tribale », *Outre-Terre*, (n° 29), 2011/3, pp. 255-262.

<sup>17</sup> Cécile Hennion, « Dans l'euphorie de la révolution, les blessures libyennes ont été sous-estimées », *Le Monde*, February 20th 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Wolfram Lacher, « Libya's Local Elites and the Politics of Alliance Building », *Mediterranean Politics*, 2016, pp. 64-85.

supporters of the revolution from the offset. As an example, the Warfallah sheikh in the Benghazi region asked the population to oppose itself to the regime. Its chief even declared: “*We declare to brother Muammar Gaddafi that he is no longer a brother, we tell him to leave the country.*”<sup>19</sup>

With the repositioning of primary identities on the political scene, it was normal that in February 2012, the tribal elders of Bani Walid create the “Social Council of Warfallah Tribes SCWT” whose name and insigne was not a reference to the new order but rather called to mind the Gaddafi era. Made up of ten men of each of the five Warfallah Aqşam (a structure dating from the Ottoman era established with fiscal intentions), the social Council claimed to be the only legitimate representative of the town and decision-making body. Members of the SCWT came together regularly to coordinate and plan local business. The SCWT ignores and refuses to recognise the legitimacy of all post-Gaddafi government or national institutions. The opposition it held towards national institutions explains in part the issues of transitional justice faced by the Bani Walid where the youth formed an important number of fighters loyal to Gaddafi during the revolution and who since the revolution have harboured a certain number of people considered to be war criminals and against whom arrest warrants have been delivered.

In June 2014, the social Council abstained from boycotting the legislative elections. The vote finally took place with poor participation rates and fragmented votes. The winners’ claims to represent Bani Walid were tenuous to say the least. The CSTW equally organised regional meetings of tribal chiefs in the central and southern regions. These meetings were used as an opportunity to ask the tribes to unite to support the introduction of national amnesties, free prisoners and end the marginalisation of specific communities. In the growing national crisis of mid-2014, the neutral position of Bani Walid attempted to create a political alternative. Neither Karam, nor Fajr Libya. They failed and are now even more marginalised as they do not have a powerful military in the growing fight for national power.

### 2.1.2 – The Qadhadfa tribe

The Qadhadfa tribe is the tribe of Muammar Gaddafi, born in a town in the desert around 50 miles south of Syrte. There are six under-tribes of Gaddafi. Their members are found in the two most important Libyan towns, Tripoli and Benghazi, but their main fortress is located in the territory stretching from Syrte (Gaddafi considered turning it into the capital of the country for a certain period) to the neighbourhood of Fezzan in Sabha (where Gaddafi attended secondary school.)

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<sup>19</sup> Igor Chersticha, « Libya’s revolution: tribe, nation, politics », open Democracy, 2011, pp.1-6.  
file:///Users/benamma/Desktop/tribaux/2011-10-03\_-\_Libya039s\_revolution\_tribe\_nation\_politics\_.pdf

The Qadhadfa tribe is not a historic force in Libya, in part because it is not very populous. The majority of its members had not played an important role in the war against Italian occupation, for example. Nor did the tribe have much influence under the monarchy, with focus shifting to livestock farming.<sup>20</sup> However, since Gaddafi took power, members of his tribe have come to play an essential role in the affairs of the Libyan core. The Libyan number one, Gaddafi counted predominantly on the members of his tribe to defend his regime against any attempt at a coup d'état. He even dissolved the army, named at the time "Echaâb El Moussalah" (the armed people). It is the army that had directed the first attempt at a political coup.<sup>21</sup> However, Gaddafi reinforced the special security units led by his sons and members of his tribe. Gaddafi's tribe being evidently the most represented in the army, this followed the same logic. It enshrined the tribal roots of Gaddafi's policies with support coming from tribes dependent principally on their level of economic success under the regime. This explicit need to associate the tribes to the hierarchy in power highlights the clear tribal factor at the heart of Libyan society. Yet, the tribal element in Libyan society is not only a source of legitimation for power, it is above all its main source of inspiration.<sup>22</sup>

### 2.1.3 – *The Zinten tribe*

Zinten, located in the middle of Djebel Nefoussa, some 150 km to the south west of Tripoli has become a stronghold of post-Gaddafi Libya. The town has acquired vast amounts of weaponry abandoned by Gaddafi and developed a considerable military influence. Whilst there exists a local and stable government in Zinten, there have been armed skirmishes with the neighbouring tribe of Machachiya due to differences concerning financial rights relating to the arbitrary redistribution of Gaddafi tribes. His youngest son, Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, should remain in Prison in Zinten whilst he awaits trial, officially until the rule of law and order is re-established in Libya, but also equally as a "hostage of influence." However, in a dramatic turn of events, he was freed on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 2017, perhaps at the request of General Haftar or of his supporters so as to weigh in on the balance of forces as Saif's influence remains considerable in the country.

The Zinten have equally deployed a powerful military presence in the Tripoli so as to preserve their influence on the shaky coalition which is currently fighting to govern Libya.<sup>23</sup> In 2014, when the national project got stuck, Zinten forces favoured the camp of pro operation "dignity" which encapsulated schematically the "anti-Islamist" faction.

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<sup>20</sup> Special Report: Libya's Tribal Dynamics, Assessments, Stratfor, Feb. 25, 2011. <https://worldview.stratfor.com/analysis/special-report-libyas-tribal-dynamics>

<sup>21</sup> Hocine Chougui, « La composition ethnique des tribus libyennes », March 12th 2012. <http://www.ism-france.org/analyses/La-composition-ethnique-des-tribus-libyennes-article-16702>

<sup>22</sup> Ali Dolamari, « Le tribalisme libyen : un critère géopolitique », *Outre-Terre*, (n° 23), 2009/3, pp. 123-125.

<sup>23</sup> « Report Libya: Militias, Tribes and Islamists », December 19th 2014. [http://www.landinfo.no/asset/3025/1/3025\\_1.pdf](http://www.landinfo.no/asset/3025/1/3025_1.pdf)



The Zinten have lost the battle of Tripoli, they have had to fall back to their mountainous fiefdom of Djebel Nefoussa. Despite the strategic depth that they benefitted in the South, despite the good relations they had with certain tribes in the region (notably Tuareg groups) and despite the three oil fields under their control in the Fezzan, they no longer have the capacity to weigh militarily in Tripolitania.

## 2.2 – *The Tribe in the Barqa region (Cyrenaica)*

In the East, the region of Barqa or Cyrenaica is marked by a diverse tribal composition.<sup>24</sup> The tribes play an important role in society and influence the political and economic spheres of the region. The tribes of Cyrenaica can be split among socio-economic status into two categories: the Sa'da,<sup>25</sup> who claim to come from Bani Salim own land. Their clients the Marabtin would be descendents of previous Arab invasions, the Abaidat, Abid, Ailat Fayid, Arif, Awaqir, Bara'assa, Darsa, Hasa and Magharba who make up the nine Saadi tribes. There are 24 Marabtin tribes,<sup>26</sup> including the Awwama, Fwakhir, Habbun, Jarrarra, Mnefa, Qatan, Sh'habat, Shwair, Taraki and Zuwaya.

### 2.2.1 – *Al-Abaidat tribe*

The Al-Abaidat tribe, made up of approximately fifteen sub-tribes, is one of the most powerful tribes in the Cyrenaica region. The dominant Sa'da tribe is Al-Abaidat whose members settled in the region in the XVIIIth century after repelling Awlad Ali to the west of Egypt. Al-Abaidat rests on the relation amongst fifteen clans who control different territories conquered by right. Al-Abaidat owes its position to its military expertise and its protection to the religious order of the Sanusi. For this reason, they have occupied the head of all security institutions in the region since the Ottoman era, including the national Libyan army under Idris and Gaddafi.

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<sup>24</sup> Cyrenaica (in ancient Greek *Κυρηναία*, in latin *Cyrenaica*), was a roman province in North Africa, located between the the provinces of Egypt and Numidia. This territory is today a part of Libya. Its name comes from the old greek town of Cyrene. Colonised by the Greeks from the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., it belonged to Hellenistic Egypt for a long period of time. Ptolomeus VII bequeathed it personally to his son Ptolomeus Apion who, without an heir, passed it on to the Roman Republic in 96 B.C. The Republic then made it into a province with the Greek island of Crete. When the Muslim Arabs captured it in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the drying of the climate and the fall in water levels contributed to depopulating the country, whose prosperity was now merely a memory. The Roumis were driven out towards Sicily or Crete and the country remained desert for many centuries. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century an improvement in the climate allowed for human recolonization. The country, called in Arabic Cyrenaiqueh *بئر قه*, became a part of Egypt before becoming a province of the Ottoman Empire which attached it to Tripolitania. In 1911, Italy took Tripolitania and thus Cyrenaica, which immediately had an impact on Libya's political destiny. To find out more see, Bulhasen Saifelnaser, « Les relations Franco-libyennes, thèse pour le doctorat en sciences politiques », Faculté de droit et de sciences politiques Université d'auvergne – Clermont-FD1, 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Sa'da: this is the name given to the Arab tribes whose genealogy goes back to the first migration in Libya and even further, to the time of the Prophet and his two followers. These tribes have a culture of war and owed their position in Libyan society to the military conquests of their ancestors.

<sup>26</sup> The Marabtin are Arabic tribes with Libyan roots. One finds in their genealogy a mixture of indigenous and non-Arabic links. Because of their mixed roots, they are often subordinates to the Sa'da tribe.

Al-Abaidat was undone in the first days of the uprising in February 2011, the main reason for which Gaddafi lost control of the East of the country. The tribe counts amongst its members (Aguila Salah), the president of the Libyan chamber of representatives. After the fall of the Gaddafi regime, Libya experienced a phenomenon of re-tribalisation of political life as there had not been the same phenomenon of tribal dissolution but rather a premeditated strengthening of its political, economic and social weight. This legitimised tribal alliances. For this reason and for others, the tribal system has remained strong in Libya and implied in the political situation.<sup>27</sup> This is the case of the Al-Abaidat tribe that was represented in a substantial manner with the other Sa'da tribe controlling almost all key institutions in the east of the country including military and security institutions. This included intelligence apparatus, security direction, military Intelligence, the Air Force, military divisions and naval and military bases.) In 2011, the Al-Abaidat chiefs decided against answering positively to Gaddafi's orders for personal reasons, although the decision was taken in consultation with a broad range of leaders, including tribal chiefs.<sup>28</sup> To be more specific, certain defections were critical, such as that of Sulaiman Mahmud al-Ubaidi who controlled the port of Toubrouk and the oil terminal of Marsa al-Hriqa. The same can be said of Abd al-Fattah Yuni, who, because of his long service to Gaddafi, controlled the security brigade in Benghazi. Finally, this was also the case for the personnel of the Libyan Air Force stationed at the Gamal Abdul Nasser air base.

### 2.2.2 – *Al-Awaqir tribe*

The Awaqir tribe is one of the nine aristocratic tribes of the Saadi that was influential during the rule of King Idris but were stripped of their power by Gaddafi. They hold the lands to the South and West of Benghazi. It is a complex and multi-ethnic tribe, some branches of which were made up of semi-nomad shepherds and more sedentary ones. It is dominated by the principal of seniority. Authority and orientation belong to senior tribal leaders. When the petrol boom started in the 1950s, members of the Awaqir tribe migrated from their homeland to Benghazi to find employment, living first and foremost in improvised huts in the outskirts. Tribal members of the al-Awaqir nonetheless occupied superior positions at the heart of the Gaddafi regime, including ministerial positions. Nevertheless, after the fall of the Guide, despite intensive lobbying, the Awaqir was not included in the higher echelons of post-Gaddafi governments.

The Al-Awaqir tribe equally played a prominent role in Operation Dignity to fight against Islamists "Ansar al-Shari'a AAS and the Islamic State IS" in Benghazi. Nonetheless, the relationship between the al-Awaqir tribe and the commander of Operation Dignity, Khalifa Haftar has deteriorated. This took place due to the recognition of the Minister

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<sup>27</sup> Moncef Ouannès, « La Libye dans « le printemps arabe » : éléments d'une lecture de la révolte armée », NAQD, (N° 29), 2012/1, pp. 167-187.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Colei, Fiona Mangan, op. cit, p. 19.



designated for Defence, Al-Mihdi Al-Baraghati of the presidential council proposed by the UN, and the arrest of Nuri Bu Fanara. This occurred in the town of Sulug, 53 kilometres to the south-east of Benghazi. Fanara was one of the main leader of the tribe and the commander of Operation Dignity. He was extracted by the Al-Kofiya prison force in Benghazi some hours after his arrest.

### 2.2.3 – Zuwaya tribe

The Zuwaya tribe may well not be the largest tribe in Libya but it represents a considerable force, if only through its geographic situation. Its members are spread throughout the region of Cyrenaica, from areas around oil exportation installations in the Gulf of Sidra until the regions around oil reserves proper, as well as the oasis of Al-Kufra. The Zawiya are known as a fierce and xenophobic tribe. In their understanding of the past, at least until the inauguration of the as-Sanusi monarch, the Zuwaya have maintained the representation of a society without a State, without hierarchy, without authority, where everything goes towards maintaining freedom.<sup>29</sup> Traditionally practicing a nomad pastoral life around sheep and camels in a triangular zone from the summit of Ajdabia to Djeghboub, the Zuwaya have conquered the region of Kufra, located in the Libyan far south, a sector that has great strategic value. It is a region located in the triangle formed by the boundaries of three countries: Egypt, Chad and Sudan. The Zawiya owns the majority of date palm trees in the Kufra Oasis, employing the Tebu tribesmen as labourers.

