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Research Paper

**The Political Aspects of the Tribal Phenomenon in Arab Societies:
A Sociological Approach to the Tunisian and Libyan Revolutions**

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Summary and methodological preface

A. The problematic

Amid the Arab revolutions that have broken out since early 2011, several countries have produced events motivated by tribal tendencies, which has confused analysts and affected both the political dynamics and the natures of the ongoing conflicts. However, the extent of tribal factor has varied from one society to the next, depending on the nature of the historic relationship between the regime and social structures.

Despite this variation the eminence of traditional structures, especially tribal ones, continued to hamper the birth of the components of civil society in these countries, slowing their development and performance. Despite the differing courses of their revolutions, the Libyan and Tunisian models represent expressive instances of the phenomenon of “the return of the tribe” to the field of political and societal action in the Arab region.

In Libya, the insurgency against the regime, and the alignments for or against the revolution, took a collective character, with each side, especially the regime, attempting to exploit these circumstances in light of all the plans, schemes, and programs to draw the Libyan tribal map over more than 42 years.

In Tunisia however, the active structures of the tribe had undergone a veritable process of dismemberment during the drama of modernization; nonetheless, the tribe in Tunisia has maintained – as has become clear during the current process of political and social liberation – a legacy of psychological and symbolic dimensions, leading to the outbreak of protests and social outbursts in some regions, especially those where real assimilation was not deepened.

The potential of the flaring of instances of “Wars of Throne” was increased by the dealings of the former regime and its affiliated organizations with the remnants of these traditional structures and their “representatives” with a secrecy that was not devoid of a pragmatic tendency, which reached the level of contradiction with the declared ideology of the regime – that of modernity and modernization.

B. Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to examine the political dimensions of the tribal phenomenon in contemporary Arab societies following the wave of popular revolts that swept much of the region and began to oust political regimes that had controlled the course of political life for several decades. It also aims to identify the mechanisms governing the relationship between the state with society, numerous aspects of which have remained unclear or even unknown to outside scholars.

This study aims to apply the scientific method, embedded in a sociological approach, to this question, which often has been overlooked by researchers, especially in the countries of the Arab

Maghreb, where many students have long believed that their traditional societies had been transformed into ones of citizenship is dominated by new identities that are supposed to have achieved social and political integration.

These gaps in the literature and the attendant negligence of significant topics highlight the risks of analyses based on generalizations, and therefore the importance of revising such generalizations and hasty judgments that were made in a context that was neither nor free. Understanding the processes by which these societies have evolved, and the mechanisms that affected this process, is an indispensable prerequisite for any investigation of the means required to build new democratic establishments.

C. Research methodology

The dichotomy of “rupture and continuity” seems a suitable methodological tool to study the political dimensions of tribal phenomena in contemporary Arab societies. It involves an acknowledgment of the occurrence of real changes in the structures of social and political relations while at the same time being aware of the continuity of some elements belonging to an older, “traditional” historical space, and their continuing influence over the present in one manner or another. A key question, therefore, is how to explain the tribal upsurge that has manifested itself in many of the events and tensions related to the Arab revolutions despite the far-reaching changes taking place in the structure of social and political thought and action: is tribalism an ethos that still colors many individual and collective practices?

In collecting and analyzing the material for this research, I have relied on a number of techniques and tools, mainly media outlets and material published on the Internet, as well as my own field knowledge resulting from contacts and interviews with various actors in southern Tunisia. I have adopted the methodology of analyzing the content of media information and political texts, with a focus on comparing certain models with actual events, while also taking into account historical texts that relate, in one way or another, to explanations of the tribal phenomenon and its effects in the modern and contemporary eras. I have also used direct interviews and focus groups during visits to the border regions, especially with some influential social actors. I have gathered the statistical material, organized it, and classified it in order to use it for comparisons.

