



Working Papers in African Studies

01-2013

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After the jubilation that has greeted Qadhafi's fall from power, many wonder whether the costs of regime change did not exceed the benefits. Merely to raise the issue is likely to invite mixed reactions. What follows is by no means intended to call into question the courage and determination of the men and women who joined the ranks of the rebels, or to ignore the huge sense of relief felt by those Libyans who experienced first-hand Qadhafi's iron-fisted dictatorship. Few are mourning his death, let alone the passing of his massively oppressive "state of the masses". Nonetheless, the dramatic – and largely unanticipated -- spin-offs of his downfall, within and outside Libya, have tempered everywhere the celebratory mood of the early post-Qadhafi era, prompting a more sober reassessment.

Libya has emerged from its bitter civil war and sustained NATO bombings a battered nation. To the material damage inflicted on the country -- infrastructures destroyed, cities reduced to rubble (as in Surt, Beni Walid, Misrata, Tawargha), public transport brought to a standstill, and so forth – must be added the Pandora's box of extraordinarily complex social, racial, ethno-regional and political conflicts opened by the collapse of the regime and their repercussions in neighboring states. Unlike the physical damage suffered by the new Libya, restoring a measure of cohesion to its social fabric will take much longer, and at a higher cost in human lives than had been anticipated.

No one trying to get a handle on the present situation can ignore Qadhafi's poisoned legacy, but its broader historical context is no less important. In this paper I try to put the many ills confronting the new authorities in the perspective of "non-state politics". Its most salient characteristic, in the words of a noted anthropologist, is not that "the state has withered away, but rather that it has never blossomed".² So, also with Libya. As far back as one can remember nothing like a functioning state ever materialized to forge enduring bonds among the three ancient provinces – Cyrenaica, Tripolitania and Fezzan -- comprised in Africa's second largest (after Algeria) and most thinly populated country. The Italian version of the Bula Matari³ proved sadly inadequate to lay the foundation of a state system, and the same can be said of its successor, the Senussi monarchy. This is where the Libyan version of the Arab Spring carries very different implications from its Mediterranean neighbors. Unlike Egypt and Tunisia, where a

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² I.M Lewis, *Social Anthropology in Perspective* (Penguin Books, 19756), p. 321.

³ "The crusher of rocks" in Lingala; by this metaphor borrowed from the Belgian Congo Crawford Young seeks to convey the essence of the colonial state, which embodies "the purest form of autonomous bureaucratic autocracy". See Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 160.

coherent, though admittedly fragile, authority structure emerged from the debris of the colonial state, the case of Libya reveals a very different story.⁴

We begin with a brief look at the country's history, move on to a discussion of Qadhafi's brand of "non-state politics", and finally turn to a more sustained discussion of the post-revolutionary situation.

A Backward Glance at History

A hundred years ago last September Italy invaded Libya. It all began when thirteen battleships sailed into Tripoli's harbor, meeting no resistance. The crunch came on October 3, with a devastating bombardment of the old city. In the words of an American eyewitness, Mabel Loomis Todd, "when bombardment finally began the noise was terrific, houses shaking as if in earthquake, refugees crying with grief and terror... Later, when the Italians blew up the Gil Gursh fort, the city shook to its foundations... By the end of October cholera had broken out, which added new terror and confusion. Mosques were filled with poor Arabs... dead bodies were picked up by carts at morning and evening and carried away for burial".⁵

Thus ended centuries of Ottoman domination (1551-1911) and began Italy's 30-year experiment in colonial rule in what became known as Italy's "fourth shore" (*squadra quadra*). The events of 1911 did more than substitute one form of imperialism (Italian) for another (Ottoman). At no time did Turkish overrule come anywhere near the degree of oppression and brutality exercised by the Italian colonizers. Just how little control was exercised on the local inhabitants is nicely captured in Bernard Newman's sweeping characterization: "The Turks, if their methods were primitive, interfered but little with the life and customs of the people. They found Libya a hungry desert, and so left it".⁶ Mabel Loomis Todd strikes a similar note: "The Turkish government has been described as more inexorable than the wall of China; and paralyzed by all these conditions, Tripoli has waited, beautiful, picturesque, glowing, but as it were in a state of suspended animation, holding her breath for the next stage".⁷