The Zuwaya make up the majority of the population of Kufra and embody a truly powerful group. The Zuwaya understand all people who can integrate the formal structure of the tribe: that includes refugees coming from the north, clients who are identified as such and other equivalent people whose origin is rarely mentioned. The Zuwaya population also encapsulates the descendants of Zuwaya former slaves.<sup>30</sup> This tribe, which owned the areas of exportation and exploitation of oil threatened to interrupt the extraction during the revolt of 2011. The tribal leader of the Zuwaya, Faraj al-Zuway, declared during an interview on Al Jazeera on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February that the Zuwaya would stop oil exportation if the army did not cease to shoot on protesters. Faraj insisted that his words be considered “a warning to the Zuwaya tribe.” He gave Gaddafi an ultimatum of 24 hours to order his troops to stop using military strength to put down the revolt. There is no sign that the Zuwaya went through with their warning. The hostility between the Zuwaya and the Tebu has been endemic for a very long time in Kufra and transformed itself into open warfare since the weight of Gaddafi’s regime was lifted after the civil war of 2011.

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<sup>29</sup> Ali Dolamari, op. cit., pp. 123-125.

<sup>30</sup> Davis John, « La structure sociale de Koufra », 1983, p. 549.

#### 2.2.4 – The tribal map of the Fezzan region

The original inhabitants of the Fezzan region are a group of reduced families, of tribes collectively called Fazzazna as nomadic Arab tribes who have dominated the political arena of the Fezzan since Ottoman times. When the Ottomans attempted to collect taxes and to control the Saharan commercial routes, Awlad Sulaiman, Qadhadfa and Warfalla came together in an alliance named al-Suff al-Fuqhi. This alliance concentrated itself on Sabha and was directed by Awlad Sulaiman, in particular the Saif al-Nasr family who briefly directed the sultanate of Fezzan from 1830 to 1842. The alliance was rekindled once again in 1923 to resist against Italian guns. However, in 1930, they could not resist against toxic gas and aviation.<sup>31</sup> Gaddafi's takeover in 1969 profoundly shook up Sabha's tribal order. Gaddafi had looked to reduce the influence of tribes, placed the Qadhadfa as head of military and security institutions and promoted tribes that were previously insignificant and marginalised such as the Magahira in Fezzan. In the Fezzan region, eight tribes are very influential: the Awlad Sulaiman, Warfalla, Al-Hasswna, Magariha, Qadhadfa, Tebu, Touareg and Fazzazna. However, three tribes in the Fezzan are particularly important today.

#### 2.2.5 – The Awlad Sulaiman tribe

The Awlad Sulaiman tribe experienced various levels of influence throughout its history. It was the dominant force in Sebha and in a large part of the Fezzan during the whole of Turk Ottoman rule (1551 – 1911), throughout the Italian colonial period (1911 – 1943) and the court period of French military rule after the Second World War and during the Kingdom of Libya (1951 – 1969). Gaddafi encouraged a large number of poor Awlad Sulaiman migrants who had migrated to Chad and Niger during the Italian occupation to return to Libya. Most famously, this was the case of the Saif al-Nasr family whose leader died in prison in the 1980s.<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, the tribe repositioned itself as a key client tribe of the Qadhadfa under Gaddafi's regime.

During the forty years of the Gaddafi era, the Awlad Sulaiman domination in the Fezzan has diminished at the expense of his own tribe, the Qadhadfa and its closest supporters, the Al-Maqarha tribe. This is the tribe of the Saif al Nasr family, the most preeminent and venerated members of the Awlad Sulaiman tribe and historical clients and allies. The Saif al Nasr family acquired its heroic status in the wars fought against the Ottoman Turks at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Italian settlers at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 2011, the balance of power changed as the tribe looked to re-establish itself as the dominant tribe in Sabha by allying itself to Misrata. This profoundly harmed the ancient

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<sup>31</sup> Peter Colei, Fiona Mangan, op. cit., pp. 25-26.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 26.

tribal pacts (Awlad Sulaiman, Qadhadfa and Warfalla) and reflects the bitter tribal struggle ongoing for power.

#### 2.2.6 – The Magariha tribe

Tribal influence is extremely important in Libya, in particular since the 1970s. This was especially important for the procurement of employment in the general committees of the people of Libya and equally important in the security apparatus of the country. Moreover, the degree of political allegiance to the regime in Tripoli has varied from one tribe to another, in particular during the forty years where Gaddafi was in power. The tribe that benefitted from the strongest and longest links with Gaddafi's region is the Magariha tribe who was for a long time Manichean and an Arab tribe based in Brak Al-Shati.<sup>33</sup> Historically marginalised, the tribe was brought into the regime's security services to counter-balance the historical and demographic influence of the main tribes

Accordingly, the Qadhadfa / Magariha alliance transformed itself into a true hegemony that prospered on the weakness of the State, the deterioration of government structures and from the very recognition of the social and political role of tribes within Libyan society. To this can be added the unlimited opportunities of material enrichment. Thus, the Magariha tribe found itself in a much better position to lead a coup against the Libyan leader as many members of this tribe occupied sensitive and superior posts in the Libyan government and its security services. The Magariha tribe was embodied by the strong man of the time, colonel Abdullah al-Sanussi, head of the organisation of Jamahiriya security (JSO). Al-Sanussi remained loyal to Gaddafi until the fall of the regime. Another strong character of the Al-Magariha tribe was the former Libyan Prime Minister, Abdessalam Jalloud, considered by many as Gaddafi's right-hand man during the majority of the rule. He is equally one of the twelve members of the Revolutionary Command Council that led the coup of 1969. He previously occupied the position of Prime Minister for five years in the 1970s and has been considered the second most powerful man in Libya. In 2011, the Magariha remained faithful to Gaddafi until the end of the Jamahiriya.

#### 2.2.7 – The Tebu tribe

The Tebus are tribes of black natives located in the south east and south of Libya, near the Tibesti mountains, along the Chadian and Nigerian borders. Their main population centers can be found in Sabha and in the Al Kufra oasis. The Tebus are going through a cultural revival (similar to that of the North-African Berbers), as the tribe is asserting its non-Arab status and demands recognition in the Libyan constitution to come. Their

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<sup>33</sup> The Makhzen tribes are tribes integrated in the security and military structure of central power, for whom they insure an authority and surveillance over their territory and to whom they serve as auxiliary forces and military backup when necessary. Thus, they are involved in the fight against diverse opposition figures on their territory. To find out more, see Ali Bensaad, op. cit., pp.5-22. See also Moncef Ouannès, « Composante endogène de la résurgence tribale », pp.255-262.

tribal links across boundaries are equally the cause of certain controversy with regard to their nationality. The interests of the oil industry have attracted a large number of Tebus from neighbouring Chad and Niger to Libya.<sup>34</sup> The Tebus are the most original tribe of the country simply due to the colour of their skin. They resemble sub-saharian Africans more than their fellow northern countrymen. (*Indeed, when the first reports arrived of African mercenaries employed by Gaddafi to put down the uprising appeared, there was a certain amount of confusion relating to whether they might have been Tebu members of the Libyan army mistaken for foreigners.*<sup>35</sup>)

The Tebu population comes from the provinces that lie in the path of the profitable transit trade of sub-Saharan Africa to the north of the Mediterranean. Traditionally, the Tebu controlled the commercial caravan routes that crossed their territory. In the past, they were widely known for plundering and ointment trade. Their language is the Tegada or Dazaga and their social unit relies on nuclear families organised into clans. They live from a combination of pastoralism, agriculture, substance traffic and date cultivation. Territorial and border control has led to tensions amongst Tebu and Arab-Berber communities who inhabit the region. It is also a privileged territory for the illegal trade of government subsidised fuel and foodstuff turned into contraband which is smuggled out of the country in exchange for weaponry, drugs, alcohol and migrants. The fall of Gaddafi triggered a minor war for control of the border zone between the black Tebu inhabitants of Kufra, Sebha and Muzuq and the white Arab tribes of Zawiya and Awlad Sulaiman. On this front, the Tebu seemed to have taken the advantage with the tacit agreement of the government.

Since mid-2014, the Tebu have been integrated into the national army led by Haftar against the Fajr Libyan Militia and Islamists in Benghazi. The Tebu militias have occupied two other important military bases in the freed south west of Libya, which acts as a refuge for smugglers and terrorists. The aerial base of Wegh was occupied by Colonel Wardoku's Libyan Shield Force of the desert of Murzuk and the military outpost at al-Tum was occupied by the Oum al-Aranib militia, led by Sharfadeen Barka.

Encouraged by the new situation, the Tebu are attempting to reclaim their citizenship, demanding better social services and access to political power. The group has globally shown allegiance to Gaddafi in the past, an allegiance that was predominantly bought. Their allegiance to anyone as far as Haftar will not be permanent. It should be noted that the Tebu support promised to the Council of representatives and Operation Dignity only materialised after its rival Arab tribes (Awlad Sulaiman) promised to support

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<sup>34</sup> David Wood, « Libya Conflict Assessment: Literature Review », Civil Society Dialogue Network, 26 July 2012, pp.11-12.  
[http://eplo.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/CSDN\\_Early-Response\\_Libya\\_Agenda\\_Literature-Review.pdf](http://eplo.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/CSDN_Early-Response_Libya_Agenda_Literature-Review.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> « Special Report: Libya's Tribal Dynamics », op. cit.

operation Dawn. This shows that Libyan tribalism is flexible and that allegiances fluctuate according to pragmatism as a response to the circumstances and perceived opportunities.

Finally, in the post-2011 political context, there was much talk about the “Misrata tribe.” This is particularly interesting as there is no such thing, in theory, as a “Misrata tribe.” Misrata is above all a commercial town with ruling elite largely inherited from the Ottoman Empire. It is a port town with a population of 300 000 inhabitants and a key center for import sectors and retail in Libya.<sup>36</sup> To refer to a “Misrata tibe” thus doesn’t make much sense, except in terms of belonging to a specific community. Between 1969 and 2011, Misrata provided the majority of ministerial workforces, exceeding those of Tripoli and Benghazi. Whilst the regime launched investment on a large scale in housing and infrastructure in the middle of the 2000s, a group of business men from Misrata used their privileged relationships with important actors to obtain advantageous positions and remuneration. Nevertheless, in February 2011, the vast majority of trading families from Misrata quickly joined the revolution.

After Gaddafi’s fall, Misrata became an important political and military center thanks in part to the revolution, its financial influence and the cohesion of its commercial elite. After the 2011 war, Misrata politicians emerged as the principal supporters of a revolutionary programme. Misrata was strongly represented in the succeeding transition governments and its leaders obtained leading positions in the main investment bodies and public companies. The leaders of the Misrata brigade exerted pressure for the official recognition of units stemming from the town and pushed ex-revolutionary forces to replace the army. These forces were acknowledged and through various institutional agreements, budgets evolved which cemented their power and created interest acquired through the distribution of resources in the security sector. In October 2012, the representatives of the GNC of the town were amongst the principal promoters of decision number 7, authorising the creation of a unit to retake Bani Walid, following the arrest of several Misrata in that town.<sup>37</sup> The Misrata units, made up the most important proportion in a coalition of forces of revolutionary strongholds that now benefitted from official status as Libya’s protection force. The few preeminent Misrata opposed to this course of action were rapidly isolated, such as colonel Salim Jha, an important figure in the revolutionary struggle. Throughout Libya, this episode created a perception of the Misrata as intransigent and ruthless, determined to dominate the new order.

Due to its role in the fall of Gaddafi, the Misrata are keen to capitalise on its revolutionary legitimacy. Control of the port and thus one of the main ports of access to the sea were decisive to obtain weapons, ammunition and goods. Emboldened by their victory, the Misrata militias were particularly aggressive against the town of

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<sup>36</sup> Cécile Hennion, « Dans l’euphorie de la révolution, les blessures Libyenne ont été sous-estimées », *Le Monde*, February 20th 2016.

<sup>37</sup> Wolfram Lacher, « Libya’s Local Elites and the Politics of Alliance Building », *op. cit.*, 2016, pp.64-85.

Tawarghas (40,000 inhabitants) that was emptied of its population, using support for Gaddafi as an excuse. When the national project started to become bogged down, the Misrata militias launched operation Libyan Dawn by combining forces as disparate as the Muslim brotherhood, local Islamists following the legacy of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) and the Amazighs opposed to the Zinten. The Libyan Dawn operation had the aim of conquering Tripolitania or at the very least the town of Tripoli. In practice, it led to heavy fighting against the Zinten who controlled Tripoli airport. It could then go on the offensive against the Zinten to gain control of Tripoli. Misrata is now the dominant military force in Tripolitania.







### 3 – The relationship between the tribe and the State

Tribalism as a political organisation that is both inside and in opposition to the State, still exists in Libya. Nonetheless, it is true that the demographic evolution, urbanisation and development have somewhat eroded it. The process of erosion of the tribal framework, has stretched for more than a century and a half with varying intensity, and evolved from institutional tribalism to civil service patronage. It undeniably peaked under the Gaddafi era. Nonetheless, it is important to note that although the originality of the Libyan State comes to a large extent from the very particular relationship that exists amongst the tribes and the centralised regime, none of the tribes were able to monopolise power to their own benefit for a long period.<sup>38</sup> By contrast, their global influence has always acted as a balance to the State that throughout history a balance whether that be represented by external forces or an oppressor.

Historically, efforts at State construction in Libya have come encountered the resistance of important figures at the heart of the tribes, notably due to the fact that Libya has been governed by foreign powers during a large part of its history. To understand the weariness towards central government, it is vital to focus on the violent and complex history of the XIXth century during which Libya was dominated by the Ottomans who controlled the southern shores of the Mediterranean, from Egypt to Algeria. The efforts deployed by the Ottoman State to reinforce its importance and power have led to what has been called a public figure policy. Such a policy saw the State work with and through important local leaders to reach central government.

The Ottoman State also faced an apparently unsurmountable contradiction in terms. It required a military force to intimidate its people, raise taxes and guarantee the integrity of its flock from outside predators. However, how should it find its military force amongst subjects to whom courage and solidarity have been forbidden? The State must thus look elsewhere. Elsewhere is another way of saying within its fringes, in the world of tribes, the part of humanity that does not live under the control of the State, that does not pay taxes and is thus not disarmed. It is the integral strength of the tribes that the State buys to insure that all its violent functions (army or police) are fulfilled.<sup>39</sup>

At that time, the Ottoman State relied heavily of political influence and the support of preeminent Libyan families to collect taxes, levy troops and control trade. The Ottomans chose to integrate local elites by associating notably rural political figures to the

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<sup>38</sup> Olivier Pliez, op. cit., pp. 235-248.