Introduction

In the midst of the events that came to be known as “the Arab Spring”, which was characterized by the outbreak of revolutions that appeared to be qualitative and promising, new terms, vocabularies and slogans emerged that were surprising to some and bizarre, or even offensive, to others. Among the epithets ascribed to days of particularly ambitious protest (frequently taking place following Friday prayers) around the region, some were notable for their content, such as “the Friday of the tribes” in Syria. During the political mobilization for and against the Libyan regime, some of the events were dubbed “tribal conferences” by their organizers. In Jordan, “The political union of the sons of the Bani Hasan tribe” demanded the formation of a “government of national salvation”. In other countries, such as Tunisia and Yemen, tribal struggles broke out over regional “thrones”. On the one hand, the manifestations of this dynamic differ from one Arab society to another, ranging from the geographic, the regional, and the social to the economic, the political, and the cultural. On the other hand, however, all of these components act according to catalysts that are linked to the traditional structures that dominate society – the most important of which being the tribal structure. This structure has left its mark on Arab social and political history, leaving a legacy whose role cannot be ignored in the contemporary era despite all of the blows to which the tribe has been subjected, both internally and externally.

This influence applies to most Arab countries whether in the Levant or the Maghreb, and from Iraq to Mauritania. Regardless of the complexities of social reality that have produced overlaps between the tribal and ethnic components in some societies, traditional structures and communal institutions still affect the direction of political and social events to varying degrees. The transformations witnessed by the region since the early days of the Arab Spring have shown that the roots of the crisis, and the motivations of the protesters, do not lie solely in economic and political factors: they cannot be separated from the influence of social and cultural factors, some of which are intrinsically linked to the tribal phenomenon.

It is true that these revolutions are generally characterized by both radicalism and resilience, and that they respond to the process of historical evolution of the region’s societies, whose political and social retardation has persisted too long. At the same time, these societies now find themselves confronted by numerous foreign and domestic challenges that must be elucidated and deciphered. In order to carry out these tasks, the current Arab reality – with its pluralism, overlaps, and challenges – must be submitted to further scholarly scientific research. This would contribute to clarifying visions and adopting processes of analysis, interpretation, and understanding in a manner that helps political actors in the region to appreciate the changes in their societies and their resultant requirements as these societies evolve through the profound changes taking place in the world. Today, Arab societies are in utmost need of the establishment of alternative institutions capable of resilience, survival, and enhanced performance.

In keeping with this direction, the scientific hypothesis on which I have relied to examine this subject holds that Arab political thought and practice are not yet sufficiently aware of the historic role of the tribe, which has had an influence over a long social and economic history, and affected the shaping and behavior of political elites, especially during the phase of the building of the nation-state, which lasted more than two-thirds of a century. With some exceptions¹, there are insufficient numbers of serious studies of this question, whether among political actors or intellectual and scholarly elites: most of these have endorsed the notion that we are witnessing modernization without modernity, and growth without development, believing that this modernization has succeeded in uprooting or neutralizing traditional structures during the wave of liberation from colonialism and the construction of nation-states. Even many of those who have discussed the influences of the tribal question have not liberated themselves from either academic formulas' constraints or their fear of risking the difficulties of the field.

Thus the academic scene regarding the stature of the tribe, its role, and the rules governing its change has suffered marked deficiency, and therefore an inability to access one of the most important social and political problematics affecting contemporary Arab reality. Overlaps of interests, complexities of processes and accelerations/escalations of events have all served to feed this academic confusion. This has prevented us from moving beyond academic judgments that oscillate between overlooking reality and hastily applying pre-cast models and concepts without taking into account the societal and historical specificities in question, which led to the emergence of a formalism in social and political analysis.

Today's Arab societies are in dire need of studies focusing on their active social structures in a serious and comprehensive manner, exploiting the environment of freedom that may herald a new Arab intellectual and scientific renaissance, which could activate much of our wasted human and material resources. Theorizing the tribal structure from the socio-political perspective will be among the priorities of social science research because these structures are no longer subjected solely to historical and anthropological studies that view tribes as belonging to the pages of history.

