

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION, TRIBES AND POLITICS IN GADDAFI'S LIBYA

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### Abstract

*Presently, Libya is undeniably one of the nations in the Middle East and North Africa where unresolved conflicts and instability continue to exist, as the consequences of the Arab Spring are becoming increasingly evident. A major factor contributing to this instability is the failure of the international system and regional/global actors to understand Libya's sociological and theological structure. Due to the lack of comprehensive research on the fundamental dynamics of Libya, its sociopolitical structure, tribes, and religious groups, it remains one of the most significant countries where stability has not been attained since 2011. The primary objective of this study is to establish a comprehensive framework for comprehending Libya, encompassing not only its contemporary problems but also its historical norms, social dynamics, and religious practices. The study explores the historical development of the region, intending to illuminate the present circumstances. The article examines the influence of religious beliefs and tribal systems within Libyan culture, emphasising the era preceding Gaddafi, the Gaddafi dictatorship, and the subsequent repercussions of his governance. This study indicates that addressing Libya's contemporary challenges through sociological and religious perspectives may offer new pathways for achieving stability*

**Keywords:** Libya, Gaddafi, Religion, Politics, Identity.

## KADDAFİ LİBYA'SINDA DİN, KABİLE VE SİYASET İLİŞKİSİ

### Öz

*Günümüzde Libya, Arap Baharı'nın sonuçları belirginleşmeye devam ederken, Orta Doğu ve Kuzey Afrika'da çözülmemiş çatışmaların ve istikrarsızlığın sürdüğü ülkelerden biridir. Bu olguya katkıda bulunan temel faktörlerden biri, uluslararası sistemin ve hâkim bölgesel/küresel oluşumların Libya'yı ve Libya'nın sosyolojik ve teolojik çerçevesini kavrayamamasıdır. Libya'nın temel dinamikleri, sosyolojik yapısı, aşiretleri ve dini gruplarına ilişkin kapsamlı araştırmaların eksikliği nedeniyle Libya, 2011 yılından bu yana istikrarın sağlanamadığı en önemli*

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*ülkelerden biri olmaya devam etmektedir. Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, Libya'yı anlamak için yalnızca güncel sorunlarını değil, aynı zamanda tarihsel normlarını, toplumsal dinamiklerini ve dini pratiklerini de kapsayan kapsamlı bir çerçeve oluşturmaktır. Çalışma, bölgenin tarihsel gelişimini inceleyerek mevcut koşullara ışık tutmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, Kaddafi'den önceki döneme, Kaddafi diktatörlüğüne ve onun yönetiminin sonraki yansımalarına vurgu yaparak Libya kültüründe dini inançların ve kabile sistemlerinin etkisini inceleyecektir. Bu çalışma, Libya'nın mevcut sorunlarının sosyolojik ve dini merceklerle ele alınmasının çözümlerini kolaylaştırabileceğini göstermektedir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Libya, Kaddafi, Din, Siyaset, Kimlik.

## Introduction

Despite its relatively small population of around seven million, Libya is home to over a hundred tribes, religious, and ethnic groups. The lack of research acknowledging the social structure of Libya and the analysis that have not delved beyond popular culture are the root causes of the unresolved crisis in the country for more than thirteen years. The primary objective of this study is to establish a comprehensive framework for analysing Libya, including its ancient traditions, social aspects, and religious beliefs, beyond the present conflicts and crises. This study aims to analyse the historical process to provide insight into the current landscape. It will explore the significance of religious beliefs and tribal sociology in Libya, focussing on the historical events preceding Gaddafi, the Gaddafi era, and its subsequent consequences. The objective is to identify the social groups that have been present in the country's history for centuries, analyse their contributions from the Ottoman Empire to the Gaddafi era, understand their significance for stability in the country, explore their roles in different historical periods, and assess their contributions to stability or conflict resolution.

This study suggests that examining Libya's present difficulties via sociological and religious perspectives could be useful in their resolution. The study, therefore, will employ the case study approach to examine Libya, focussing on different historical processes during the Gaddafi era. The research will include methodologies such as document and case analysis. To accomplish these goals, cause-effect correlations will be developed using descriptive methodologies, and various sources such as books, articles, internet resources, official papers, and reports will be employed. An analysis of the historical context in Libya, including the colonial era in the aftermath of Ottoman Empire's term, the Gaddafi coup, and the subsequent religious factions, as well as their influence on the country's politics and administration, will be provided to enhance comprehension of the study's nature and rationale. The article's primary research question examines the historical influence of religious organisations and various sociopolitical factors on Libyan politics. Consequently, an inquiry will be conducted to determine if the escalating

instability in Libya, stemming from the Arab Spring and the ousting of Gaddafi, can be addressed through contemporary roles as it was historically.