The next stage is where the tectonic plates shifted. Whereas Turkish occupation was largely limited to a few coastal enclaves, Italian overrule proved immensely more disruptive. The human losses from 1912 to 1943, when the allied forces in WW II pushed their way into Tripoli, are estimated at 250,000 (of whom 12,000 died by execution) out of a total population at the time of about one million. The large influx of Italian settlers that followed in the wake of Mussolini's rise to power in 1922, along with the violent uprising it engendered among Libyans, in turn unleashing an even more brutal

⁴ How history and society combined to propel Tunisia and Libya along radically different paths is brilliantly explored by Lisa Anderson in *The State and Social Transition in Tunisia and Libya, 1830-1980* (Princeton University Press, 1986), esp. chapters 11 and 12.

⁵ Mabel Loomis Todd, *Tripoli the Mysterious* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co. Publishers, 1912), p. vii, ix. The book offers a wealth of rare and fascinating insights into everyday life under the Ottomans, as well as a priceless collection of early photographs of Tripoli and the surrounding desert.

⁶ Bernard Newman, *Mediterranean Background* (London: The Travel Book Club, 1950), p. 130.

⁷ *Tripoli the Mysterious*, op. cit., p. 38.

repression, were key factors behind this human tragedy. Omar al-Mukhtar, the rebel leader who, to this day, stands as a symbol of Libyan resistance was captured on September 11, 1931, and publicly hanged while some 20,000 Bedouins were forcibly assembled to watch the grisly scene. It is not just in the US that 9/11 has a powerful emotional resonance. Nor is it by coincidence if Qadhafi consistently tried to invoke his memory to burnish his nationalist credentials.⁸

Libya became independent as a monarchy in 1951, but it took much wrangling before agreement could be reached over its future form of government. Dirk Vandewalle describes the birth of the Sanusi kingdom, through the concerted efforts of the UN and Western allies, as an “accidental state”: indeed few pretenders were as reluctant to be coaxed out of exile as the aging Emir Idriss, grandson of the founder of the Senusiya, an Islamic brotherhood (*tariqa*) born in Mecca in 1837.⁹ Whether it could be called a state is where doubts arise. As a religious order the Senusiya seemed singularly unpromising as the institutional foundation of the future polity; it never was able to develop the ethos of a modern state; nor did it claim much of a following outside Cyrenaica, the cradle of anti-colonial agitation. By the time Qadhafi seized power and proclaimed the end of the monarchy in 1969, the Senusi throne was all but a pushover.

The Nation as a Big Tribe

Measured by its capacity to institutionalize authority, the successor polity can hardly be seen as an improvement over the monarchy. In order to remedy the many sins of the Senusiya, including its proclivity to overcentralize power, the Libyan strongman, not yet the Arab world’s most psychotic despot, set out to lay the foundation of a new form of democracy, the “state of the masses” (*Jamahariyya*). The aim, as stipulated in *The Green Book*, was to give all power to the masses, thus eliminating the need for a state. But as the Libyans “masses” quickly realized, efforts to put into practice such “stateless society” turned out to be sadly counter-productive, and in the end produced exactly the opposite of what had been intended.¹⁰ Once this is said, there is every reason to assume a congruence of sorts between Qadhafi’s ideology and the ethos of Libyan society. The point is convincingly summed up by John Davis: “Notions of statelessness are endemic in Libyan society, and to some extent they explain both Qadhafi’s rhetoric and practice of statelessness, and the willingness with which Libyans accept them”.¹¹

Direct democracy, the core idea of the new dispensation, implied a transfer of power to “basic people’s congresses” (BPC), organized in pyramidal fashion from the ground up,

⁸ For a detailed analysis of the Ottoman and Italian legacies (1911-1950), see Dirk Vandewalle’s outstanding contribution, *A History of Modern Libya* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 16-42, and Claudio Segre, *Fourth Shore: The Italian Colonization of Libya* (The University of Chicago Press, 1974).