An inability to diagnose the Arab social reality is what led to the inability to change it, due to a lack in understanding of its active mechanisms. Both political despotism and foreign intervention have helped to deepen this deficiency, and therefore to sabotage positive transformations.

¹ Among the few attempts to examine these matters closely are some daring theorizations formulated by Arab thinkers like Barakat, Al-Jabiri, Ghalyun, Al-Taizini, Bishara and Djait. These attempts have not yet led, however, to a foundational intellectual movement that adopts cumulative work and dissemination in order to address the confusion of Arab political analysis and its dysfunctions.

I. The role of the tribe in the political dynamics of the Arab region during the contemporary era

The tribal structure has been among the sociological specificities of the Arab region since its ancient history, and also marks its modern history. This structure has played important roles in the cohesion or fragmentation of societies, as well as in anti-colonial movements, and it also affected the process of the shaping of the nation-state and its institutions in most Arab countries. Unquestionably, many tribes in the Arab region have had an effective presence in social and political history, with some leading uprisings against both the central Ottoman authorities and foreign colonists; the culture of resistance among these tribes has contributed to the maintenance of the social fabric and the civilizational character of the region's population. As a general rule, the social composition of these countries has changed with the foundation of the modern state. Among the manifestations of this process has been the fact that the majority of traditional structures, including the tribes, experienced a reduction of their influence. Their functions therefore shrank amid the patriotic and nationalist feelings among the educated youth and within the circles of the rising intellectual and political elites. Examining the stature of the tribe in the Arab region since ancient history shows that its resilient structure has absorbed several significant blows that can be summarized into three major shocks:

- **The shock of Islam**
- **The shock of colonialism**
- **The shock of nationalism**

While these shocks carried varying degrees of effect among different regions in the Arab world, and within each country according to the specificities of its historical, social, economic, and political development, the tribe was able to maintain its integrity as a psychological and cultural structure that shapes individuals and communities, especially in the peripheral regions, in most Arab societies. One example of this is the tense relationship in the Arab Maghreb between what are termed *bilad al-siba*, the lands of dissidence (unsubdued lands) as opposed to *bilad al-Mahzen*² the areas of central, sultanic authority directly related to the royal palace. In other countries too, especially Sudan, Yemen, and Iraq, the tribe has maintained its political, military, and economic structure. This continuity varied widely among states due to their respective political approaches to the processes of development and change. In some Arab societies, change led to a radical transformation in the social map, while others have preserved tribal entities out of complicity, coordination, alliance, or to exploit them on the public and/or private political scenes.

² The word *makhzen* literally means "warehouse" in Arabic, (from *kazana* 'store up). Today, *Makhzen* is the governing elite in Morocco and in pre- 1957 Tunisia, centered around the king and consisting of royal notables, businessmen, wealthy landowners, tribal leaders, top-ranking military personnel, security service bosses, and other well-connected members of the establishment.

The weak presence of the tribal question in Arab political discourse does not measure up to the magnitude and importance of this issue, a mismatch which hampers public policies and programs in some societies. The position of the tribe within the discourse also has been affected by an instrumentalist tendency relating to the natures of the ideologies that have inspired the analysis and rhetoric of Arab political elites – nationalist, Marxist, liberal, and then Islamist – since the application of each of these ideologies took place in a supra-national context which, by its very nature, marginalizes the tribal phenomenon and its manifestations. On the level of the media discourse, which is mostly based on foreign or international references, treatment of the tribal question has been marked by inconsistency because it often took place during periods of social or political upheavals, during which tribal events emerge as expressions of protest and public demands. Featuring the tribe prominently would entail exposing the impotence of the state and civil society institutions in dealing with the challenges of development, challenges which tend to escalate when analysts are unable to explain the workings and mechanisms of the social and cultural components of society.