<sup>39</sup> Gabriel Martinez-Gros, « L'État et ses tribus, ou le devenir tribal du monde. Réflexions à partir d'Ibn Khaldoun », *Esprit*, 2012/1 (January), pp. 25-42.

management structures of the State. The consequence is that “tribal socio-political organisation gave way to the rise of patronage relations, based on the exchange of goods and services amongst individuals of different socio-economic status and whose access to resources was unequal.”<sup>40</sup>

This custom allowed particular important figures to emerge from a group or a local actor with social capital or a certain influence. From then, they used State structures to develop and spread their social status and their influence. On its side and to spread its influence, the Tripolitan central administration allowed such important figures to increase their influence. By utilising such a system, the Ottomans profoundly altered the tribal relationship and made patronage relationships commonplace.

Italian colonisation (1911 – 1943) that followed the Ottoman presence in Libya did not contribute to the development of the State as was the case of the two French protectorates in Tunisia (1881 – 1956) and in Morocco (1912 – 1956). There colonialism contributed to the process of monopolisation of violence by the Bey of Tunis and the Sultan of Morocco. The Italians replaced the old administration with Italian exclusivity, in which the local population was not allowed to participate. The exclusion of Libyans from all participation and management of the the country led to the fall back on the tribe whose influence increased through its resistance to colonisation. When, after the Second World War, Libya saw itself granted independence (1952), there was neither national political organisation nor political authority. It should be underlined that until the declaration of independence in 1951, the country remained administered by the British (in Tripolitania) and the French (in the Fezzan), under the tutelage of the United Nations.

### **3.1 – The tribe and the State during the Senussi monarchy**

During the process of state formation in Libya, the as-Sanusi brotherhood played a particular role. The Senussi are disciples of the Senussiya, a politico-religious organisation present in Libya and founded in Mecca in 1837 by Muhammad ibn Ali As-Sanusi (1787 – 1859) known as the Great Senussi. The founder of the brotherhood increased his religious mission with a political action of armed resistance to the invaders and organised support for Bedouin tribes of the Sahara through the creation of a “zaouia” rosary. The first was founded in El-Beida, some 20 kilometres from Cyrene which King Idris, grandson of the founder, had just turned into the federal capital of the kingdom of Libya. Then, to avoid Turkish domination, the seat of the brotherhood was transferred, in 1856, to the Saharan oasis of Djaghaboub which the Great Senussi turned into a cultural and commercial activity center before dying there in 1859.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Bocco R., « L'État “contourné” en Libye : tribalisme, clientélisme et révolution dans une économie pétrolière », *Revue Genève-Afrique*, vol. 26, (n° 2), 1988, pp. 133-146, cited in Ali Bensaad, op. cit., pp .5-22.

<sup>41</sup> Henri de La Bastide, « La Senoussia dans l’islam contemporain », *Le Monde Diplomatique*, October 1968, p. 35.

The movement came to organise the tribes that lived in the territory of Cyrenaica and who knew nothing of political organisation. They were in permanent conflict and even the Ottomans did not have total control over them. To win them over, religion was the best method. However, despite their conversion to Islam, these tribes knew nothing about this religion. This was thus a good occasion for the founder of the movement, by using his

Extensive knowledge of the religion to extend his control over the tribes that refused to submit to any authority except that of the tribe.<sup>42</sup> It should be noted that the authority of the tribe in the Senussi Zaouias was composed of a sheikh, who was in charge of the Zaouias, head of the system and military commander during the wars. He also acted as intermediary between the tribe and the Ottoman administration, received travellers, oversaw the harvest, acted as imam to direct prayers and helped to preach and teach.

To his credit, his work ethic, effort rates and bid for autarky were essential components to the structure of the State and society that was imagined by the Great Senussi, who was able to benefit from the wide-spread sufi institutions at the heart of the North African tribal system, in this case zaouias. He also built schools that were a great success amongst the tribes, neglected by an Ottoman central State that was more concentrated on coastal areas. The Zaouias were not simply areas of worship and religious learning but also welcome centers for refugees and the resolution of disputes in the absence of courts of law. It is thus that this institution became essential to the resolution of frequent tribal disputes in Libyan society, in particular amongst the tribes of various ethnic origin such as the Tebu and the Zuwaya. Thus, it insured the smooth running of the segmentary system by favouring amongst other duties trade functions and insuring mediations and arbitrations.<sup>43</sup> Its politico-religious action was influenced by the Arabian Wahhabi-ism, to which can be added a large number of Sufi influences. The Senussi fought the French expansion in the Sahara from 1900 to 1913 and in 1911 the Italian invasion forced them to concentrate on Libya.<sup>44</sup>

Simultaneously, the de-colonising struggle with the Senussi brotherhood as a uniting force favours the transcendence of tribal membership for national sentiment. In 1922 however, the direct colonisation of Libya by the Mussolini government had an Italian campaign against the brotherhood. As a consequence, it became a nationalist movement and allowed Idris al-Sanusi to be perceived as a sort of “father of the nation” or “founding

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<sup>42</sup> Bulhasen Saifelnaser, op. cit., pp. 33-38.

<sup>43</sup> Younes Abouyoub, « Islam et politique dans la Libye contemporaine », *Maghreb - Machrek*, (N° 224-225), 2015/2, pp. 61-72.

<sup>44</sup> Olivier Vallée, « Kadhafi : le dernier roi d'Afrique », *Politique africaine*, (N°125), 2012/1, pp. 147-167.

father.”<sup>45</sup> This status allowed him to become Great-Britain’s preferred intermediary during the Second World War. Supported by the British, he became the first Libyan head of state. However, due to his lack of social support outside the brotherhood and certain tribes and encountering a certain opposition amongst the urban population of Tripolitania, Idris Al-Sanusi leaned on the brotherhood’s network and allied himself to the tribes of the Fezzan and Cyrenaica to govern the country.

The federal structures of the independent Libyan State made up a compromise between international demands and the reality of a political formation where regional and tribal factors predominated.<sup>46</sup> The tribal method of operation found a new vigour during independence. This was triggered by a favouring of a system by the monarchy that is looking to compensate for the weakness of its administrative apparatus. King Idris had to resort to the tribes as social relays for the resolution of conflicts and tribalism became increasingly similar to a patronage system.<sup>47</sup>

Pandora’s box was opened all along during the period of the Senussi King’s monarchy (1952 – 1969). What prevailed then was the coexistence of a formal framework of federal monarchy and a reality based on corruption and patronage where family ties, tribal links and hereditary relationships were the most important. This system represented for the monarchy means of integrating the Elite into the State.<sup>48</sup> Even if King Idris attempted to promote a new State ideology based on “an ideology of legitimacy based on the principle of civil equality,” patronage became the framework of unrelenting corruption supported by increasing oil revenues. Thus, whilst it should have allowed King Idris to consolidate his power and improve his legitimacy, this policy had the opposite effect. Indeed, it worsened the monarchical crisis and hastened its downfall

### 3.2 – **Gaddafi’s Jamahiriya, a tribal operation**

Gaddafi’s ascension to power disrupted the dependence of the population on the tribal system. The insurgent troops who triumphed over the regime that emerged from the

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<sup>45</sup> Idris as Sanusi (1890-1983), was the grandson of the founder of the muslim brotherhood founded by Mohamed Ben Ali as Sanusi (1787-1859) in the Mostaganem region of Algeria (similar to emir Abdel Kader). Indeed, his family are descendents of the prophet Mohammed. He visited Mecca where he founded his own brotherhood whose doctrine is based on a strict return to the Quran and the tradition of the Prophet (Sunna). This rejects all innovation that is seen as potentially susceptible to corrupting Islam. Idris as Sanusi received a theological formation in Islamic law. After the Italian occupation of Libya, he entered alongside the brotherhood and the allied tribes into allied anticolonial resistance. After finding refuge in Cairo, he returned to Cyrenaica in 1946. In December 1951, he was appointed King of Libya and ruled from 1951 to 1969. A little before the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1969 coup he left the country first for Turkey and then to Cairo where he died in May 1983. To find out more, see Moncef Djaziri, *État et société en Libye Islam, politique et modernité*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 1996, p. 38.

<sup>46</sup> Moncef Djaziri, « Tribus et État dans le système politique libyen », *Outre-Terre*, (n° 23), 2009/3, pp. 127-134.

<sup>47</sup> Ali Bensaad, op. cit., pp. 5-22.

<sup>48</sup> Moncef Djaziri, « Tribus et État dans le système politique libyen », op. cit., pp. 127-134.

antimonarchical putsch of the first of September 1969 were only organised in a tribal system in small localities where the population diversity had little significance. The military junta was multi-tribal. The Nasserian model, who these Libyan officers claim to be following originally, could nevertheless only provide a limited solution. In contrast to Egypt, Libya did not dispose of a large politicised middle class, nor a national historical narrative that was likely to create the conditions of immediate consensus.<sup>49</sup> In its first few years, Gaddafi's regime decreed the end of the tribe and reorganised local administrative structures according to the interest of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC). This explicitly replaced the "tribal politicians" with supporters of the Revolution.<sup>50</sup> The reform, in the spirit of Arab socialism, rejected the governors, mayors and deputy mayors, sheikhs and important tribal dignitaries and put in place a system of committees and revolutionary councils at the local, regional and national levels. It was designed to promote and put into place the idea of basic popular democracy. State institutions were generally weakened deliberately by Gaddafi who centralised power into informal networks surrounding the broader family and his tribe and constantly reorganised a confused patchwork of institutions with unclear, redundant and overlapping utility.

This "dismantling" of the State consisted in replacing or splitting in two the institutional cogs of the mechanisms of power that proved in the end to be too numerous, heavy, fragmented and tangled. Never since the start of the Libyan state had there been such ubiquity and social control. "Popular committees" crossed paths with "general congresses of the people," "cleansing committees" with popular and social commandments" and "tribal clubs," dividing the country by sectors of activity. The density of this network is an more pronounced expression of centralisation of power, surpassing even that of the monarchy.<sup>51</sup>

### 3.2.1 – *The strategy of recomposition of tribal space*

During his first years in power, Gaddafi systematically attempted to diminish the power of local figures of importance. One of Gaddafi's first measures as head of State was to abolish the old administrative divisions of Libya, established on the basis of tribal localisation. He decreed the redundancy of all locals in charge, including governors, mayors, deputy mayors, the majority of which were the sheikhs, or their kin, of local tribes. He replaced them through the establishment of alliances with major tribes through family marriages and the nominations of important civil servants, in particular in the security apparatus.

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<sup>49</sup> François Dumasy, Francesca Di Pasquale, « Être historien dans la Libye de Kadhafi. Stratégies professionnelles et pratiques mémorielles autour du Libyan Studies Center », *Politique africaine*, (N° 125), 2012/1, pp. 127-146.

<sup>50</sup> Wolfram Lacher, « Families, Tribes and Cities in the Libyan Revolution », *Middle East Policy* Vol. XVIII (4), Winter 2011.

<sup>51</sup> Ali Bensaad, op. cit., pp. 5-22.

In fact, Gaddafi had the aim of removing from power the established State elite, made up predominantly of tribal leaders and their attachés whom the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) identified as threats. This was done through the systemic removal of tribal influence and the establishment of “administrative units implicating parts of several tribes.” The regional heads have been replaced by members of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC). The tribes have been forced to move and to break alliances. The administrative borders have been drawn up differently to split certain tribes, to mix them with fragments of several tribes at the heart of the new administrative units. Gaddafi even tried to create a new identity and loyalty to the State that went beyond tribal loyalty.

To better insure his intermediaries’ dependence on him, Gaddafi often chose them from the branches of the less prestigious and the less powerful, re-shuffling the hierarchies at the heart of the tribes. In the same way, when Gaddafi, after his accession to power, contracted his second marriage with a woman from the tribes in the East, traditional supports of the monarchy, the political character of this alliance becomes clear. However, although he chose his spouse well amongst the prestigious tribe of Baraassa, he made his choice on the least prestigious, the Farkach.<sup>52</sup>

In 1973, Gaddafi called his supporters and the entirety of the population in what was called the “Zuwara speech” to provoke all governmental institutions and buildings and to create “popular committees” to replace the current management. This purge, ordered by Gaddafi himself and performed by the masses led to considerable disturbance amongst governmental institutions throughout the country. Indeed, highly qualified and experienced government employees were expelled and replaced by revolutionary enthusiasts who often lacked the sufficient expertise to run State institutions. From 1973, Gaddafi was looking for new allies in those marginalised by Libyan society. This was notably represented by the rural population and the tribes who are in opposition to the urban bourgeoisie.<sup>53</sup> This combination allowed Gaddafi to rid himself of political opponents and popular urban forces. These efforts intensified during the “Green Book” phase, 1977, an ideological base of the political system of “direct democracy” paired with strong decentralisation.

Paradoxically and almost subtly, the supreme Guide thus adopted an ambivalent attitude towards the tribe. On the one hand, direct democracy and the empowerment of the people so put forward in his third universal theory, were put forward. More important measures to reorganise society into a “State of the masses” was conceptualised (Jamahiriya), substituting the Jomhourya, which implied trying to oppose tribalism as a form of political organisation. On the other, he did not withhold from the

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid. pp. 5-22.

<sup>53</sup> Jean-François Daguzan, Jean-Yves Moisseron, op. cit., pp. 78-97.

tribe its contribution to social security and the source of social values. He even exalted the tribal origin in his book on the third theory: *“The only true social link is that of blood. The individual is tied to the other and first of all to his family. The tribe is thus a broader family and the nation a group of tribes.”* Gaddafi himself leant on his tribe, the Al-Qadhadfa, and on those groups that swore him allegiance to govern.