⁹ Vandewalle, p. 43. On the Senussi brotherhood, see, among other sources, Glauco Ciammaichella, *Libyens et Français au Tchad (1897-1914). La Confrérie Senoussiste et le commerce transaharien* (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1987), and Jean-Louis Triaud, *Tchad 1900-1902: Une guerre franco-libyenne oubliée? Une confrérie musulmane, la Sanusiya face à la France* (Paris, L’Harmattan, 1987).

¹⁰ Vandewalle offers the best critical discussion of Qadhafi’s “stateless society” in *A History of Modern Libya*, op. cit. pp. 96-138.

¹¹ John Davis, *Libyan Politics: Tribe and Revolution* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1987), p. 40-41.

and formally invested with legislative and executive authority. The Bedouin tribal template thus became the model for the entire country. Unforeseen by the theory, however, were the many problems that quickly drove the BPCs into a state of near paralysis – ranging from apathy to absenteeism, internecine tiffs and quarrels over funding, and tribal favoritism. By 1979 the state of the masses threatened to become massively dysfunctional. To reinvigorate the system a new set of committees was therefore introduced alongside the BPC: the revolutionary committees (RC). Intended to breathe a new revolutionary fervor among the masses, they quickly morphed into the organizational weapon designed by Qaddafi to root out his enemies. As civil society shrank, the security apparatus became omnipresent. Meanwhile the huge amount of revenue made available through petroleum resources meant that the raising of taxes could be conveniently dispensed with – and so also the need to liberalize the regime in response to the fiscal imperative. The monstrous polity spawned by the *Jamahariya* now came in full view: a deeply repressive kin-based dictatorship bolstered by informal nets of loyal clients kept in tow by a selective allocation of rewards and penalties.¹²

The contrast with King Idriss's paternal kingship could not be greater. Yet both had to contend with the many fault lines inscribed in the social landscape. The most enduring, and potentially threatening, calls attention to the historical forces that have shaped the destinies of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. Colonized by the Greeks in the 7th century BC, what is left of the ruins of its capital (Cyrene) testifies to Cyrenaica's rich Hellenistic heritage; in Tripolitania, on the other hand, the stronger influence was Roman. Although the Arab invasions were a powerful unifying force, regional identities persist.

That Bengazi, Cyrenaica's provincial capital, served as the fulcrum of the anti-Qadhafi rebellion, and contributed in no small way to its success, is a commentary on the extent of economic and social neglect suffered by the region during the Qadhafi years. His profound aversion for anything reminiscent of the Senussi monarchy goes far in explaining the social and economic marginalization of the eastern region compared to the more developed Tripolitania, and by implication its emergence as the vanguard of the anti-Qadhafi insurgency. By the same token the leading role played by Cyrenaica in setting in motion the forces of revolution has been a critical factor behind the re-awakening of regional loyalties.

How to integrate provincial identities into an overarching sense of national self-awareness is not the least of the challenges facing the new government. In the immediate future, however, there are a host of more pressing problems to be solved, including first and foremost restoring a modicum of security through the land. Security means, first and

¹² It is worth emphasizing that the absence of an institutionalized state system does not imply the absence of a power center. The point is convincingly argued by Daguzan and Moisseron in their excellent analysis of post-Qadhafi Libya: among those institutions which they describe as “the vertebral column” of the Libyan power center are the security apparatus, the revolutionary committees, the Libyan National Oil Company and the Libyan Investment authority; the first insures social control through the exercise of violence, the second allows a measure of ideological conformity, the third provides the skills necessary to extract and manage the benefits of the petroleum rent, the fourth serves among other things as an instrument of Qadhafi's foreign policy, notably his African policy. See Jean-Francis Daguzan and Jean-ves Moisseron, “Le Libye après Kadhafi: essai de prospective du conflit libyen”, *Hérodote*, No. 142 (2011), pp.78-97.