## **1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND COLONIAL INFLUENCE**

Due to its vast land size of almost 1.8 million km, strategic location on the Mediterranean coast, and historical role in hosting numerous civilisations, Libya is undeniably one of the most significant countries in North Africa and the countries adjacent to the Mediterranean Sea. Presently, Libya's population stands at seven million (Cordell, 2022), while its coastline stretches for almost 1770 kilometres to the Mediterranean Sea (Harris, 1986, pp. 45-60). The initial colonisers of Libya, which is today majority Amazigs and Arabs, with 97 percent of the population being Muslims, were Amazigs. It is believed that the term 'Libya' originates from the Amazig tribe known as 'Levata' (Önder, 2021, pp. 136-148). Given its significant geopolitical importance and its role as a busy transit route in the Eastern Mediterranean, this location has traditionally served as a host for numerous civilisations. Libya contains archaeological evidence of several nations and civilisations, including Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Byzantines, Abbasids, Mamluks, and the Ottoman Empire (Taşçı, 2023, pp. 45-60). Under Ottoman administration, Libya, which was acquired from the Spaniards in the mid-16th century by Captain Sinan Pasha, who was appointed by Suleiman the Magnificent in 1553, underwent the most stable periods of its history (Ceviz, 2011, pp. 80-90).

Post-conquest, the country, initially governed by the administration of Algeria and Tunisia of the Ottoman Empire, underwent a subsequent transformation into a distinct province. Subsequently, these regions were designated as 'Western Hearths', and among them, the Libyan Western Hearths have shown very strong allegiance to the Ottoman Empire (Şıvgın, 2006, pp. 55-70). The unique community structure of Libya, characterised by tribes, prompted the Ottomans to implement the 'Dayılık' (Uncleship) system, which was also put into practice in other regions of the Ottoman Empire, including Libya (Babacan, 2020, pp. 51-74). From 1551 to 1864, Tripolitania was governed by uncles who had some degree of independence. However, in 1711, Ahmet Pasha, in collaboration with the Arabs, transferred the administration to the Karamanid dynasty without involving the uncles. In the 19th century, similar to Algeria and Tunisia, the primary impetus of the uncles in Libya was the quest for independence from the United States of America. After 1835, the Karamanid dynasty governed the region until 1864, when Tripolitania was converted into a regular province under the rule of Istanbul. This transformation persisted until the Italian occupation in 1911 (Wright, 2022, pp. 45-60). Approximately 30 uncles are believed to have served in Libya until the Karamanid Dynasty's term.

While the Italian invasion of Libya occurred in 1911, Italy's ambitions for Libya could be traced back much earlier. Given that the Mediterranean is

considered the inland sea of Ancient Rome, Italy places significant historical value on the region and Libya. The 1878 Berlin Conference serves as an illustrative instance of this phenomenon. During this meeting focused on Africa, Italy articulated its aspirations for conquest in Libya (Munene, 1990, pp. 73-79). While the Treaty of Ushi, signed at the end of the Tripoli War, officially designated the area as Ottoman territory, Libya was practically ceded to Italy and thereafter brought under complete occupation (Toprak, 2012, pp. 223-237).

Subsequent to the escalating violence and ruthless actions under the Italian fascist dictator Mussolini, Omar Mukhtar, a prominent figure in the Libyan resistance, was executed in 1931. In years that followed, Libya and its people were subjected to the brutal processes of Italianisation (Lobban & Dalton, 2014, pp. 89-105). Following the execution of Omar Mukhtar, Libya was formally established as an Italian colony until 1943, and subsequent to the Second World War, it was assigned to France and Britain due to Italy's non-participation in the conflict (Paoletti, 2011, pp. 313-319). In addition to these changes, the aspiration for freedom in Libya progressively intensified within society, leading to the emergence of independence movements. In this environment, multiple agreements were established with Britain and France, and the country's independence process, to be proclaimed in 1951 under the leadership of Sayyid Idris Senusi, effectively commenced. Idris Senusi, the leader of the Emirate of Berka, one of Libya's three historical territories, ascended to the throne as King of Libya, with the United Nations recognising the country's independence on 27 November 1951.<sup>1</sup>

On 24 December 1951, Libya proclaimed its independence, becoming the first independent nation in North Africa (Khadduri, 1963, pp. 45-60). The process that emerged under King Idris Senussi's reign following Omar Mukhtar is crucial for comprehending the impact of religious beliefs on political objectives in Libya. Senussiism, established by Sayyid Muhammad bin Ali al-Senussi, the grandson of Prophet Hasan, is an Islamic sect. Sayyid Muhammad bin Ali al-Senussi, born in the late 18th century, championed the union of the Islamic world in response to Christian incursions and assaults on Muslim communities. He formulated a discourse focused on the fraternity of the tribes and ethnic groups in the region, successfully disseminating this ideology from Egypt to Sudan, and from Algeria to Senegal and Gambia. The Senussis disseminated Islam throughout the interior of Africa while also waging a colonial resistance against the British and the French. This conflict, initiated against the French under the leadership of Sayyid Ahmed al-Sharif Senusi, the third leader of the order, persisted via military, political, and cultural resistance against the Italian occupation. In this scenario, the Senussis,

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<sup>1</sup> Berka is one of the three main historical regions of Libya, along with Tripoli and Fezzan. The system of electing representatives of these regions in the country through the UN in 1949 came to an end in 1951 when Idris declared himself king. (Abdulnem Ali Alriteemi. "Sosyal, siyasi ve Ekonomik Yönüyle Libya. (1951-1969)." Doktora Tezi., 2021).

who formed an alliance with the Germans in 1915, prevented Italy from advancing beyond the coastal strip. In 1951, under the leadership of Idris al-Senussi, who would later ascend to the throne as King of Libya, the Senussi contributed significantly to Libya's independence movement (Turan & Turan, 2011, pp. 190-206).