Even though tribal influence diminished in the 1970s, the tribes continued to play a considerable but informal role as it was important for Gaddafi to protect the revolution by creating new tribal alliances, in particular against the great tribes of Cyrenaica who had supported King Idriss. Gaddafi’s early modernisation strategy was progressively abandoned and a tribal emphasis on power emerged. However, as the Al-Qadhadfa tribe was not particularly important, the Libyan leader was forced to form confederations with other constituents. His anti-tribal modernisation strategy was abandoned and a focus on non state activity emerged, dominated by members and associations of the Qadhadfa tribe and its allies, the two largest tribes in the country: The Warfallah and the Magariha. From then, tribal affiliations became a very important structure of political integration. Gaddafi himself began to change his symbolic appearance, starting with the way he dressed and presented himself to the public to shifting away from his military style and towards an explicitly tribal direction. In his speeches, he introduced the nation as one large tribe rather than a society organised and structured by the State.<sup>54</sup> He had often been introduced as unpredictable, exuberant, promoting women in his own way as in the first few years of his rule he had wanted to give the impression of a modern Bedouin, eclectic and cultured. When Gaddafi received important dignitaries in a Bedouin tent in the middle of the desert, another was installed in a European capital to give an “authentic” image of the country. It is not by chance that the most important informal circle around Gaddafi was known under the name of Rijal Al-Kheima (the men of the tent) and thus had certain explicit tribal connotations.

Seduced although instrumentalised, the tribe thus became an important actor of the Libyan political framework as it provided to the regime a certain personnel whose loyalty was unquestionable for the regime’s structures. The attempts to reinforce “national loyalty” were always in the shape of “divide and rule” with the aggravation of tribal antipathies so as to legitimise Gaddafi himself as the only barrier against local divisions.<sup>55</sup> In the absence of political parties, trade unions, mobilisation structures and policies to supervise the youth, the tribe quickly imposed itself as a protector of power and a judge of the necessity to recompose the tribal landscape and to construct a new alliance.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the Green Book agreement only helped to build a power center (and not a State)

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<sup>54</sup> Hüsken, Thomas, op. cit., pp. 26-31.

<sup>55</sup> Moncef Ouannès, « Composante endogène de la résurgence tribale », op. cit., pp. 255-262.

<sup>56</sup> Jean-François Daguzan, Jean-Yves Moisseron, op. cit., pp. 78-97.



organised around the Gaddafi and his clan.<sup>57</sup> Nonetheless, its main aim was to expand his personal power, not through stable State institutions but through traditional structures and regional decentralised mechanisms that could undergo frequent modifications. It was thus a case of building an ideological apparatus in which the State could function without a State system. The absence of institutions allowed Gaddafi to maintain his position constantly at the center of the action without worrying of his official position at the heart of the State structure. This deliberate strategy allowed his to manage in a constant way the constantly unstable balance of forces, satisfy social demands and make and break alliances. *In fine*, his system collapsed into anarchy and tribal authoritarianism due to the absence of participation rules and democratic counterbalances. Indeed, the implementation of the “revolutionary” program in a tribal society led to a hybrid system where each citizen, each executive and each region had to submit to the double allegiance of the Jamahiryen revolution and the tribal system. Essentially, Gaddafi has created two States.

### 3.2.2 – *The tribe as an instrument of social control*

Submitted to a permanent remodelling of alliances and a continuous reorganisation of families and factions, the tribal landscape evolved a great deal under Gaddafi. From the 1990s, central power was not afraid of increasing its recourse to violence due to two main factors. The first was the embargo that was put in place over a decade (1992 – 2003), which threatened the survival of the regime and eroded its grip on society. This forced it to shift its focus on centralisation and violence in order to maintain its authority. The second factor relates to attempted military coup against the regime in 1993 where the Warfallah tribe played a central role. This provoked a backlash from the regime with the blocking and the radicalisation of the relations with the opposition of the interior and exterior. The tribes were used as a tool to apply pressure to weaken and dissipate the opposition. The majority of the tribes were encouraged to publish declarations which denounced their members who had betrayed the country.

Profoundly shaken by the “treason” of his right hand man, Gaddafi changed his political strategy and identified the securitisation of the system as the absolute priority.<sup>58</sup> His strategy relies on the civil service, structured in the middle of the 1990s, so that tribal leaders be represented and made responsible for social control of their members and associates to the repression to which is invariably linked a tribal indicator. The most symbolic example of this evolution is first of all the creation of Social People’s Command (SPC) in 1994. The coordinators (munassiq) who were raised to the rank of official spokesperson to the local people, worked alongside high ranking officers and Gaddafi’s most trusted advisers, originally from the same area as them. The missions of the SPC

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<sup>57</sup> Ali Bensaad, op. cit., pp. 5-22.

<sup>58</sup> Moncef Ouannès, « Composante endogène de la résurgence tribale », op. cit., pp. 255-262.



are to fight corruption and treason, to diffuse revolutionary culture, solve local conflicts and mobilise people so as to increase production.<sup>59</sup> A structure of interaction between the regime and the local tribes took shape. The presence of the tribes facilitated direct contact with the political centre and the control of their allegiance towards the centre. Gaddafi wanted to responsibilities the tribes and force them to uphold the law instead of the central administration. Thus, the regime would not have to worry about tribal conflicts that are often complex and difficult to manage in a society where the tribe is still socially dominant.

Tribal show was even stronger in Tripoli and Benghazi where, following the SPC, structures explicitly called tribal clubs “*Al-Rawabit Al-Shabadiyah*” were created in 1998. This structure that voluntarily tribalised society based itself on an ideological process of tribal reinvention. Tribal clubs, have as a particular mission to reinforce the links between the youth, their tribe and their region. Thus organised this created a form of “return” under pressure to the tribal tradition.<sup>60</sup> Towards the end of the 1998, Gaddafi created new politico-administrative units, the Chaabiyat, which reproduced on the regional level the models of congress and popular committees. These were placed under the supervision of the SPC in their zone which constituted an additional step of integration of tribal elites on the Cyrenaican coast (al-Awaqir, Obeidat, Hassa). This former bastion of the monarchy was integrated into the power system installed by the Guide of the Revolution so as to contain, as much as possible, insurrectional desires in the East of the country. It was thus a case of co-opting traditional elites by granting to the tribes the authority of supervising the operation of organs of popular authority and thus to gain access to the control of a part of the petrol revenue. Other measures were taken to reinforce former political and legal tribal structures. The honour Certificate (1993) gave responsibility to tribal Sheikhs over the political activity of members of their tribe.<sup>61</sup>

The structures promoted by Gaddafi aimed to manipulate the tribes so as to reinforce his authority in regions that did little to hide their hostility towards him on the one hand. On the other hand, they aimed to marginalise all institutional cogs or any civil entity likely to be gain autonomy. Most importantly, the aim was to politicise all inter-tribal and intra-tribal relations. The fluidity of tribal alliances in Libya as well as the rapacious desires of many tribes to ally themselves to the political authority helped Gaddafi to put into shape a strategy which inflicted vast damage to the tribes and destroyed their power structures, so that they ceased to be an effective force in the political and economic sphere. The Gaddafi regime was characterised by unpredictable policies, constant abolitions as well as the instability of diverse administrative institutions, of constitutional

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<sup>59</sup> Ali Bensaad, op. cit., pp. 5-22.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 5-22.

<sup>61</sup> Jesús Jurado Anaya, « « La Seconde Jamahiriyya » libyenne : l'échec d'une stratégie de survie », Research dossier: Arab Spring: a «revolution» for social sciences?, *L'Année du Maghreb*, VIII | 2012, 207-218.

bodies and of circumstantial formations. These processes deepened the State crisis and in many cases, opened the way to the domination of the regime by tribal alliances, thus exacerbating factionalism.

### 3.2.3 – The tribalisation of the security apparatus

The explanation of the phenomenon of tribalisation of the institution and of the security apparatus throws us back to the circumstances in which the state of Libya came to exist. In general, the process of fragmentation of security apparatus into several bodies of specialised elites, with different chains of command dependent more or less directly on the supreme Commandment of the armed forces is due in part to the technologisation and the specialisation of the security operation and defence. In the Libyan case it is also an example of what American analysts call *counterbalancing*: It is important for those in power to multiply the bodies of security services to be able to alternatively lean on one so as to be defended from the others. In the Libya of the Second Jamahiriyya, besides the regular armed Forces and the police, the following coexisted:<sup>62</sup>

- ➔ Three intelligence services controlled by Abdallah al-Senussi, Gaddafi's father-in-law (this included exterior security, led by Moussa Koussa, then Abu Zaid Dorda);
- ➔ The battalions of security: special brigades of the army established in the most important cities, led by the sons of the Guide;
- ➔ The revolutionary Guard: an elite body of armed forces formed by members of the revolutionary Committees;
- ➔ The Committees of Purification: mixed committees charged with the struggle against corruption and made up of soldiers and "revolutionaries."

This scheme was characterised by the absence of horizontal lines of coordination between the different services of security; all the lines of commandment were vertical in the direction of Gaddafi and his brother-in-law Abdallah al-Senussi. Moreover, Gaddafi constructed multiple security structures, both informal and parallel to uphold the regime. He relied heavily on tribal affiliations to assure loyalty and put emphasis on informal relations and chains of commandment.

The forces of Libyan security are very diverse and their tasks have changed over time. This is particularly true of the regular armed forces, whose task to protect the regime has been taken up by the revolutionary Committees from 1978. Nonetheless, the revolutionary committees also experienced similar developments in the 1990s, where they lost the monopoly of protection of the regime and the revolutionary order. They then had to develop and learn to share these tasks with other security organisations.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp. 207-218.

The way in which this led to a counter-productive rivalry is not clear. With regard to the revolutionary spirit and the State structure, revolutionary Committees are still the most important security organisations. They also remain the closest to Gaddafi. There is rarely any interaction amongst individual security organisations with the exception of the Committees of purification (cooperation amongst military and revolutionary committees). In fact, even at the heart of different security organisms, there are no horizontal ties, only vertical lines concerning communication and commandment. These are tied together in the office of the revolutionary leader or in the Guide's Intelligence office.<sup>63</sup>

Gaddafi relied heavily on the south of Libya, principal stronghold of the regime with the Syrte, Bani Walid and Tarhuna. The communities of the region figured amongst the principal bases of recruitment for the security battalions and the intelligence services of the regime. Key units were based on particular tribal administrative district:

- ➔ The Faris brigade, based in Sabha, was recruited amongst the Qadhadfa, Warfalla, Awlad Suleiman and Tebu;
- ➔ The Sabhan Brigade, based in Gharyan, was led by Maqariha;
- ➔ The Maghawir Brigade, based in Ubari, was constituted exclusively of the recruits of touareg tribes of Malian and Nigerian origin; Mattes;
- ➔ The Tariq bin Ziyad brigade, also based in Ubari, were dominated by the Qadhadfa and Awlad Suleiman.

Gaddafi was not ignorant of the influence that the tribal spirit has always had on individuals and the important role of the tribe as a mobilising force at the heart of Libyan society. Thanks to his alliance with the more powerful tribes he has played up internal divisions to promote certain clans or personality, who may have been inferior in rank, but ascended very rapidly to ensure the maintenance of the regime. In other words, the tribal dynamic of Libya should be considered in the context of the effects of Gaddafi's political project on Libyan society. For four decades, his regime has stopped the formation of a real civil society. In the absence of political parties or of autonomous organisation, many Libyans were forced to resort to tribal links (and even to tribal law) in their daily lives. Finally, the fact that Libya is fundamentally based on a tribal structure, each clan struggles to maintain its prerogatives. Through armed force, Gaddafi had succeeded to maintain the complicated balance of the tribal structure by skilfully spreading disharmony and proclaiming in the face of the world that his own elimination could lead Libya to fragment along tribal lines. The tribal logic guided Gaddafi until the end and it is in the direction of Syrte, on his own tribal territory that he found refuge amongst his last loyal supporters.

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<sup>63</sup> Mattes Hanspeter, 2004, « Challenges to Security Sector Governance in the Middle East: The Libyan Case », Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, Working Paper no 144.

The Tribal Structure in Libya: Factor for fragmentation or cohesion?

## 4 – The role of tribalism in post-Gaddafi Libya

Contrary to the events of Tunisia and Egypt which preceded and triggered the Libyan uprising, the protests in Libya were not conducted by a growing number of young and well-educated members of a middle-class. Nonetheless it is true that a handful of lawyers and university professors did initiate the first action in Benghazi. Whilst the established opposition forces only played a limited role in Tunisia and in Egypt, in Libya the absence of organised movements and institutions was more striking. In this way and whilst the syndicates and labour groups contributed to the increase the pressure on Ben Ali and Mubarak, they were completely absent from the Libyan uprising. Finally, the army that had been the real artisan of the fall of Mubarak and merely a passive observer in the case of Ben Ali, came out to support Gaddafi.<sup>64</sup> The army remained united whilst other State institutions rapidly disintegrated.

The events in Libya are the result of a chain reaction in the Arab world, the success of a neighbour being a pro domo example. It is important to underline that they represented one of the most striking episodes of the “Arab spring,” which concerned Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria. These Arab insurrections were first of all, characterised by a strategic double game, with both citizen mobilisations and the defection of elites.<sup>65</sup> The deepening of the mobilisation was telling of the defection of elites and vice-versa. It is important to note that the revolt against Gaddafi’s regime did not fit into a framework of claims for regime change. It asked for vast political, economic and constitutional reforms. The end of the violation of citizen rights, freedom of opinion, freedom of expression, economic reforms aimed at reducing corruption and better life condition of the citizens. Indeed, the majority of the population lived from a combination of badly paid public subsidies and employment with young people particularly affected by generalised joblessness. As a consequence, and apart from a small elite that benefited outrageously from the economic boom of the last decade, income for the majority of the population has faced weak growth.