foremost, establishing control over local militias; but it means also coming to grips with the issue of tribalism, which Qadhafi went to great lengths to exacerbate. It is significant that his consistent contempt for the state found a corollary in his love for the tribe and the family. “The state” he wrote, “is an artificial economic and political system”, unlike the “tribe (which) is a big family”. Rather than a state, “the (Libyan) nation is a big tribe”.¹³ An Arab tribe, one might add. Minorities, be they Berber, Tubu or Tuaregs, are all “Muslim Arabs”, we are told, in the same way that “the people of Chad... are Muslims of Arab origin”.¹⁴ Viewed from this perspective one can better understand why the Berbers of the Nafusa Mountains in the northwest – whose militias played a major role in tipping the scales on the side of the rebels -- should have joined the rebellion at an early stage, eager to re-establish their claims to cultural autonomy. Whether in the form of *berberité*,¹⁵ or through the assertion of Saharan identities, ethnicity is emerging as a major ingredient of post-revolutionary Libya.

The issue of tribalism, as distinct from ethnicity, also points to an important dimension of the strategy used by Qadhafi loyalists in their efforts to reverse the tide of revolution.

The Dynamics of Insurgency

Reflecting on the gaping institutional void facing the new regime, a close observer of the Libyan scene starkly described the results:

“Libya has no army. It has no government. These things exist on paper, but in practice Libya has yet to recover from the long maelstrom of Qadhafi’s rule... There are still no lawmakers, no provincial governors, no unions and almost no police. What Libya does have is militias, more than 60 of them, manned by rebels who had little or no military or police training when the revolution broke out less than 15 months ago. They prefer to be called *katibas*, or brigades, and their members are universally known as *thuwar*, or revolutionaries. Each brigade exercises unfettered authority over its turf, with ‘revolutionary legitimacy’ as its only warrant”.¹⁶

The fractiousness of the post-revolutionary environment is not without parallels elsewhere in Africa and the Middle East: in settings as diverse as Afghanistan and Iraq, Zaire and Somalia, the political vacuum that has accompanied the overthrow of despots has been filled by a constellation of more or less autonomous forces rooted in local communities. Whether designated as Mai-Mai, militias, factions, armed groups, *katibas* or *groupuscules*, in the absence of alternative sources of protection their unstated

¹³ For a discussion of the ethos of the tribe in Qadhafi’s ideology, see Anerson, op. cit., p. 268.

¹⁴ Cited in John Wright, *Libya, Chad and the Central Sahara* (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble Books, 1989), p. 135.

¹⁵ For an excellent discussion of the Berber problem, see Salem Chaker and Masin Ferkal, “Berbères de Libye: Un paramètre méconnu, une irruption politique inattendue”, *Politique Africaine*, No. 125 (March 2012), pp. 105-126.

¹⁶ Robert F. Worth, “The Future of Libya Depends on Mercy or Revenge”, *The New York Times Magazine*, May 13, 2012.

mandate is to provide a minimum of security to their people. In Libya as elsewhere loyalty to one's turf, to the hometown or local community has been the guiding principle in organizing self-defense groups. Rarely do militia identify themselves by ethnic labels, even though their place of origins leaves no doubt about their ethnic identity (as among the Berbers of the Djebel Nafusa); more often than not their names refer to the localities from which they came into existence, or the name of their self-appointed leaders. Out of this locally rooted dynamic has emerged a deeply fragmented political landscape, dominated by a flurry of independent fiefdoms under the control of self-appointed strongmen.

Nor is the role of ethnic or tribal identities in discriminating between "them" and "us", "loyalists" and "revolutionaries", a phenomenon unique to Libya. Where Libya stands out as a special case is in the wide array of frequently overlapping identities mobilized by Qadhafi loyalists in resisting the tides of revolution: family ties, tribal allegiances, regional solidarities and race. Next to immediate family ties,¹⁷ tribal identities proved especially potent in resisting revolutionary change.