In alignment with their fundamental doctrines and the principles central to their battle, the Senussis governed Libya through a federative tribal confederation, which they upheld alongside the new administration that achieved independence under the monarchy. In Libya, which was very impoverished at the time, major advancements occurred concurrently with the discovery of oil reserves in 1959. The UK and the USA perceived Libya's economic deficiencies as an opportunity and commenced backing in exchange for different concessions after the discovery of oil. The UK received naval and aviation bases, while the US committed to supporting Libya in exchange for many port concessions, resulting in a noticeable British and American influence on Libyan foreign policy (Ahmida, 2012, pp. 70-81).

The repercussions of the Free Officers Movement, whose philosophical roots were established in Egypt in 1952, subsequently impacted Libya. Libya was one of the nations where the regional ideological impacts of this movement, characterised primarily by Arab Nationalism and prominently associated with Gamal Abd al-Nasser, were evident (Murat, 2012, pp. 55-72). In 1963, a comparable secret group was formed under the guidance of Muammar Gaddafi and three associates, with the objective of executing a bloodless coup to depose King Idris in 1969 (Düzsöz, 2018, pp. 295-330). During the six years preceding the coup, this Gaddafi-led institution was extremely organised (Cantürk & Şengül, 2018, pp. 45-70).

Nasser's increasing prominence, particularly in the Arab world, significantly impacted Gaddafi and his associates, with the ideological underpinnings of the 1969 coup against King Idris being rooted in anti-imperialism and anti-Semitism (Bearman, 1986, pp. 29-45). Gaddafi, influenced by Arab socialism, executed the coup, abolished the monarchy, and eventually proclaimed the foundation of the Libyan Socialist Arab Republic.

## **2. LIBYA DURING GADDAFI'S REGIME: CONSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE AND THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN GOVERNANCE**

Following Gaddafi's coup against King Idris, Libya saw a regime transition in 1969, leading to the declaration of a republic. The 'Jamahiriya' rule was instituted in 1977, and in 1986, the term 'Great' was appended to the name, resulting in the designation of the Great Libyan Socialist People's Jamahiriya. This designation persisted in official usage until the anti-Gaddafi insurrections in 2011. As a socialist leader, Gaddafi tried to establish a governance structure in Libya that emphasised the representation of all societal groups with the publication of the Revolutionary Command Council

members' names in the official gazette in 1970.<sup>2</sup> Gaddafi's initiatives resulted in the formation of an organisational model in Libya that encompassed many elements of the people, akin to the Ottoman-era system of uncleship. The Revolutionary Command Council, under Gaddafi's leadership, initially relocated the capital from Benghazi to Tripoli, expropriated foreign-owned estates, particularly those belonging to Italians, and returned foreigners, notably Italians, residing in Libya. Libya's oil reserves, discovered during King Idris's reign, significantly influenced economic policies during the Gaddafi era, resulting in a near tripling of the Libyan economy's GDP between 1970 and 1974, with per capita income reaching eleven thousand dollars (Totman & Hardy, 2015, pp. 1-6).

Alongside economic advancements, Gaddafi endeavoured to safeguard the nation's religious beliefs, cultural heritage, and traditions, instituting a prohibition on alcohol through legislation aligned with Sharia law in Libya. He proclaimed Arabic as Libya's national language and promoted the adoption of traditional attire. Gaddafi, who asserted the provision of 'popular power' administratively, vehemently condemned the contemporary democratic system and parliamentary governance, characterising the parliament—deemed essential for modern democratic frameworks—as a 'fraud' in his renowned Green Book (Kaddafi, 1980).

Gaddafi contended that the parliamentary system obstructed popular sovereignty and exacerbated societal divisions by class. He advocated for the concept of 'People's Congresses,' which incorporated members from all societal sectors and diverse religious and ethnic groups. In this annually convened system, Gaddafi anticipated the emergence of popular power and articulated his conviction in this notion, which he asserted had not been actualised historically, particularly due to the imperialist and colonialist tendencies of the West. Gaddafi attributed Arab backwardness in the post-Ottoman era to Western influence and monarchy, asserting that the unification of all Arabic-speaking peoples under a singular Arab State -his ideological 'Red Apple'- could be realised through the popular power he 'established' in Libya (Kaddafi, 1980). The manifestations of this philosophy in the area were evident in practical terms starting around 1970. Gaddafi, who terminated the operations of foreign military facilities (British and American) in Libya, founded the Islamic Dawah Society and endeavoured to impede the proliferation of Christianity over the African continent. Subsequently, he initiated the nationalisation of Libya's oil wealth and sought to unify with Egypt, Syria, Tunisia, and Maghreb nations as an embodiment of his vision for a vast, singular Arab State. It depicted capitalism and communism as two ideologies yielding indistinguishable outcomes and embraced Arab socialism, the foundation of its ideology, as a remedy for nations caught between these two poles (Cantürk & Şengül, 2018, pp. 45-70).