In contrast to the Tunisian and Egyptian revolution, the Libyan revolution very quickly faced a dynamic of skirmishes resembling a civil war which offered little room for negotiation or compromise. Eight months of a fratricidal conflict, doubled by the direct implication of a foreign coalition, have led to the collapse of the regime. The fall of Gaddafi, the only consensual objective of the insurgents of the time can at best be described to be of revolutionary issue. However, no stable socio-political order nor

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<sup>64</sup> Cristiano Tinazzi, *op. cit.*, pp. 263-268.

<sup>65</sup> Mousa Allafi, *la Cour pénale internationale et le Conseil de sécurité: Justice versus maintien de l'ordre*, thèse pour le doctorat en Droit, université François-Rabelais de Tours, 2013.

State has been able to emerge.<sup>66</sup> This is in fact due to a return to “primary identities” shaped and defined by local identities and particularisms inherent to each group or sub-group, be it ethnic or tribal.

At the start of the Libyan uprising and to assure coordination between the different towns under the control of the insurgents, the National Council of Transition (NCT), an unelected body of war was created in Benghazi on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011. The NCT has been the institutional platform of the rebel movement, destined to insure a political and military authority, to provide municipal services and basic security and come to the help of Libyans living abroad. The NCT was led by Mustapha Abdeljalil, an old sanctimonious judge and a conservative who occupied the position of minister of justice under the old regime. His inaugural speech was devoid of all urgent measures necessary to re-establish security and without mention of any of the priorities to follow for the construction of a new State. This as revealing of what would be the place of Islam in the future Libyan State. It was a question thus of reiterating Islamic identity in Libya, to Islamised the banking sector, to insure that the principal source of legislation be the sharia and to remove all legal constraints on polygamy.<sup>67</sup> Even if Islamist ideology was not at the origin of the Libyan insurrection, it was clear that the NCT would not contravene its ideals. Yet again, in the manner of preceding regimes, the religious discourse was going to be the medium through which the NCT would sit down its legitimacy to govern the new Libya.

With regard to the internal dynamics of the NCT, with the disintegration of State institutions and the defection of high ranking public servants, an elitist political direction quickly established itself at the top of a popular movement that was until then lacking in coordination. First of all, there were the defectors of the former regime’s elite, including superior officers and diplomats, Gaddafi’s comrades since the 1970s. This included such figures as the minister of the interior (later head of the chief of staff of the revolutionary forces) Abdelfattah Younes and ambassador to the UN Aderrahmane Shalgam. It also included reformists and technocrats who had only briefly occupied superior positions at the heart of the Gaddafi administration, such as the head of the NCT, Mustafa Abdeljelil and the former “Prime Minister” of the NTC, Mahmoud Jibril. Then came the Muslim Brotherhood, who, supported by other Islamist currents, tried from the very beginning to take control of the council. Thus they succeeded in introducing a fundamental amendment to the constitutional declaration, in the form of article 30.<sup>68</sup> They also heavily

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<sup>66</sup> Patrick Haimzadeh, « En Libye, ce n'est pas le chaos, c'est la guerre », *Le Monde Diplomatique*, April 2015, pp. 12-13.

<sup>67</sup> Younes Abouyoub, op. cit., pp. 61-72.

<sup>68</sup> Article 30 does not figure in the project prepared by the commission charged of writing the Declaration, opening the way to a second transitional phase that would consist in the creation of the general national Congress. However, it had been planned that the NCT would deal with the transitional period until the legislative elections. To find out more see: Younes Abouyoub, op. cit., pp.61-72.

influenced the composition of the electoral law and that concerning parties. Finally, many opponents to the regime and independent personalities joined the NCT from aristocratic and bourgeois families who had dominated Libya during the monarchy (1951 – 1959). Many of these same figures were major actors during the period of Ottoman rule and were often decimated, expropriated and exiled under Gaddafi.<sup>69</sup> For example Abdlmajid and Mansour Saif al-Nasr (member of the NCT for Sabha and ambassador to France, respectively) both came from a family of tribal nobility who dominated the Fezzan both in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and under the monarchy.<sup>70</sup>

It is interesting to underline that the Libyan uprising was predominantly made up of tribal skirmishes, was not founded on tribalism and was not the theatre for concrete or meaningful tribal battles. The protest movement in Libya emerged and structured itself on a civil foundation, with an anchorage in modernity. Moreover, it received support from the population and developed in a dynamic that overcame the factors of fragmentation such as tribal affiliation which are overestimated today. However, it became clear as time went on that the war against Gaddafi was undertaken through the medium of tribalism. Each party has attempted to use tribal loyalty to mobilise its own supports. The National Council of Transition (NCT) organised tribal conferences with representatives of the main tribes of the country. It should equally be noted that the NCT who led the revolt used the tribes including Gaddafi's very own so as to undermine the Guide's own efforts and deprive him of tribal legitimacy at any level whatsoever.

Gaddafi however, worked to organise press conferences with the chiefs of the qabila to spread an image of unconditional tribal support. This was central to the confusion that permeated within Gaddafi's regime and this occurred despite the fact that the tribes were not the only actors and even though they no longer have the same weight as in the past. The idea spread in west that the majority of the tribes were against Gaddafi collided with the reality of the facts on the ground. As if it had indeed been the case, Gaddafi's Libya and Gaddafi himself would have disintegrated very quickly.<sup>71</sup> Such tactics are a good reminder of the role played by tribalism during the Italian occupation of Libya when the war of resistance was waged against the tribes.<sup>72</sup> Thus tribal loyalty or identity proved to be an appropriate tool to generate a tribal consensus with the aim to strengthen his legitimacy to govern the country.

After the end of the war of 2011, without going into further detail, the transition period was truly defined by a profound transformation of the political arena. This is not only because of the road map of transition but also because struggles for power emerged

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<sup>69</sup> Arturo Varvelli, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>70</sup> Wolfram Lacher, « Families, Tribes and Cities in the Libyan Revolution », op. cit.

<sup>71</sup> Cristiano Tinazzi, op. cit, pp. 263-268.

<sup>72</sup> Sawani, Youssef Mohammad, « Post-Qadhafi Libya: interactive dynamics and the political future », *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, Vol.5/1, Routledge, 2012.

amongst the representatives of important families, amongst the tribes and the towns that dominated the political scene after the fall of Tripoli. Moreover, the situation inside the National Council of Transition (NCT) was complex and tense. It was formed to two groups that were contrary and divergent, as much on the level of ideology as the methods of action.<sup>73</sup> This is what made coexistence difficult amongst these two groups and placed into doubt the capacity of the NCT to deal with the transitional phase. This prevented a resolution to the crisis for Libya as the ideological differences were so profound and hard to manage.

#### 4.1 – Difficulties in “state-building”

The process of polarisation has produced a political landscape with several key centres, whose peripheries consider themselves to be central which raises the issue of necessity of reforms to political transition, crucial to the future of Libya. The emergence of centres of local and tribal power during and after the war of 2011 was closely intertwined with the disintegration of central authority. The political and military organisation that took place principally on the local scale during the war found its roots in the Gaddafi era (1969 – 2011) and the monarchy that preceded it (1951 – 1969). Post-Gaddafi Libya can be reduced to a bi-polarised centre which exercises no control on its peripheries. These were split into a multitude of entities administered by local councils and military councils, largely tied to the militias which are implanted there.<sup>74</sup> The country found itself divided into multiple autonomous territories, quasi-independent and acting in a way to satisfy immediate interest and alliances of convenience.

Although somewhat controversial, independent of considerable positive momentum and of a legislative body enjoying real democratic legitimacy, a struggle took place in Tripoli at the heart of the National General Congress, elected on the 7<sup>th</sup> of July 2012.<sup>75</sup> This was a battle for central power between two camps who are progressively becoming increasingly radical. The first, auto-proclaimed “liberal” brings together more secular forces into a coalition called the Alliance of National Forces founded by Mahmoud Jibril. He was Prime Minister of the government of opposition during the war against Gaddafi. The Alliance is mainly made up of business men, executives of the former regime who

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<sup>73</sup> Moncef Ouannès, op. cit., pp.167-187.

<sup>74</sup> Patrick Haimzadeh, « Libye : le miracle de la reconstruction nationale », *Politique Internationale*, (n°149), Winter 2015.

<sup>75</sup> Mahmoud Jibril's Alliance of national forces has won 39 seats out of the 80 reserved for political parties; the Muslim Brotherhood's Party of justice and reconstruction came second with 17 seats and the National Front, a blend of the historical party of the opposition, the Front of National Libyan salvation, founded in 1981 by Mohamed Youssef Magarief, third with only three seats. The party of union for the fatherland and the Wadi Al-Hayat party have each won two seats. The remaining seats are spread amongst several political parties. The other 120 seats were reserved for independents. To find out more see, Wolfram Lacher “Fault Lines of the Revolution”, SWP, May 2014, pp. 1- 36.  
[https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research\\_papers/2013\\_RP04\\_lac.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2013_RP04_lac.pdf)



are close to the “reformist” movement initiated by Saif al-Islam (second son of Gaddafi) from 2005. It is also composed of officers who deserts in the early stages of the insurrection.<sup>76</sup> The second “Islamist” faction, was united around the party for Justice and Construction, a political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya in Islamist Wafa bloc. However, it also includes the representatives of Misrata, a town with strong revolutionary credentials and other towns on the Tripolitan coast of trading tradition, notably Zaouia and Wouara. These two clear factions on the political scene of Libya declared their hostility from the first day of the uprising and opted for open warfare. This was directed against the parliament, television and throughout the main streets of principal towns where they pursued their struggle for power through the use of militias.<sup>77</sup>

Beyond the split between religious and secular, another fault line can be seen to take shape. On the ground, the balance of power has become very favourable to militias and, whilst on the opposite side the army is disconcertingly weak, they have regrouped into several formations to constitute a military centre outside of the institutional structure. The armed groups budgeted by the state have also split up into several brigades, without being able to benefit from parallel chains of command. Perhaps more importantly they now serve the interests of their tribe or of their town.<sup>78</sup> Thousands have been granted and spent on militias, effectively increasing their power and their capacity to make their members more loyal. This has also attracted thousands more members by means of finance, power and statute. Because of this, the country was inundated by weapons and innumerable militias. The political actors of Libya made this problem worse when they offered to compensate those that were participating in the struggle against Gaddafi’s regime. The number of militia men thus rose from 30 000 to 250 000 according to the most generous estimations. Progressively, tribes and towns chose to reinforce the armed militias whose interests and political agendas coincided by using them as a political weapon to influence and dominate the political arena in post-Gaddafi Libya with catastrophic consequences on the short term and huge implication for long term stability.

Throughout the country, the increasingly frequent action led by local militias have underlined the total helplessness of central government. From the start of 2013, armed militias although drawing their salary from the state started to block the oil fields or to

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<sup>76</sup> Patrick Haimzadeh, « En Libye, ce n’est pas le chaos, c’est la guerre », op. cit., pp. 12-13.

<sup>77</sup> Mohamed Ben Lamma, « La transition libyenne : Tomber de charybde en Scylla ? », *Tribune, la Revue Défense Nationale*, Paris, n°568, October 9th 2014, p. 1.

<sup>78</sup> The El-Kib government has safeguarded a budget of some 70 billion dollars for the reconstruction. The budget evaporated without any realization. The Ali Zidane government had a budget of some 90 billion dollars and had promised to build 200 000 flats, but this never came to fruition. Corruption kills the State, drains governmental institutions and weakens the country. It should be stated without hesitation that Libya today is one of the most corrupt countries on the planet. To find out more see Moncef Ouannès, « Les milices en Libye: Obstacle majeur à la reconstruction de l’État », dossier: Vers un nouveau Moyen-Orient ? États arabes en crise entre logiques de division et sociétés civiles, July 19th, 2015, pp. 277-295.

control the strategic installations such as oil exportation, extraction or refining sites, for economic gain. To apply pressure on central government or to bolster their claims on the federal system or even regional secession in the East. This is the case of the federalists who have blocked the principal petrol terminals such as those of Brega or As-Sider or even the refinery of Ras Lanouf on the eve of the polls of the 7<sup>th</sup> of July to demand the creation of the semi-autonomous region of Cyrenaica. This stretches from the Mediterranean coast to the border with Chad in the south and encapsulates almost three quarters of the petroleum reserves of Libya and the majority of water reservoirs necessary for the realisation of the artificial Great River project. These federalists demand that the new constitution be based on a system of federal union which was neglected under Gaddafi.<sup>79</sup> Certain tribes also support federalism which generally enjoys vast tribal support. The head of the federal government, Ibrahim Jadran, comes from the Magharba tribe and also receives the support of the Al-Awaqir and Al-Hassi tribes. In July 2013, a power struggle was started by Ibrahim Jadran, chief of the militia designated to protect the installations and oil sites. The opposing party were the temporary authorities of Tripoli who accused him of corruption and mismanagement of oil revenues. Ibrahim Jadran demanded the creation of an investigative commission designated to make light on the management of petrol revenues of post-Gaddafi governments. He demanded that Tripoli commit itself to fairly spread its revenues between the three regions of the country. The success of his initiative is largely due to the material and human resources that he disposes and the positive echo which his egalitarian claims have had at the heart of the population. With around 10 000 men at his disposal who block the oil installations of Ras Lanouf, Brega, al-Sider and Zuitena and thus the threat to export petrol for the sole profit of Cyrenaica, the Guard of petroleum installations is a powerful figure. He enjoys the kindness of tribal chief despite his divergences with Zubeyr al Senussi. These focus notably on the utilisation of armed force and the presence of Islamists amongst those close to him.