The Gadadfa, Warfalla and Megrahi loom largest in the demonology of pro-Qadhafi's tribes.¹⁸ Their rise to prominence is traceable to the 1969 coup, when the Gadadfa quickly gained a foothold in the machinery of government, and then proceeded to strike alliances with the other two, resulting in the birth of a "tribal front" cemented by the resurgence of traditional solidarities.¹⁹ Their strategic location east and south of Tripoli helps explain the seriousness of the threats they posed to the rebellion. The significance of their geographical spread is plainly revealed in one of the earliest maps of Tripolitania, drawn in the late 1800s by the German explorer Gustav Nachtigal: a few miles south-east of Tripoli lies the Beni Ulid (Beni Walid) and then further south lies a vast stretch of desert and mountains only identified by two words in capital letters: Qedadifa (Gadadfa) and Urfilla (Warfalla).²⁰ In his discussion of the tribes of Fezzan and Tibesti Nachtigal makes clear how misleading it would be to think of them as monolithic blocs. He calls attention

¹⁷ Key players in Qadhafi's attempt to crush the rebellion were his sons Khamis, Mutuassim, and Seif al-Islam, with Khamis playing the key role as the head of an extremely brutal militia.

¹⁸ The use of the term "tribe" in this context -- a shorthand reference to culturally related communities -- is likely to raise the hackles of readers familiar with the work of E.L. Peters: in his critique of De Agostini's classic two-volume treatise on the populations of Libya (*La Popolazioni Della Tripolitania, La Popolazioni Della Cirenaica*, Governo Della Tripolitania, 1917, 1922) he shows just how inadequate the concept of tribe (*qabila*) really is in describing social configurations that are intrinsically different from each other: "Given this latitude and elasticity of meaning (of the term), enabling it to contract or expand contextually, then it is plain folly to assume similarity of organization wherever the word is applied". See E.L. Peters, "Cultural and Social Diversity in Libya", in J.A. Allan ed., *Libya Since Independence* (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 106. We agree with Peters that tribal patterns are not structurally fixed but are largely determined by the attempts individuals make to configure or reconfigure their relationships: "Since these perceptions change as circumstances alter, patterns of social relationships are re-configured historically" (ibid. p. 115, my emphasis). The present conjuncture is one of those critical moments where a drastic reconfiguration of tribal self-definition appears to be taking place.

¹⁹ Said Haddad, "Les forces armées libyennes de la proclamation de la Jamahiriya au lendemain de la chute de Tripoli: une marginalisation paradoxale", *Politique Africaine*, No. 125, March 2012, p. 74.

²⁰ Gustav Nachtigal, *Sahara and Sudan, Tome I Fezzan and Tibesti* (Barnes and Noble Books, 1974), Translated from the original German with new introduction and notes by Allan G.B. and Humphrey J. Fisher.

to “the various sections of the widely ramifying Urfilla tribe”, and suggests much the same about other configurations.²¹ To view their respective members as solidly unified in their support of Qadhafi is equally unwarranted. Intra-tribal factionalism has been for centuries and remains to this day a key feature of the Libyan landscape. What does need to be stressed is that such distinctions have rarely been taken into account in the settling of scores that followed in the wake of the rebels’ victory; all too often the entire tribe is held to account, a fact dramatically illustrated by the fate of Tawergha.