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<sup>2</sup> *The Council was composed of seven major and five captains. (Blundy and Lycett, 1987).*

Gaddafi prioritised the Palestinian issue, a contentious matter for the Muslim world, within his country's foreign policy and ideology. He urged several nations on the continent to sever diplomatic ties with Israel; however, he subsequently acquired a negative international reputation when certain Arab nations alleged that Gaddafi supported radical groups within their borders (Doğan & Durgun, 2012, ss. 61-90). Despite the favourable economic advancements from 1970 to 1974 and the enhancement of Libya's prosperity, a negative perception persisted, prompting Gaddafi to initiate significant political reforms after the unsuccessful coup attempt against him in 1975. In 1977, Gaddafi, attempting to unify Libyan society through Islamic principles, proclaimed a ten-point proclamation focused on 'popular sovereignty', designated Libya as a socialist people's republic, and established the Holy Quran as the nation's constitution.

In November 1977, the second part of the Green Book was issued, establishing socialism as the foundation of economic policies (Kaddafi, 1980, pp. 38-45). Gaddafi characterised property and wage employment as embodiments of a contemporary interpretation of slavery and put out suggestions to address the fundamental needs of the populace (Kaddafi, 1980, pp. 45-48). In the Green Book, the third section of which he finalised in 1979, Gaddafi underscored the significance of the family as a fundamental aspect of the Islamic faith, characterising the family as a construct that precedes both the individual and the state, with tribes constituting one of the essential components of a nation (Kaddafi, 1980, p. 71).

The influence of the Green Book, which elaborated on these ideological concepts, on Libyan society progressively intensified over the 1980s. While Gaddafi effectively conveyed his perspective on domestic politics, he began to lose credibility in foreign policy. Gaddafi, who emerged with the ideals and rhetoric of unity against imperialism following his coup against King Idris, endeavoured to construct a forceful foreign policy narrative concerning other nations within his territory and geography. This has prompted him to intervene in the domestic affairs and military conflicts of other nations (Çıldır, 1969, pp. 55-57). The conclusion of the Cold War and the subsequent dissolution of the USSR marked a pivotal moment for Gaddafi and Libya. Gaddafi, who had centred the rhetoric of Muslim unity 'against imperialism' in his domestic and foreign policy from the coup against King Idris until the 1990s, began to confront the reality that his increasingly contentious regime was being targeted by the international community and certain Muslim nations (Sturman, 2003, pp. 109-112).

Notwithstanding this, Gaddafi, who did not hesitate to meddle in the internal affairs of regional and Western nations, was accused by Tunisia of supplying arms to the opposition, while he also resorted to violent measures to suppress demonstrations in London following the unsuccessful integration of Syria and Libya (Joffe & Paoletti, 2010, pp. 12-30). Likewise, his disputes with Chad, the bombing of a French Air France aircraft aiding Chad

(Richburg, 2004), the deployment of troops to Chad despite his denials, and his endorsement of the Red Army and the IRA in reaction to the UK following diplomatic crises led Gaddafi to adopt a more aggressive stance in his rhetoric and policies, ultimately resulting in his isolation (English, 2013, pp. 496-511). The tumultuous relations with both Western nations and regional Muslim countries following the dissolution of the USSR placed Gaddafi and Libya under scrutiny by the UN Security Council, which accused them of endorsing terrorism (Collins, 2004, pp. 1-18), while certain Muslim nations adhered to UN resolutions, contrary to Gaddafi's anticipations (Ulutaş et al. 2011, pp. 12-30). This sequence of events led to Gaddafi's substitution of Islam-focused rhetoric with a more Africa-oriented one (Morais & Naidu, 2002, pp. 109-118). Gaddafi, who proposed the concept of a 'United States of Africa' to unify all African nations under a singular administration, concentrated on enhancing relations with Sub-Saharan countries during this time and offered economic aid to impoverished nations on the continent (Ramutsindela, 2009, pp. 1-3).

### **3. GOVERNANCE, COMMUNITY, AND MINORITY GROUPS IN GADDAFI'S LIBYA**

Gaddafi, a prominent critic of the contemporary system, deemed the modern order excessively oppressive regarding education, advocated for a global cultural revolution, and proposed the liberalisation of education in this context. In the Green Book, he asserts that individuals should possess the autonomy to determine their preferred kind of education, which should be conducted in their native language and encompass their religious teachings. Similarly, Gaddafi asserts that the fine arts, along to religion and language, reflect the national character of a country (Kaddafi, 1980, pp. 89-90).