The emergence of new political forces is destined to profoundly transform the political scenery. Some of the characters in the public eye who had served as spokespeople for foreign diplomats have disappeared. Conversely, previously unknown actors are likely to emerge. These power struggles have inevitably lengthened and will provoke certain instability in the long run. The new political elites have progressively leant on armed groups that they consider as loyal or trustworthy (often as they stemmed from the same communities) and forced the adoption of contested political decisions (for example the political exclusion Law adopted in May 2013.) This law forbids all collaborators of the

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<sup>79</sup> The federalists elected a supreme Council of Cyrenaica, given the responsibility of running the region's affairs. They placed at its head Ahmed Zubeyr al Senussi, member of the NCT, younger cousin of King Idriss al Senussi and the oldest of Gaddafi's political prisoners and thereby winner of the Sakharov prize by the European Parliament. Indeed, the resurgence of the federal question in Libya translated into a power struggle around the electoral law and the weight of each region in the new constituent assembly. To find out more see Said Haddad "La sécurité, "priorité des priorités" de la transition libyenne", Dossier « Le Maghreb avec ou sans l'Europe ? » in *L'année du Maghreb* n° IX, 2103, pp. 323-342.

former regime from participating in political life or public service. The beneficiaries from this have been members of the old exiled opposition, often descendants of families who had played a role at the forefront under the monarchy, and Islamist movements.

It should be noted that Islamist movements were the biggest losers during the election for the Chamber of Representatives in July 2014. The factors that explain the failure of Islamist movements in the elections are first of all the tribal aspect of Libyan society. On the religious front, the tribal structure has made the Libyan population adherents to a more traditional and popular Islam which is predominantly spread and interpreted by the vast networks of *zawiyas*. This explains the popular rejection of the speech on the sharia which was disseminated by Islamist groups. Even the party of the Muslim Brotherhood, Justice and Construction, who nonetheless had adopted a more moderate discourse, would not escape from this rule.<sup>80</sup> In contrast to Egypt, where the movement of the Muslim Brotherhood had succeeded to create a truly popular base at the heart of the underprivileged and middle classes, the representative structures of political Islam are very recent and were historically absent from the social tissue. Moreover, decades of Gaddafi have stamped this movement with the seal of suspicion in the collective Libyan mind-set.

The year 2014 began in this context with a weak and bipolarised centre and a periphery where local logics dominate. The country split into a multitude of entities administered by local councils and military councils, usually tied to militias.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, the launch of Operation Dignity (*Amaliyat Al Karama*) from mid-2014, by general Khalifa Haftar<sup>82</sup> in Benghazi to eradicate the Islamist militia, relied on the town's battalion of special forces and the air force. This was composed predominantly of executives of the former regime having defected in 2011, of brigades recruited from the large tribes of the East and brigades tied to the federalists of Cyrenaica.

In Tripolitania, the anti-Haftar camp structures itself around the Fajr Libya forces who are a majority at the heart of the GNC. This relies on a collation of forces named Dawn

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<sup>80</sup> Younes Abouyoub, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-72.

<sup>81</sup> Patrick Haimzadeh, « En Libye, ce n'est pas le chaos, c'est la guerre », *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>82</sup> An army officer at the time of Gaddafi who was made prisoner during the war between Libya and Chad, Khalifa Haftar spent more than twenty years in exile in the United-States before coming back to Libya to support the uprising in 2011. He then became one of the main commanders of the armed rebellion in the East before being dwarfed during the first phases of political transition and retiring. He reappeared at the forefront of the scene in February 2014 in a televised broadcast which announced in the name of the National Libyan Army, the dissolution of the GNC and the government. It also demanded a new road map for transition. The initiative fell short and was seen by many as an attempted coup by the authorities of Tripoli. In May 2014, Haftar launched an ambitious military operation in Benghazi, presented as a battle against Islamist radical groups. Although he is officially retired, he is supported by what is left of the military establishment in the east (in particular the Air Force), tribal militias and young civilians. After months of combat in Benghazi, Haftar was finally 'reintegrated' into the ranks of the loyal armed forces to the Al-Baida government, where he was named Commander-in-chief in March 2015. OT find out more, see Virginie Collombier, *op. cit.*, pp. 261-275.

of Libya that encapsulates principally Islamists, ex-members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group LIFG (Al Jama'a al-Islamiyyah al-Muqatilah al-Libye), the town of Misrata, of Amazigh units of Nalut and of Jadu as well as certain Zawiya or Gharyan brigades. The Fajr Libya force responded to Haftar's intervention by attacking Tripoli to expel the Zinten brigades (supported by the Chamber of Representatives) set up at the International Airport. After a battle of six weeks, the Forces of Fajr Libya conquered the capital in August 2014. With the legislation disposed of, they formed a "National Salvation government." Its ministers have announced the resumption of their ministries in Tripoli. For the government of national salvation and the force of "Libyan Dawn," the Tobrouk parliament is not legitimate as the supreme court has declared it unconstitutional.<sup>83</sup> Control of the capital by the Fajr Libya forces could be interpreted as a pre-emptive measure to exercise more influence by capturing important installations and thus maintaining an essential position on the political scene.

This alliance might seem heterogeneous on several levels as the communities are once again taking position based on several factors. These include their own interests, former rivalries and alliances that were made and were necessary to bind political, ideological, local and national splits stemming from the recent history of Libya as well as to the conflict of 2011 and short-term and local considerations. Indeed, the Islamo-conservative forces from Misrata are allied to groups that have more in common with jihadists. Thus, the tribe of the Machachiya, a traditional rival of the Zinten, opted to join the Libyan Dawn. Other tribes from Tripolitania who had for long periods of time constituted Gaddafist bastions in 2011 (Warshafana, Nawil, Siaan) joined general Haftar for essentially local reasons, that intersect with the splits that occurred during the 2011 war between insurgents and loyalists.

In the South, with the Tebou and Al-Mgarhai having taken up position for General Haftar, certain Touareg groups determine their position in favour of the opposing camp. The main Gaddafist stronghold that was the town of Bani Walid did not take position either for Karama nor for Fajr Libya. As in 2011, generational logic also operates. For example, in berberophone communities of Djebel Nefussa, the heads of the village refuse to take sides for one of the two rival factions in Tripoli out of fear of being subjected to reprisals by the Arab majority. Nevertheless, they cannot stop numerous young people from joining the National Mobile Force, a powerful militia that is predominantly Amazigh that supports the so-called "Islamist" faction. This commitment cannot be explained by the adherence to a certain form of political Islam but rather by the antagonism that exists between the Amazigh populations of the Djebel and their powerful Arab neighbours in the town of Zinten.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Patrick Haimzadeh, « En Libye, ce n'est pas le chaos, c'est la guerre », op. cit., pp. 12-13.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. pp. 12-13.

Besides, the political conflict between these two political entities that both claim legitimacy and the internal struggles opposing rival militias have benefitted the so-called Islamic State (IS).<sup>85</sup> Daesh has gained ground and now controls the town of Syrte (2014 and 2016). Its zone of influence stretches into the Libyan South. In addition, the failure of multiple successive municipalities and governments to provide services to their constituencies has offered the opportunity to terrorist organisations such as Ansar al-Shari'a (AAS) in Benghazi and to IS Darnah and Syrte to fill the vacuum. This convergence of factors has allowed violent extremist elements to use the platforms in Libya to develop short-term formation camps for Libyan and third-world country recruits. These recruits are then redeployed to perform terrorist acts throughout the region and in Syria. The violent extremists based in Libya have continued to provide weaponry throughout the region and to the Syrian fighters.

The result is such that as the end of 2014, we witnessed the split of State institutions, the emergence of two governments and concurrent claims of legitimacy. This period was equally marked by the emergence of protean political violence that did not spare a single region in the country. This violence was revealing of the fragmentation of the security landscape of the country and the difficulties that transitional authorities had to be recognised by all parties within Libya (armed or not). It is clear that after 42 years of Gaddafi, this task entails building a new system and a new political culture that respects human rights. Between the construction of a new political scenery and the legacy of the past, new Libya has collided with the dualism of Libyan power. On the one hand, that of transitional authorities and on the other that of the militias. In other words, it is the competition between political legitimacy from the polls and revolutionary legitimacy stemming from armed conflict that has structured political life since 2012. Besides, the military conflict between rival tribes and partisans of the two rival governments around the oil export facility of Sidra in December 2014 marked a turning point in the polarisation and intensification of armed violence. It signalled the complete breakdown of the process of political transition as it was conceived in 2011. Not only did competition for power from then on take place outside of the institutional political framework, but direct control of the ground and its resources have become a crucial stake.

Considering this complex situation, the international society that had until then resolved to remain an observer of the deteriorating political and security situation in Libya, attempted to act as an arbiter. The attempted mediation between the two warring factions through the channel of the United Nations in September 2014 had the objective of setting up a government of harmony. This body would prepare the organisation of a referendum on the project of a Constitution and subsequently, legislative elections. At the end of a long marathon of discussion, Bernardino Leon, UN emissary proposed on

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<sup>85</sup> Patrick Haimzadeh, « Libye : le miracle de la reconstruction nationale », op. cit.

Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> October in Skhirat to create a government of national unity.<sup>86</sup> However, the situation remained affected by the absence of a consensus around the perspective of political reconstruction, by a political split and by institutional differences. After the failure of the Chamber of Representatives to endorse the new legislation, there is a serious risk that the main split between the partisans and the adversaries of the agreement deepens and creates new divides within the two camps proper. Besides, the Presidential Council (PC) which is an executive body established through a political agreement of Skhirat, remains incomplete and fragile. This weakness has arisen whilst the attempt to establish Faiez Sarraj's government of national unity, supported by the international community, remains completely blocked in its actual form and created additional problems. The trust and the hopes that were provoked by the arrival of Faiez Sarraj and his PC have largely dissipated. One of the main causes of this dissatisfaction has been a PC that has been plagued with internal divisions, weakened by its inability to answer the legitimate fears of the Libyans in Security and economic matters and the refusal of the Chamber of representatives to ratify and give to its cabinet a vote of confidence despite western pressure that threatens to impose sanctions on stubborn parties. IN addition, the parallel institutions have remained in place. The interim government based in Al-Baida has refused to recognise the PC and continues to exercise its authority in the east of the country thus encouraging the continuation of parallel institutions, including that of a branch of the Central Bank of Libya (CBL), in Al-Baida.<sup>87</sup> Instead of launching a virtuous dynamic, the establishment of the the Presidential Council of Faiez Sarraj has on the contrary contributed to the creation of new lines of fracture in a political scenery already extremely fragmented.

For a national dialogue to truly have a chance of succeeding, any attempt to re-launch political transition in Libya must be based on round table discussions with negotiators representing several parties. These would be the principal armed groups, local groups, chiefs of tribes capable to mobilise substantial support amongst their supporters, thos capable of assuring governance and disciplined responsibility in key areas such as the mobilisation of larger coalitions. One has to advance from multiple bilateralism to

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<sup>86</sup> The process was led by the special representative to the UN, Mr. Bernadino Leon until November 2015 and since then by Martin Kobler. At the end of a long marathon of discussions, Bernardino Leon, emissary to the UN proposed on Thrusday October 8<sup>th</sup> in Skhirat, Marocco, to create a government of national unity. Mr. Leon also announced the names of candidates who will lead the Fayez Sarraj government. It is made up of a President of the council (considered as the designated Prime Minister of his future government), five deputies (Prime ministers-designated deputies) and three State ministers, each representing a different political and geographic area. The new government would then govern for a period of one year which would be renewable. If this agreement were approved, the Chamber of Representatives would be the legislative organ that would reincorporate the members who had boycotted, whilst the State council would serve as a second advisory chamber, essentially composed of members of the GNC. To find out more see: International Crisis Group, « The Libyan Political Agreement: Time for Rest », in Middle East/North Africa Report, (n.170), 4 november 2016. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/libyan-political-agreement-time-reset>

<sup>87</sup> Jean-Bernard Pinatel, « Vers une prise de pouvoir du Général Khalifa Haftar », *Géopolitique- géostratégie-Analyses et débats*, 23 Décembre 2016.



conclusive multilateralism. This would allow to widen the base of a political process beyond that of Tobrouk, of Tripoli and the political entities that only represent a small part of the political spectrum. Thus one must lean at the same time on local forms of legitimacy and tribal powers, without overestimating its importance as this would merely serve to accentuate the political fragmentation of the country. Thus, more than the promotion of *competition*, it is the construction of foundations of a consensus amongst communities that can be the only factor to reset the Libyan transition on the rails and thus avoid that it definitively ends in chaos. Hence, the construction of a consensus is not impossible.

#### 4.2 – *The proliferation of Tribal conflicts*

Vengeance is a key proponent of the traditional tribal code in Libya.<sup>88</sup> Gaddafi, himself a Bedouin tribal chief is the perfect example of this by exercising his vengeance without pity on his enemies and opponents. On the day that followed the revolt, this vengeance was put into place with incredible violence on certain tribal population, due to their supposed or real allegiance to the former leader of the country. They are marginalised by the new authorities where numerous exactions take place from militias at the heart of the towns.<sup>89</sup> This factionalism is clearly visible today between these tribes that were known to have been supporters of Gaddafi all along the uprisings and those that have opposed his rule, additionally complicating a soft transition of the former regime towards a new democratic State. At the fall of the regime, former tribal rivalries, revived by the conflict have added themselves to the internal splits to the insurrection and the traditional opposition between center and periphery. The tribes and certain districts found themselves at the heart of this vengeful violence, and of the control of militias.<sup>90</sup> Small-scale incidents implicating individuals can rapidly be turned into major intertribal, urban fighting as each group attempts to protect his own camp. The revolt against the Gaddafi regime was not built upon tribalism and did not give way to tribal battles proper. However, the state of uncertainty since 2011 has led to a greater dependence on tribal and local networks. The shaky period that followed also made way to a state of conflict between the tribe and the parties on their political role.

In Tripolitania, the death of Gaddafi has signified the rise to power of the victorious towns and tribes and the defeat of communities who had remained faithful to the regime.

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<sup>88</sup> « La Libye du Boulevard Saint Germain : Une guerre civile ? (III/III) par Champsaur. », 26 juillet 2013. <http://lafautearousseau.hautetfort.com/archive/2013/07/20/la-libye-du-boulevard-saint-germain-une-guerre-civile-iii-ii.html>

<sup>89</sup> Helena Mayr, «Have tribal structures in Libya promoted or hindered the establishment of a new state after the Arab Spring uprisings? » academia.edu, [https://www.academia.edu/11443499/Have\\_tribal\\_structures\\_in\\_Libya\\_promoted\\_or\\_hindered\\_the\\_establishment\\_of\\_a\\_new\\_state\\_after\\_the\\_Arab\\_Spring\\_uprisings](https://www.academia.edu/11443499/Have_tribal_structures_in_Libya_promoted_or_hindered_the_establishment_of_a_new_state_after_the_Arab_Spring_uprisings)

<sup>90</sup> Peter Colei, Fiona Mangan, op. cit., p. 12.