No other community has suffered a more cruel punishment for its alliance with Qadhafi than the people of Tawergha, a town of some 30,000 inhabitants, a few miles south of strategically located city of Misrata, which saw some of the bloodiest fighting of the war (and sometimes referred to as the Stalingrad of the Libyan revolution). “It is now a dead city as if a tsunami rising from the Mediterranean had destroyed everything in its path”, is how one newspaper described Tawergha.²² The town has indeed been virtually wiped out, its inhabitants hunted down; many have been killed on the spot or tortured before being killed. How many were executed by Misratan *katibas* is impossible to tell. What is well established is that the Tawerghi were overwhelmingly supportive of Qadhafi, that a large number were actively engaged in the assault on Misrata, and that many were guilty of human rights abuses, including rape. Whether this is a legitimate reason for holding the entire community, including women and children, responsible for the crimes committed by hundreds or even thousands is an entirely different question.

Their political sympathies for, and active engagement in support of Qadhafi’s cause, are not the only reasons behind the solid hatred their name evokes among the people of Misrata. That they happen to be dark-skinned for the most part -- their origins said to be traceable to the slave trade -- only tends to reinforce the image they project of themselves as enemies of the revolution, as if their phenotype and lowly status were consistent with their pro-Qadhafi stand. This is where the case of Tawergha differs from other cities identified with the regime, and accordingly destroyed, notably Surt and Bani Walid.²³ The racial dimension of the rebel’s vengeance in Tawergha is emblematic of a larger phenomenon: the extent to which support for Qadhafi is identified with people of African descent.

The Double-Edged Race Factor

“Se sei nero, sei gheddafiano”. Antonio Morone’s pithy formula²⁴ captures the essence of the existential dilemma faced by black Africans in the wake of the rebels’ victory: a black skin is often seen as a tell-tale sign of pro-Qadhafi sentiment. The message came out clear and loud in the early days of the rebellion, when the media revealed pathetic scenes of African migrant workers being rounded up and expelled or herded into

²¹ Ibid., p. 337.

²² Christophe Ayad and Benjamin Barthe, “Tawergha, une vengeance libyenne”, *Le Monde* July 7, 2012. For a more general discussion of how vengeance has become routinized, see Joshua Hammer, “Vengeance in Libya”, *The New York Review of Books*, January 12, 2012, p. 45-46.

²³ On the sack of Bani Walid see Jean-Louis Touzet, “Bani Walid, la ville ou Kadhafi est martyr”, *Libération*, November 23, 2011, p. 30.

²⁴ “Se sei nero, sei gheddafiano. Così il razzismo in Libia spopola intere città”, *Linkiesta*, July 4, 20012.

makeshift prisons, where they were kept for weeks and months in thoroughly inhuman conditions.²⁵ A well informed source puts it tersely: “The Arab Spring brought a sense of pride and hope to North Africa (...) but for the more than one million African guest workers who came to oil-rich Libya seeking their fortunes, it has meant terror”.²⁶

Not just for guest workers but for thousands of Libyan citizens whose racial profile makes them physically distinct from most Arab inhabitants. The Tubu (also referred to as Tebu or Toubou) and Touaregs²⁷ of the Fezzan – a Berber sub-group -- are prime examples of what Jean Chapelle in his classic work on Tubu of northern Chad called “les nomades noirs du Sahara”;²⁸ both have roots in neighboring states, the first in Chad, the other mainly in Niger and Mali; both are nomadic communities, but are found in substantial numbers in the southern oases of Sebha, Murzuk and Kufra; and both have had a history of conflict with Arab tribes. In view of their geographical distribution they could be described as “borderland” communities, aggressively competing for the control of smuggled commodities and illegal immigrants from Chad and Sudan.

Unlike the Tuaregs, however, who formed a substantial portion of Qadhafi’s armed forces,²⁹ the Tubu strenuously resisted incorporation into the Libyan military. Whether in Chad or in Libya, much of their history is one of resistance to Arab forays into their traditional homeland in the Tibesti mountains and beyond. Their devastating raids against Qadhafi’s occupying forces in northern Chad, in 1987,³⁰ testifies both to their fighting skills and uneasy rapport with their Arab neighbors. The overthrow of the Qadhafi regime did little to improve relationships between them.