The concept of popular power, foundational to the ideological tenets of the Gaddafi regime, has transcended mere discourse and has also infiltrated societal structures in actual administrative terms. A successful system of representation existed until Gaddafi's more repressive regime. The 1951 Libyan constitution, enacted under King Idris, is unexpectedly more compatible with contemporary governance than anticipated for a nation recently freed from colonial domination. Prior to Gaddafi's regime, a tribal-based, federal monarchy was established in Tripolitania, Fezzan, and Cyrenaica. During King Idris's rule in Libya, where Benghazi and Tripolitania alternately functioned as the capital, the majority of the populace had either semi-nomadic or totally nomadic lifestyles. In accordance with the 1951 constitution, the monarchical system mandated that monarchy be inherited within the Senussi family, while legislative functions were executed by a bicameral parliament including the Senate and the House of Representatives. In this environment, the parliament, endowed with extensive powers, possessed the capacity to install a new monarch in the absence of a royal heir. This senate, intended to function for eight years, comprised twenty-four



senators directly appointed by the king. The House of Representatives served four-year terms, with one representative elected for every twenty thousand voters. Consequently, the House of Representatives, the primary executive body of the legislature, persisted in its legislative functions concurrently with the Senate.

The 1951 Constitution delineated the executive branch, led by the King and consisting of the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers. The constitution forbade royal family members from holding the position of prime minister, granted the prime minister the authority to choose ministers, and mandated that the country's rulers be Libyan nationals. During the Gaddafi era, Arabic was designated as the official language of the country, and the constitutional rights of non-Muslim groups and tribes were assured, albeit indirectly referenced (Cantürk & Şengül, 2018, pp. 45-70).

The Gaddafi era, conversely, fostered a distinct administrative comprehension inside a systemic framework, considering the ideological disparities already addressed in this study. The various political discourses articulated by Gaddafi, as referenced in this study, fluctuate in alignment with shifts in domestic and foreign policy, occasionally reflecting religious rhetoric and at other times embodying a pan-Africanist discourse. Gaddafi, whose parliamentary system is regarded in this analysis as an embodiment of the contemporary, Western-centric model, endeavoured to establish a new system in Libya under the auspices of the 'People Power' rhetoric. Gaddafi, who first saw tribes as a vital component of society, subsequently dismantled the longstanding local tribal associations to consolidate central authority and establish a centralised administrative framework. The primary objective of this initiative was to cultivate a cadre of loyalists to him and the regime following the unsuccessful coup attempt in 1975. Regrettably, this process, during which the nation's economic conditions generally improved, compelled Gaddafi to implement more severe measures in response to the opposition he began to encounter both domestically and internationally.

In 1977, he intensified his stance against the opposition by targeting opposition groups, resulting in a full transformation of the parliamentary system, culminating in the issuance of the statement on 2 March 1977 to safeguard popular sovereignty, as referenced in the initial section of this study. This renowned statement introduced the appellation of Libya's Jamahiriya and established its constitution as Islamic Sharia, with congresses, committees, and trade unions as the principal components to guarantee public sovereignty. In this newly integrated legislative framework, all units were permitted to establish the dates of their meetings and their internal regulations. Despite being the lowest legislative organs within the hierarchical structure formed by

local governments,<sup>3</sup> the congresses were the most numerous and active entities (Cantürk & Şengül, 2018, pp. 45-70).

The fundamental requirement for the people's congresses, which formed the foundation of legislative authority, was citizenship and an age of at least 18 years. Above the people's congresses, where all citizens meeting this criterion were regarded as natural members, were the people's committees. The committees, composed of individuals elected by the congress members, served as the executive representatives of the congresses. It is believed that these annual congresses established approximately six hundred committees from their inception until the fall of the Gaddafi dictatorship. The committees consisted of twenty members who nominated a general secretary. The General People's Committees were the foundation of the country's executive organisation, with Muammar Gaddafi serving as the head under the title of Secretary General. These committees formed the executive branch of the state, empowered for provisional law-making. The preeminent legislative authority was the Great People's Congress, established to supplant the disbanded parliament one year subsequent to the unsuccessful coup orchestrated by the opposition against Gaddafi in 1975. This assembly, consisting of 2700 members, was chosen through popular vote by qualified Libyan people for a three-year term and convened annually. Given that the fundamental prerequisite in Libya for legislative, executive, and administrative affairs is to be a Libyan citizen aged eighteen or older, Gaddafi's perspective on minorities within this societal framework merits further examination. Gaddafi posits that the concept of minority is categorised according to third world beliefs (Kaddafi, 1980, p. 86).

He posits that two categories of minorities can be delineated. The first group comprises minorities that are part of a nation, with their social milieu shaped by their national affiliation. The second group consists of minorities who do not belong to the nation in which they reside and who independently create their own social environment. Gaddafi asserts that addressing minorities politically is an unhealthy strategy, irrespective of their classification, and will exacerbate rather than resolve existing issues. According to Gaddafi, the issues faced by minorities in a nation can be addressed within the norms and traditions of their own social groups. Given that Libya is a tribal society with 25-30 of the about 140 recognised tribes actively engaged, it is essential to acknowledge the minorities inside the nation (Hatitah, 2013).