This is the case of the black tribe of the Tawarghas (touareg), between Syrte and Misrata. The revenge of Misrata, once the conflict was ended, prevented the Tawarghas from returning to the town which was almost destroyed. Today there are around 40 000 black tribe members who wander or are tortured in obscure prisons. Thrust into cages like animals, they have been forced to eat Gaddafi's old green flag by the Misratan militias who claimed they had participated in the destruction of the town alongside loyalist forces. Many of them have had to group together in camps around Tripoli and more than 13 000 are still imprisoned, missing or deceased. The Tawarghas presented apologies to the inhabitants of Misrata at the end of a meeting in Benghazi. On their side, the new authorities have abstained from intervening in this conflict. Another conflict between the Zinten militia and that of the Machachiya who remained loyal to Gaddafi until the end, is turning out very costly for the latter. According to certain estimates, nearly 5 000 people, forced to leave the town are now without a home. In Djebel Nefussa, in the localities close to the town of Nalut, berber militias have also treated inhabitants suspected to have sympathy towards the regime of "Arab dogs."<sup>91</sup>

The sacrificial violence of Gaddafi's execution in October 2011 had at one point allowed the interruption of the mimetic cycle of violence of the civil war and a peaceful period to settle on the country. However, in October 2012, the revolutionary camp led by the town of Misrata led an offensive to take Bani Walid, considered to be a counter-revolutionary stronghold.<sup>92</sup> A conflict arose between the Warfallah tribe and the town of Misrata, from where general Youssef Al-Mangoush is originally from. He is both head of the army and coordinator of the militias supporting power in Tripoli which is attempting to take control of the whole of the region. Bani Walid, stronghold of the Warfallah tribe, continues to harbour the faithful of the former regime. In 2012, it became the theatre of violent fighting against the Misrata militias. It was subjected to a siege by forces essentially coming from Misrata, the Shield of Libya, sent by the temporary authorities. Authorised by the General National Congress (GNC) on the 25<sup>th</sup> of September, the use of force against this locality intervened in a general climate of suspicion towards former Gaddafists and people suspected of having been supporters. This added to a climate of ancient rivalry between the towns of Misrata and Bani Walid. This goes back to the creation of the Tripolitan republic in 1918 and was broadly instrumentalised by Gaddafi's regime throughout the changing of tribal alliances. Certain members of the GNC even participated in the operation, completely illustrating the new balance of power.<sup>93</sup> This attack has ensured the domination of Misrata on central Libya, whilst weakening the tribes west of Tripolitania and further weakening their Warfallah allies who have now been removed from power.

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<sup>91</sup> Report of the International Commission of Inquiry on Libya, 2 mars 2012.

<sup>92</sup> Lacher W., « Libya's Local Elites and the Politics of Alliance Building », op. cit., pp. 64-85.

<sup>93</sup> Saïd Haddad, op. cit., pp. 323-342. Voir aussi Christopher S. Chivvis, Jeffrey Martini, « Libya after Qaddafi lessons and implications for the future », RAND Corporation, 2014, pp. 1-119.



Besides, from the end of the revolt, old tribal conflicts resurfaced south of Libya, especially in Kufra (south-east). This crossroads is a point of vital strategic importance for traffic between Chad, Sudan and Niger. The feud took place between the Tebus on the one hand who represent approximately 25% of the population of Kufra and who can be found as a majority in the north of Chad and in Darfur (Sudan) as well as in the north-east of Niger and in Algeria. Their language, Saharan, belongs to a different linguistic family as to that of Arabic, Amazighes and the Zouwaya, who are themselves originally from Ajdabia (north-east) but make up a majority in Kufra (55% of the population). From December 2011 to February 2012, the Zwai Arabic tribes and the Tebu have fought in the oasis of Kufra in the extreme South-East of the country. They struggled over control of the roads that lead to Sudan and Chad. These disputes are recurrent when it comes to smuggling: weapons food, medicine, fuel, cigarettes, stolen vehicles and clandestine immigration. To attempt to put an end to these tensions, the authorities in Tripoli sent to Kufra a peace-keeping force made-up of former Benghazi rebels. However, the presence of this brigade called the “Shield of Libya” only exacerbated tensions as the Tebus considered it an ally to their Zwai enemies.<sup>94</sup>

It should not be forgotten that the conflict became recurrent amongst the Tebus and the Arab tribes of Ouled Souliman and Al-Ahsawna for control of the lucrative smuggling rings of all kinds. Control over cross-border roads insure the possibility to regulate manufactured goods, foodstuff, cattle, cigarettes, drugs, weaponry as well as migrants.

Following the fighting that decimated Libya, there were around 550 000 people who fled throughout the civil war so as to escape from the threats and the violence. Especially, the Tawarghas and Machachiyas have been in a situation of constant movement since the fall of the Gaddafi regime in 2011. In the new account of post-Gaddafi Libya, little room is given to the truth on this matter and even less to the legality of the matter which is a serious hindrance to chances of reconciliation. Convinced of being the only artisans of Gaddafi’s fall, the ex-rebels have no complexes with regard to the success of their insurrection.<sup>95</sup> The history of the civil war remains to be written with the dominant version remaining that of the victor. It is clear that within this construct, the ‘other’ either failed to participate or did not support the insurrection which upholds the self-importance of the fighters. However, seen from Benghazi, the fall of Tripoli took a long time... For the Tripolitans, the cause of this late engagement was the massive presence of loyalist security forces in the town. In contrast to Benghazi, Tripoli was the place of residence of the Gaddafi family.

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<sup>94</sup> Ammour Laurence Aïda, « La Libye en fragments », JFC Conseil: La Méditerranée en partage, avril 2013, 18 pages ([www.jfcconseilmed.fr/files/13-04---Ammour--La-Libye-en-fragments.pdf](http://www.jfcconseilmed.fr/files/13-04---Ammour--La-Libye-en-fragments.pdf)).

<sup>95</sup> Luis Martinez, « Libye: une transition à l'épreuve du legs de la Jamahiriyya », in *Les Études du Ceri*; [http://omer.sciences-po.fr/sites/default/files/etude\\_195-martinez\\_web-1\\_0.pdf](http://omer.sciences-po.fr/sites/default/files/etude_195-martinez_web-1_0.pdf)

However, the tribes are not merely a cause nor an automatic solution to the conflict. Yet, the tribes can also play a role in breaking the revenge cycle, improving the likelihood for reconciliation. It is true that the tribe as an institution continues to exercise an influence on socio-political interactions and the collective and individual identities within Libyan society. But since the fall of Gaddafi, the majority of the reconciliations amongst tribes and the regions in conflict have been the product of tribal chiefs and elder councils. Since 2015, and during eight months, the Djebel Nefussa (a mountain range in the West, dominated by Berbers) has thus been the theatre of conflict between armed groups of Zinten, allies of general Haftar and militias of several neighbouring towns allied to Fajr Libya and the government of Tripoli. Roads were cut with in fuel and medicine halted. The local social structures then played a key mediating role amongst belligerents and permitted the opening of roads, the exchange of prisoners and the establishment of a cease-fire.

Following on from this dynamic, tribal leaders are thus an important actor on the ground which should be utilised for any peace process or agreement to succeed at grassroots level. They have considerable power to force members of their tribes to abstain from revenge action and to create ceasefire agreements with other tribal leaders. The tribes have to impose themselves and take an active role as the State is absent and has failed to fulfil its duty. Investment in the short run in this area will clearly allow social cohesion in the long term and institutional capacity. It could allow a robust central government to control all its territory and a more lasting future.

### **4.3 – *The role of Tribes in security***

Facing the collapse of the official coercive state power, the restructuration and reform of the security sector has become one of the central tasks of transition in post-Gaddafi Libya. The successive governments have not been able to successfully answer this task. The failures that have brought the country into civil war, notably the empowerment of the rebels followed by foreign military intervention, led to another civil war between May 2014 and March 2015.

Following a riot against Gaddafi, underlying conflicts have reappeared. Each opposing party has felt increasingly marginalised as they believed that the other was rapidly obtaining a political and economic advantage. One of the major failures of the Libyan transition was basing the process of transition on the organisation of rapidly organised elections, thereby favouring electoral legitimacy over reconciliation.<sup>96</sup> This dynamic has concealed the importance of the break between victors and vanquished in the civil war. Such developments are without a doubt the consequence of a certain choice of political

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<sup>96</sup> Cécile Hennion, op. cit..

transition (and a certain concept of democracy) based first and foremost on the competition that exists between concurrent groups without taking into account the context of Libya post-2011. This context encapsulates a mutual weariness amongst rival communities and groups, inexperience with regard to dialogue and political compromise, weakness of the formal security sector. Moreover, armed groups benefit from an integration and legitimacy amongst local communities that is often far superior to that of new political elites.

The local and fragmented character of political and military actors as it expressed itself during the war as early as 2011, led to a transition led by a coalition of cowardly and fragile interests rather than a single united political force. Too many local counter-balances to the central authority in the form of local and military councils have developed throughout the conflict. The tribes and districts have become the heart of the perpetration and hence the reduction of reprisal violence as well as hubs of training and the control of militias. Rivalries and the balance of power have become increasingly important.

At its most basic level, the violence in Libya has been an intensely local affair, coming from networks of patronage that have ancient roots. These aim to insure the control of the country's wealth, its trade and political power on a backdrop of secessionism, compounded by a state weakened by its institutional weakness and in the absence of a central referee with a dominating power. It is important to note that the army and the police largely evaporated during the revolt that uprooted Colonel Gaddafi.

The theme of security remains a real dilemma. Despite the political agreement of Skhirat in 2015, the majority of security disposition had not taken shape two years later. Even measures as simple as an agreement on brokering a cease-fire have not been adopted. The key security question has remained without an answer. This political agreement does not take into consideration the reconversion of armed groups or the reconstruction of the army and security services that nonetheless make up vital and necessary prerequisites for its implementation. In contrast, the presidential council and its international backers have placed emphasis on the committee of security arrangements. This is a group based in Tripoli under the authority of the council, overly dependent on a few militias and personalities, some of which could prove to be obstacles to national reconciliation.<sup>97</sup> In theory, it is impossible for the current efforts of the government of national unity to pay off if discussions on security questions do not take up the most controversial question. What role is there for controversial personalities such as Khalifa Haftar who has considerably increased his bargaining power through his creation of the National Libyan Army (NLA), which is now the dominant political and military power in the Libyan East? Its zone of influence also stretches into the Libyan south where it

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<sup>97</sup> International Crisis Group, « The Libyan Political Agreement: Time for Rest », op. cit..

benefits from tribal support. Other challenges relate to the type of integration desired alongside disarmament and demobilisation of militias who have the final word on the local scale. The inability to dismantle the militias and to elaborate a national vision for Libya has allowed the centrifugal forces to return to war schemes and move away from local, religious and tribal allegiances. This is exacerbated in a non-securitised environment where survival of the fittest dominates and where surrender entails destruction.<sup>98</sup>

The marginalisation of civil society and its potential non-politicised or non-armed representatives could thus prove to be an obstacle to the concrete establishment of a political agreement meant to re-establish civil peace and to bring Libyans together around new institutions.<sup>99</sup> Nonetheless, the citizens may want to establish tribal councils that will implicate important tribal personalities so as to contribute to reconciliation, peace and security during the transition period. Another important characteristic of such a council is that it will offer the opportunity to reintegrate tribal allies of the Gaddafi regime. To avoid deep-seated divisions in society in the near future, Libyans will have to reintegrate tribes that supported Gaddafi such as the Warfallas, the Warshefanas or even the Megaras. These groups should also have the possibility of contributing to the reconstruction of Libya.

In addition to reconciliation, the tribes in Libya have a role to play in the improvement of the security situation and to fill the vacuum of power. This is particularly important when a society is in transition. The tribal leaders have the capacity to mobilise important tribal forces to insure peace and maintain order in the absence of a formal security apparatus. In a broad country like Libya that lacks strong central government, the necessity for informal forces has become even more essential throughout the country. Despite a study that was made by the United States Institute of Peace on the role of the tribe in security services, almost 86% of those asked answered that local police should be independent and devoid of all tribal affiliation (see figure 3). For 70% of people, tribal elders should not have the capacity to have any influence, even informal on the police (see figure 4). On this clear national preference for a police structure independent of tribal influence, those questioned have a tendency to positively consider tribes, especially as they make a significant contribution to the security of the region. Nevertheless, this point of view was more frequently shared in the east of the country where tribal organisation, the relationship amongst tribes and the limits of territorial tribes are more stable, than in the west and the south-west where tribal conflict is ongoing.<sup>100</sup>

While surpassing the security fragmentation of the country is one of the conditions for stability in new Libya, the political forces at present will not have the luxury of reflecting

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<sup>98</sup> Karim Mezran et al., « Une dernière chance pour la Libye », *Outre-Terre*, (N°44), 2015/3, pp. 119-127.

<sup>99</sup> Virginie Collombier, op. cit., pp. 261-275.

<sup>100</sup> Peter Colei, Fiona Mangan, op. cit., p. 13.

on the manner in which centralised and local power, as embodied by the tribes, will be necessary to maintain the peace.<sup>101</sup> According to the same study, 60% of those questioned answered that tribes could provide security to communities independent of individual tribal affiliation (see figure 5). 51% of those questioned stated that security entities organised along tribal lines (armed groups) were less corrupt than State security.<sup>102</sup>

In the absence of other functional structures, the tribes operate as an important reference point at the local level. The tribes today control the profitable roads of trade or contraband, oil facilities and other resources that were suddenly absorbed during the void that opened after the war in 2011. These are now considered vital for the short run prosperity, power and prestige of the tribes. This is particularly the case as post-Gaddafi Libya has more or less been the scene of a state collapse. This is especially the case as governmental authority does not stretch through the whole of the capital and is even less present in the majority of Libyan towns. Amongst the social forces of Libya, the tribes are best placed to fill this security void. In the border region, for example, the tribes could play the role of border control. Surveillance of the 5 000 km stretch in the south could be exchanged for aid and to fight an economy based on illegal trade. Indeed, the traffic of migrants has become a means of gaining money.