The extreme brutality of recent anti-Tubu pogroms bodes ill for the future. Though the circumstances of the bloodshed remain unclear, scores if not hundreds of Tubu were massacred by Arab tribes in April 2012 in Sebha, some six hundred miles south of Tripoli. “They kill our men, our women, our children: it’s a genocide” lamented Jomode Ely Getty, spokesperson for the Tubu in France.³¹ Described as “one of the most ferocious struggles brought to light in post-Qadhafi’s Libya”³², such violent outbursts are sadly illustrative of the inability of the new authorities to restore security and settle inter-

²⁵ It is estimated that anywhere from 3,000 to 5,000 Sub-Saharan Africans are still in captivity.

²⁶ William Wheeler and Ayman Oghanna, “After Liberation, Nowhere to Run”, *The New York Times*, October 30, 2011 (Sunday Review p. 1).

²⁷ For an excellent introduction to Tuareg culture and history by a leading authority, see Helène Claudot-Hawad, *Touaregs: Apprivoiser le désert* (Paris: Découvertes Gallimard, 2002). See also her contributions to her edited volume, *Touaregs: Exil et Résistance* (Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 1990), pp. 9-48.

²⁸ Jean Chapelle, *Nomades Noirs du Sahara* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1982)

²⁹ Their enlistment in the Libyan army goes back to 1976, when in the wake of a Touareg-instigated failed coup in Niger, a number sought asylum in Libya; by 1980 hundreds from Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, referred to as *ishumar* (from the French *chomeur* for jobless) were receiving military training in Libyan camps. They were joined by another group after the Tchinn Tabarden uprising in Niger in 1990, which quickly spread to Mali, in turn triggering an extremely brutal repression in both states. See Claudot-Hawad, *Touaregs*, op. cit. p. 100 ff.

³⁰ See my chapter on Chad in my edited volume, *The Green and the Black: Qadhafi’s Policies in Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 106-124.

³¹ Christophe Ayad, “Sud libyen: combats meurtriers entre Toubou et Arabes”, *Le Monde*, April 2, 2012.

³² *Ibid.*

group conflicts. Much the same sort of violent confrontation has been reported from other parts of the Fezzan, notably in Kufra, where Tubu and Zawiya have been at daggers drawn, and where the latter have also been accused of genocide and ethnic cleansing. What is the explanation for this sudden resurgence of age-old conflicts, and, more to the point, for the rising tide of anti-black sentiment?

To invoke the lingering influence of the slave-trade is too facile. Although historic conflicts between the *nomades noirs* and the Arab tribes of the north are well documented – most notably between Tubu and Zawiya³³ -- and are probably a significant factor behind the continuing enmities in Sebha and Kufra, there are other forces at work, including the competition over the illicit trade across the Sahara. More generally, however, among the factors which help explain the plight of Sub-Saharan Africans, first and foremost is the last-ditch effort made by the Qadhafi loyalists to recruit a number of mercenaries from Sub-Saharan states. In addition to Tuareg elements from Niger and Mali, and a number of South-Africans, some three hundred were recruited in Chad with the blessings of President Idriss Deby, along with an undisclosed number in Mali.³⁴ Nor can one ignore the sense of resentment evoked by the Islamic Legion, essentially made up of black Africans, whose presence stood as a symbol of “black mischief”.

What has further contributed to tarnish the image of black Africans in the eyes of many Libyans is their realization that, beginning in 1998 with the diplomatic overture formalized through the creation in Tripoli of the *Communauté des Etats sahélo-sahariens* (Cen-Sad), a number of African leaders allowed themselves to be bought off by Qadhafi, and were widely perceived as indirectly responsible for diverting the country’s wealth into the wrong hands while enhancing the stature of the “King of kings”. In a culture where popular wisdom holds it that the friends of our enemies are our enemies (and the enemies of our enemies our friends) , it is easy to see why so many Sub-Saharan Africans became the victims of Qadhafi’s friendly overtures.