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<sup>3</sup> *Libyan local governments have a three-tier organisation from the bottom to the top. At the lowest level, there are units such as Amanah, Baladiyah, Hai, Manallah, Qarya, Sheyah. The second level includes Mintaqah, Qaada, Nahiyah, Markaz, Mutamadiyah, Daerah and Liwa. At the top level, there are Muhafazah, Wilayah, Mintaqah, Mudiriyah, Imarah and Baladiyah. Some of these buildings are still in existence and some of them have been removed. Please see: <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/507937>*

This study cannot encompass tribal sociology, which need independent research; however, it is essential to acknowledge the names of several mainstream groups and their historical presence in the country. Prior to Muammar Gaddafi's rebellion, the Gaddafi tribe was relatively obscure and diminutive; however, it later on assumed a significant position in the governance of the country following the 1969 coup. The impact of tribes and minority groups on Libyan politics, rooted in history and persisting to the present, is undeniable. The Gaddafi tribe, bearing the same name, was notably influential from 1969 until the anti-regime riots in 2011. This tribe, centred on the city of Sirte in Libya, though relatively small, has engaged in significant governmental affairs and undertaken sensitive responsibilities during the Gaddafi era. The Megarha tribe, a significant supporter of the Gaddafi administration, is centred in Sebha. Abdulbasit al-Megarhi, who executed the Lockerbie bombing on Gaddafi's directives, is a member of this tribe. The Warfalla tribe is significant, possessing the greatest population in Libya and comprising almost 15 percent of the nation's total population. The primary hub is the Beni Walid region, located south of Tripolitania, with members dispersed from the extreme west to the eastern part of the country, reaching as far as Benghazi. The 1993 coup attempt against Gaddafi, following the dissolution of the USSR, was attributed to this tribe, which Gaddafi characterised as a betrayal of his own tribe. To maintain his links with the Warfalla, Gaddafi surrendered two captive tribesmen, who were in the aftermath murdered by his own tribe, thereby safeguarding his affiliations with both his tribe and the Warfalla. The fourth significant tribe is the Tarhune tribe. The tribe, which exhibits strong loyalty to Gaddafi, gained increased prominence after the coup attempt by two Warfalla members. Although Gaddafi maintained his links with Warfalla, he began to delegate increasingly significant responsibilities to members of the Tarhune tribe. This tribe, situated in southern Tripolitania, has gained significance due to its strategic position in countering potential assaults on Gaddafi and has taken on a deterrent function against any incursions on the regime from the south of Tripolitania (Hatitah, 2013).

Furthermore, the Beni Salim tribe, situated in Cyrenaica and believed to have migrated to Libya from the Arabian Peninsula, along with the Beni Hilal tribes found in the western region of Tripolitania, represent two significant groups of Arab descent. Among the notable and impactful tribes in Cyrenaica are the Kargala, Tawajeer, and Ramla tribes. While approximately fifteen percent of Libya's total population is not classified as having tribal origins, it is believed that these individuals may trace their ancestry back to Amazigh, Turkish, and various other ethnic backgrounds. As we progress eastward across the nation, the Misrata tribe, recognised as one of Libya's largest and most significant tribes, plays a crucial role in the current active conflicts. The tribe, deriving its name from the city of Misrata located in northwestern Libya, exhibits considerable activity in the urban centres of Benghazi and Derne as well.

The inhabitants of this region are categorised into two distinct factions. The underlying cause of this situation, persisting for approximately fifty to sixty years, lies in the decisions made by the tribe's members concerning their adherence to traditional versus modern lifestyles. In addition to the two distinct tribal schools in Misrata, which encompass individuals adhering to the traditional tribal system and those who have diverged from this tradition by establishing themselves in rural areas, the presence of Bedouins in the region is also noteworthy. Among these, groups such as the Al-Mahjup, the Zamura family, the Kawafi tribe, the Dababis tribe, the Zawaiya tribe, and the Sawalih tribe have distanced themselves from traditional Bedouin tribal life. The Kwar tribe, originating from Arab lineage, derives its name from the Kouar region and, as indicated by certain studies, encompasses a total of fifteen larger and smaller tribes. Furthermore, the Al Awaqir tribe in Cyrenaica stands out as a significant entity in Libyan politics. This tribe was instrumental in the resistance against Italian colonialism, both prior to the era of King Idris and throughout the tenure of Muammar Gaddafi. In the period of Gaddafi's rule, individuals from the Al Awaqir tribe, known for their loyalty to the regime, occupied significant roles, including those within the cabinet. The Abdiye tribe, recognised as one of the most formidable tribes in Cyrenaica, is a collective formed through the amalgamation of numerous tribes, exerting significant influence in and around Tobruk. The Mesamir tribe, recognised for its profound religious sensitivities surrounding Tobruk, has also been pivotal in the resistance against Italy. Alongside the tribes previously examined in this study, one must also consider the Zawiye tribe located in Tripoli. Tripoli, while hosting a diverse array of tribes, predominantly features a population that is largely affiliated with the Misrata tribe. The Muntasir, Suni, Qadi, and al-Bashti families stand out as the most prominent members of the Misrata tribe (Hatitah, 2013).