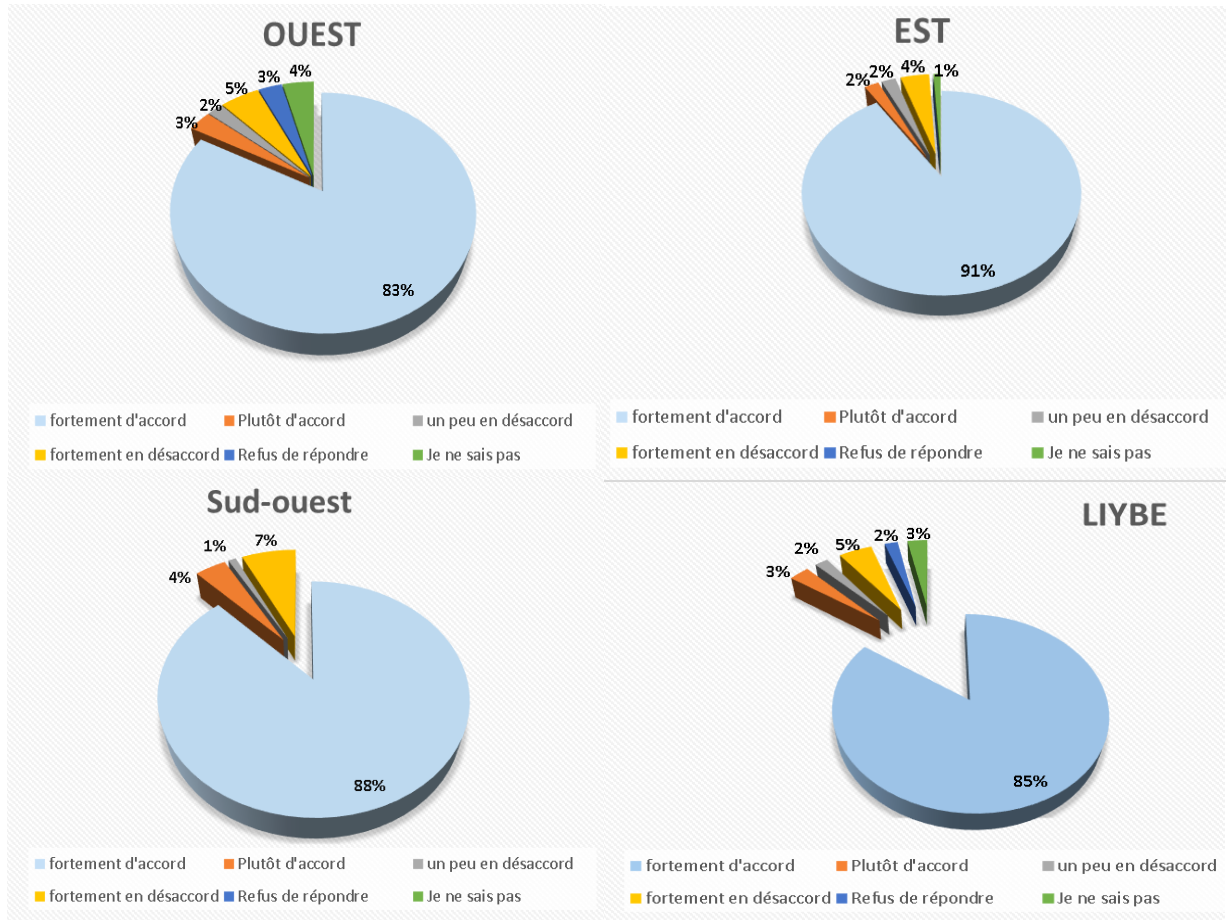
In summary, since 2011, the tribes have asserted themselves in the security apparatus necessary for a peaceful solution in Libya. Nevertheless, the tribal influence in this area is not new; it has historical resonance. The Libyan State traditionally relied on the tribal components of its society to support its power and thus its control on the country. What has happened since 2011 has been a growth of tribal influence in the provision of security as a response to the collapse of the State. As the implication of the tribes has increased, so too has the impact of the dynamic of intertribal power on which tribe provides security to what region of the country. The tribes could thus constitute a stabilising force in the post-conflict resolution process. Due to their very respected social status, their experience as mediators of orders and conflicts, the tribal elders can use their moral power to exercise an influence on other members of their tribe to pardon and reconcile different parties. Libyans identify this reality and the positive role that tribes can play. Nevertheless, the Libyans in vast majority wish for a security system provided by the State and independent of all tribal influence. The local and tribal interests are thus likely to continue to play an important part in the future of Libya.

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<sup>101</sup> John Davis, *Le Système libyen. Les tribus et la révolution*, Paris, PUF, 1990, p.255.

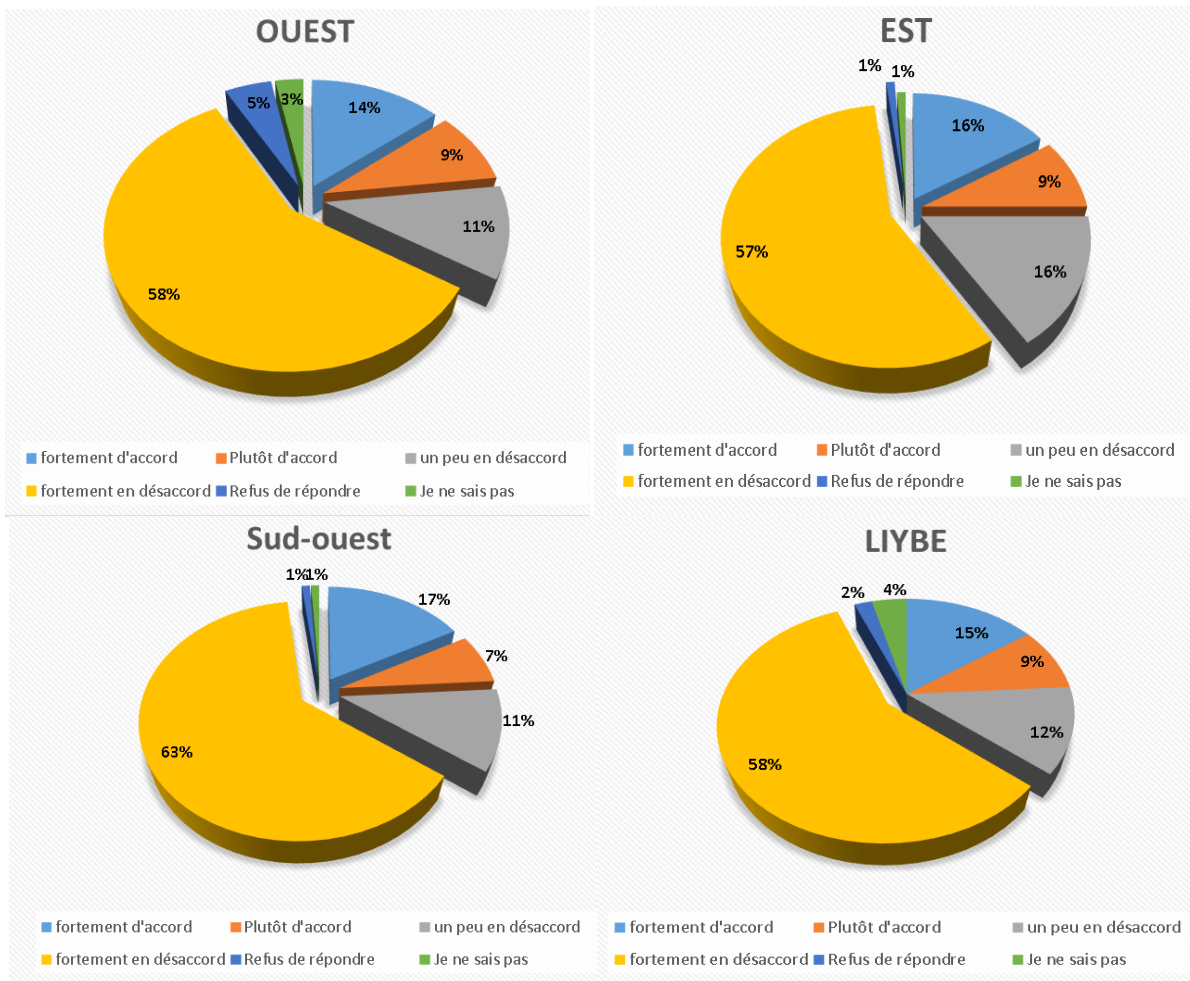
<sup>102</sup> Peter Colei, Fiona Mangan, op. cit., p. 13; voir aussi, Fiona Mangan, Christina Murtaugh, « Security and justice in postrevolution where to turn? », *Peaceworks*, the United States Institute of Peace, (N°100), September 2014, pp. 1-76. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2014/09/security-and-justice-post-revolution-libya>

**Figure n° 3 : DO YOU AGREE THAT THE LOCAL POLICE FORCE SHOULD BE COMPLETELY INDEPENDENT OF ALL TRIBAL AFFILIATION?**

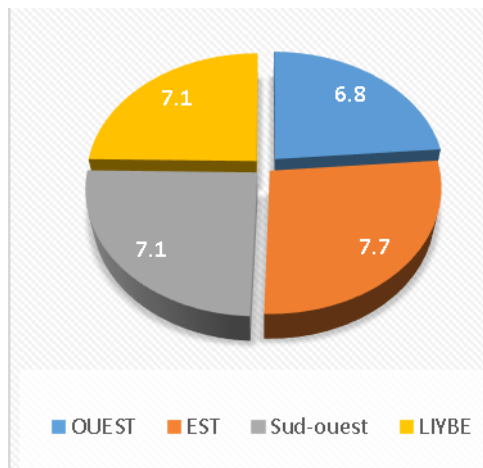




**Figure n° 4 : DO YOU AGREE THAT ANCIENT TRIBES SHOULD HAVE INFLUENCE OVER THE LOCAL POLICE FORCE? (N=979) PER REGION:**



**Figure n° 5 : ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 10, WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ROLE OF THE TRIBE IN THE SECURITY OF YOUR REGION? (N=979) AVERAGE PER REGION.**







## CONCLUSION

Tribal loyalties no longer have the institutional structure that they once had but they maintain large societal influences. Historically, Libyan tribalism contributed to the formation of political structures. Post-Gaddafi Libya marks the return of the tribe as a main political actor at the heart of society and coincides with the unease that the State is currently experiencing today. This shows that tribalism never disappeared from the collective consciousness of Libyan societies. Admittedly, the demographic evolution, urbanisation and the development of the country eroded this tribal character little by little. Nonetheless, the context of uncertainty pushes populations to turn themselves towards primary affiliations. In particular, tribes have played an enormous role in the safeguarding of lives and the alleviation of conflicts. Just after 2014, when the fragile process of State construction collapsed into civil war. Nonetheless, the tribal structures continue to organise people into somewhat coherent militias to put up a united front against the creation of a new State and exercise veto rights at the national level. It is them who counter attempts at a widening of control by the central government through autonomous alliances or secession on the regional rather than national level. Moreover, tribal and self-proclaimed regional militias still refuse to incorporate their fighters into the official army and police force to keep a grip on the process and methods of integration of armed groups in State structures.

“E pluribus unum,” make one out of many? To make peace with and against the tribes? What role, what arrangement, what means are left to the Libyan tribes to manage to achieve a type of unity and necessary stability? The hypothesis of a fortuitous and legitimate man, acknowledged by all parties concerned can be put to the side, having already been exploited. The democratic fever of the immediate post-Gaddafi seems to have dissipated. Indeed, what worked in Spain or even in Tunisia seems to last here. The apparition of gangs and violent smugglers are complicating the situation to the benefit of a few gangs of thugs and old tribal rivalries that had been muffled for a long period of time have re-emerged, although wise men still exist. Thus the solution must still come through the tribe.

In the short run, whilst Libya is looking to re-build and to exceed its history of colonialism, conflict and coups, efforts at reform must use tribal expertise and experience in order to re-establish peace, negotiation and reconciliation. Moreover, tribal loyalty or identity could prove to be an appropriate instrument to generate a tribal consensus with the goal of affirming legitimacy to govern the country. National reconciliation and transitional justice are thus generally considered as essential and important pre-conditions to the process of peaceful transition. Furthermore, the potential success in reconstruction of a Libyan Constitutional State must take into

account what modern tribalism really means to Libyans. However, so that the Libyan State can function without major disruption, a new ideology and a common State identity must be created so as to establish a common front.

In the future, tribal structures must be less important so that Libya can move forward as a united nation with mixed goals. Decisions will need to be taken at the heart of the government rather than by local tribal leaders as tribes take decisions based on family loyalties and priorities and not about national interest. It is clear that customs and tribal traditions can still influence the decision-making process, but in the long term. Tribes ought to concentrate on distancing themselves from the political sphere and the role of a wide sprawling family.

Transition to democracy is never easy, yet it would be wrong to be weary of the influence of the tribes in Libyan social fabric and their capacity to surpass themselves and embrace a historical leap. Progress will also demand the search for a method of building a system of governance that benefits from existing social relations instead of simply ignoring them, as often happens in weak States. A will to live together and to keep what brings citizens together unsullied must be accompanied by intelligent adjustability. This is embodied by decentralisation, the principle of subsidiarity or the clumsiness of a foreign government. This is because if the tribes are completely ignored, they will form a parallel structure of power that will undermine the formal institutions of the State. Does Libyan history not show that in the face of great occasions and important stakes Libyans know how to stick together?