The Mess in Mali: The Libyan Connection

The destabilization of the Malian state, along with the break-away of the Tuareg-dominated north, will go down in history as the most disastrous of the unanticipated consequences of the international intervention on the side of the rebels (pace Bernard-Henri Levy).³⁵

Seen in retrospect, the circumstances that led to this astonishing turn of events are a commentary on the Tuaregs’ capacity for making rational choices in light of changing circumstances. As Libya began to totter on the brink, many realized that they would be the first to come in the cross-hairs of the rebel militias. Flight southward was the only sensible option. The presence of sizeable Tuareg communities in Niger and Mali served as a powerful pole of attraction, and the vast quantity of weapons they stole from

³³ See Chapelle, *Nomades Noirs*, p. 49 ff.

³⁴ Olivier Vallée, “Le dernier roi d’Afrique”, *Politique Africaine*, No. 125, March 2012, p. 164, 165.

³⁵ This point is argued at some length by Stephen Kinzer in “Libya and the Limits of Intervention”, *Current History*, Vol. 111, No. 748 (November 2012), p. 305 ff.

Qadhafi's arsenal, including highly sophisticated heat-seeking missiles, ensured their safe passage as well as the enthusiastic welcome of their secessionist kinsmen.

After crossing into Niger they traveled to Mali where they joined the ranks of the Tuareg independence movement – the *Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad* (MNLA) – and gave their full support to its ultimate goal: the creation of a secular state in the Azawad region of north Mali. This military windfall had immediate and profoundly adverse consequences for the Malian army desperately trying to hold its ground against the better equipped and determined desert warriors. The crunch came on March 22, 2012 when a group of disgruntled noncoms overthrew the government of the highly respected though somewhat inept Amadou Toure. Subsequent events quickly revealed the utter paralysis of the interim authorities in the face of the worsening crisis in the north, where discordant voices among Tuaregs raised fears of internal strife. Suddenly, all the ingredients of a perfect storm loomed on the Sahelian horizon.

This is not the place for a detailed discussion of one of the most complex crises anywhere in the continent, much less for an exegesis the several Islamic movements to which it has given birth.³⁶ Suffice it to note the irony behind the multifaceted backlash of the Libyan rebellion: neither the rebels nor their NATO allies expected the Tuaregs of Gadhafi's "black guard" to retool themselves into the spearhead of a major secessionist movement in northern Mali; but neither did the latter anticipate, after joining the Azawad movement, that their secularist-cum-secessionist ambitions would be high-jacked by Islamist firebrands, holding aloft the banner of the Sharia as they went about destroying centuries-old mosques.

The paradox goes even further. After assuming the highly un-Islamic posture of piggy-backing on the back of the MNLA, major divisions have emerged among the jihadist riders between the Ansar al-Din faction, led by Ayad Ag Ghaly, invoking the legitimacy of Wahabbist doctrine, and the Arab-dominated *Mouvement pour l'unicité du jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest* (Mujao), a faction of an even more radical bent. Both are said to be closely associated with the terrorist, Taliban-inspired Al Qaida in Islamic Maghreb (Aqmi). Just as Qadhafi's advent to power brought about a major reshuffling of the diplomatic cards in Sub-Saharan Africa, his demise may well usher in an even more turbulent era.

Libya, meanwhile, must come to grips with its own Burkean law of unanticipated consequences: deepening regional tensions, untamed militias, settling of scores between rebels and loyalists, Islamists and secularists, lingering hatreds among tribal communities who found themselves on opposite sides of the barricades – such are the more pressing issues facing the newly elected constituent assembly. That the electoral process, contrary to expectations, went on remarkably smoothly, is in itself a notable achievement. Whether it can live up to its constitutional mandate and in due course reconstruct a state system where none previously existed is as yet impossible to tell.

³⁶ The best coverage of the crisis in north Mali can be found in the series of reports written by Anna Mahjar Barducci for the Middle East Media Research Institute, especially "*MNLA: The Fight For A Secular State of Azawad*", MEMRI, Inquiry and Analysis Series Report No. 848, June 18, 2012.