#### **4. LIBYA'S 'OTHERS'**

The 2011 uprisings and the subsequent events leading to Gaddafi's demise represented a pivotal moment for communities and tribes that had long been politically and sociologically marginalised, perceiving it as a chance for empowerment. Libya's minority groups, including the Amazighs, the Tawariks—an influential subset of the Amazighs—and the Tebus, who perceived a lack of adequate representation in the state and society during the Gaddafi regime, sought to engage more actively in the subsequent era. In July 2013, the Amazighs, Tawariks, and Tebulars contended that their representation in the 60-member panel tasked with drafting the new constitution was inadequate, asserting that the two seats designated for them were insufficient. Subsequently, the Amazighs staged a large demonstration in Tripoli, while the Tawariks specifically demonstrated against the official acknowledgement of their language and the unauthorised dissemination of their identifying information by violently shutting down an oil field near

Ubari. Consequently, the ideological initiative aimed at unifying Arabs and eradicating 'ethnic distinctions and tribal origins' within the nation, which was addressed at an elevated level during the Gaddafi era, proved insufficient to obliterate the Amazighs, as well as the prominent Tawariks and Tebu groups, from the historical narrative (Kohl, 2014, pp. 423-438). In the third chapter of the Green Book, Gaddafi characterises these minorities as nations whose nationalism has been obliterated (Qadhdhafi, 1981, ss. 29-45).

Confronted with the collapse of the Gaddafi regime, these minority groups envisioned a new Libya that acknowledged their ethnic needs, rather than a system that subsumed them under a super-Arab identity. This is due to the fact that the Amazigh are an indigenous population that inhabited North Africa prior to the Arab settlement. Currently, it is estimated that between 10 and 25 percent of Libya's population is of Amazigh descent (Maddy-Weitzmann, 2012, p. 139). The Amazigh people of the Cebel Nafusa region, also known as the Western Mountains in Turkish, are categorised as a religious minority. A few of them are Kharijites, while a majority are Maliki Muslims (Maddy-Weitzmann, 2012, p. 139).

The Amazigh include the Tawariks residing in Gath, Ubari, and Gadames. The Tawariks in Libya are fundamentally categorised into two classes. The first group consists of individuals who once resided along the Libyan-Algerian border, while the second group comprises migrants from Niger and Mali. The second group, Tawariks of Niger and Mali descent, who were assimilated into the Libyan army under the Gaddafi regime, particularly in the 1980s, fought alongside Gaddafi following the uprisings in 2011. Amazighs and Tawariks, while part of the same linguistic family, identify as distinct communities with separate ethnic backgrounds. The term 'Amazigh' is presently employed to politically designate both groups, and occasionally the Tebus as well (Maddy-Weitzmann, 2012, p. 139).

## **5. RELIGIOUS GROUPS, FIGURES AND CONFLICTS IN LIBYA**

In addition to tribes, religious groupings and movements have also constituted a significant sociological reality in Libya's historical development. The initial group is the Salafis. The two distinct intellectual pioneers of the Salafism movement, whose impact is evident in Libya through two primary currents, are the Egyptian Muhammad Abduh and Cemaleddin Afgani. Rashid Rida, born subsequent to Afghani, embraced a distinct goal throughout the contemporary era, employing a more activist methodology, in contrast to the proliferation of Salafism and other Salafi movements. Rida was the instructor of Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. This faction, representing the more passive segment of the Salafis, referred to as the Makdali Salafis, primarily acquired their education in Saudi Arabia under the Gaddafi regime. This faction of Salafis adhered to a more apolitical stance and maintained this attitude until the Gulf War. The Gulf War caused a schism within this organisation. Founded in 1991 by Ethiopian Mohammed Aman al-

Jami, its disciples primarily studied under Ibn Hadi al-Makhdali in Saudi Arabia before returning to Libya. The group, under al-Jami's leadership, sustained close ties with Saudi Arabia subsequently. This group, which cultivated close ties with Gaddafi, counselled its members to refrain from venturing into the streets and to abstain from participating in anti-Gaddafi rallies in 2011. The Jihadist Salafis, another significant Salafi faction, was established in 1990 along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border by those exiled by Gaddafi. The Salafist factions have focused on sects in Tripoli, Rajma, Sebha, and Misrata, orchestrating assaults on their temples subsequent to the 2011 upheavals. In 2014, the tombs of the Companions in Daraa were bombed and obliterated by militant Salafists affiliated with al-Qaeda (Kakar & Langhi, 2017).

In 2014, the Makdali Salafis allied with various factions in the Libyan crisis. Alongside the Makdali Salafis who engaged in the 'Operation Dignity' orchestrated by warlord Khalifa Haftar against Daesh terror group (al-Iraq al-Islamiy al-Iraq wa al-Sham) to fortify his standing with the West, there were also participants in the Libyan Dawn Operations supporting the Tripoli government. In addition to the Salafis, other religious organisations identified in Libya include Takfiris and the Muslim Brotherhood (Kakar & Langhi, 2017).

## **6. FROM GADDAFI TO THE PRESENT: RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS IN LIBYA**

One of the significant measures Gaddafi undertook for his own benefit following the 1969 coup was his endeavour to eradicate the Senussi order. To diminish the power of the Senussi ulema, he centralised authority of the Zawiyas under his administration and prohibited the establishment of new Zawiyas (Anderson, 1981, pp. 1-15). Conversely, throughout the initial years of his reign, he refrained from altering the Awqaf institutions and sought to utilise them to bolster his authority and influence (Wehrey, 2021).

Conversely, he utilised the Awqaf to diminish the Senussi influence, and in 1971, legislation was enacted to consolidate all Awqaf institutions under a single centralised authority (Bleuchot, 1978, p. 397). In 1972, legislation like to the Syrian and Egyptian model was implemented to regulate the authorities of the Awqaf institutions, and by 1973, Gaddafi's endeavours to integrate Islam into the cultural revolution became increasingly evident. In 1977, Gaddafi's policies intensified when Libya was rebranded as the Socialist Jamahiriya, and the dictatorship commenced to assert control over religious beliefs and organisations (Pargeter, 2008, pp. 83-102). By the 1980s, the Gaddafi administration had expropriated the earnings of the Awqaf, and the majority of properties belonging to the Awqaf institutions in various cities were allocated to tribes allied with Gaddafi (Ibrahim, 2017, pp. 135-156).

During the 1990s and 2000s, the Awqafs became increasingly active, managed by clerics responsible for praising and reinforcing the Gaddafi

dictatorship (Ibrahim, 2017, pp. 135-156). During this period, the individuals designated as imams in mosques were selected by the administrators of these institutions, and the theological influence of the Maqдали Salafis proliferated, as desired by Gaddafi (Ibrahim, 2017, pp. 135-156). The Maqдали Salafis, who strengthened their power spiritually, politically, and militarily until Gaddafi's overthrow, effectively disseminated the political ideas of the Gaddafi era under the guise of religious motivations to the people (Al-Aswad, 2020).

Following the ouster of the Gaddafi regime, minor rivalries emerged among the Maqдали Salafists, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Sufi movements regarding influence. However, in the subsequent period, alongside the political instability and conflict within Libya, the competition for religious authority began to evolve in a different direction. Established in 2011, Dar al-Ifta, led by the current Grand Mufti of Libya, Sadiq al-Gharyani, has persisted in its existence, remaining in dispute with the Ministry of Awqaf. The primary cause of this difficulty is that Dar al-Ifta operates under the legitimate government in Tripoli, whilst the Ministry of Awqaf is aligned with the Haftar-supporting parallel organisation in the East (Al-Aswad, 2020).

In 2012, the government led by Abdurrahman al-Kib selected Hamza Abu Faris, an imam hostile to Gaddafi, as the Minister of Awqaf, a decision that unsettled Saudi Arabia, which sought to exert its religious influence in Libya via the Maqдали Salafis. The Riyadh administration began to express concern on the potential resurgence of the Muslim Brotherhood's influence (Wehrey, 2021). In the following process, Egypt and other participants, spearheaded by Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who engaged in the Libyan context in support of Haftar due to analogous concerns, emphasise the significance of religion and religion-focused movements in Libya's political destiny.

## **Conclusion**

Religion has significantly influenced Libya's political landscape throughout its history, from the independence movement to the reigns of King Idris and Gaddafi, as well as during the 2011 revolution and its subsequent developments. Islam served as the primary impetus that galvanised the Senussis against colonialism, unifying the Libyan populace in the struggle for national freedom. In the lead-up to the 1969 coup d'état, as socialism was perceived to jeopardise religious values, Gaddafi embarked on a path towards Arab nationalism, strategically employing religion in both domestic and foreign policy to fortify his rule. In a tribal community such as Libya, religion has consistently served as the primary unifying force, despite its use by various individuals for political purposes.

A primary impediment to the acceptance of Khalifa Haftar, who has garnered Western backing in Libya in recent years by highlighting his secular identity and alleged fight against the DAESH terrorist organisation, is undeniably rooted in religious connotations. In the fight against colonialism, the monarchy, the Gaddafi coup and its repercussions, the 2011 protests, and

the following political developments, religious groups, their beliefs, and the associated tribes played a significant role. Comprehending the social realities of Libya necessitates an awareness of this context for both international stakeholders and regional nations.

Despite Western sources' subjective attempts to compare Ottoman governance in Libya with Italian occupation and colonialism, King Idris's request for cooperation from the Republic of Türkiye while appointing the Prime Minister of the Emirate of Berka underscores the fallacy of this comparison. Likewise, when Libya endeavoured to construct a political framework decades after Italian occupation, the emergence of groups promoting annexation to Türkiye and the communication of these demands from Libya to Türkiye emphasises the significance of religious unity in Libya. Gaddafi's frequent religious references and the centrality of religious belief in the social structure during the 1970s in the nation he proclaimed as the Socialist Arab Republic serve as further evidence. Libya serves as a significant illustration among several instances that unequivocally showcase the influence of societal religious beliefs on politics, irrespective of the governing regimes and structures.

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