Protest behaviors were not absent from the social reality of most Arab countries after independence, despite political and media efforts to underreport these acts of protest, with rationales ranging from protecting “national unity” to dismissing the challenges as marginal and/or isolated. Nonetheless, conflicts proliferated and leaderships came and went, leading to a continuation of tribal pressures on the state and the parties in local societies, which fell victim to regional inequities in development. The situation of these underserved regions led many of them to take refuge in their traditional identities as a form of protection and in order to register their presence and character. Close observers would have no difficulty identifying such manifestations of tribal protest during elections, political campaigns promoting ideas and programs, and through the movement of leaders. These manifestations also appear during periods of war and regional conflicts among neighbors, including some forms that became items of novelty for the Western media in the past two decades, such as taking foreign hostages to pressure the state, obtain public projects, or achieve local reconciliations. On such occasions, tribal recruitment and clannish divisions take different shapes, open or subtle, benefiting (according to the specificities of each region) from the spread of weapons and/or the absence or weakness of civic conduits for expression and representation.

The Iraqi example (as with Afghanistan later) bears witness to the fact that major powers pursuing policies of a globalization adopting an interventionist approach, realized the importance of dealing with the tribal component in some societies. Thus, the US occupation authorities labored to make political use of tribal social capital, attempting to revive it in order to achieve the project of national fragmentation. These policies, which were implemented in many parts of the world, can be described as ones of social explosion, which takes place through various strategies, the most important of which being the mobilization of sub-national identities from the

outside³. It may be true that deteriorating social and political conditions bore within them the seeds of division, engendering risks that threatened Iraqi society, but events during the period of the war supply multiple examples indicating the use of conspiracies, skirmishes, coups, disinformation, bribery, threats, and other means of political maneuvering, which embraced pre-planned schemes and programs that eventually lead to opening the doors for foreign intervention in the context of “creative chaos”.

Destructive chaos has led to a loss of security for the individuals and groups who sought to protect themselves through clans⁴, tribes, and sects. As a result, “tribal mobilization” became so clear that political forces and state institutions began to legitimize these identities and introducing the logic of power-sharing deals into their workings, thus reverting to a legacy that had almost disappeared due to the transformations achieved by the modern Iraqi state.

Despite the slogans, in times of crisis the Iraqi regime did not hesitate to seek the aid of the tribes. This was especially true during the early 1990s, when the effort was designed to foil the goals foreign intervention. The methods employed included the arming of tribes, the granting of privileges to some of them, and the promotion of tribal customs despite some of them having been in clear violations of the law. Both sides (the regime and the occupation authorities) wagered on a tribal specificity that manifests itself, in anthropological terms, in rebellious and independentist tendencies.

In the Gulf, on the other hand, the birth of the state was not based on the same components, and took place in different contexts than those of other Arab regions that witnessed the birth of the modern state. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, the state did not emerge from a struggle with the colonialist state, but as a result of an internal evolution and social and geographic specificities, in addition to linkages between the birth of the Saudi state and religious reform on the one hand, and tribal composition on the other. However, both factors tended toward unity. Salafi Wahhabi proclamation (or *da'wah*), with the aid of the tribes – and with the Najdi⁵ leadership having fallen into the hands of the Saud family⁶ – had a role in uniting tribal confederations and extending their influence after a bloody struggle that led to a mutiny against the central Ottoman authorities. This coalition quickly expanded to include other tribes, resulting in the unification

³ Such plans relied on broad consultations, employing scholarly studies to understand societies where intervention was on the agenda, in order to guarantee for the political and military decision-makers the achievement of their objectives with the least cost.

⁴ See, regarding this topic: Ali Al Wardi, *A Study on the Nature of Iraqi Society*, (Arabic), Baghdad: Al Ani printing house, 1965. And Mohammad Jawad Rida, *The Struggle of the State and the Tribe in the Arab Gulf*, (Arabic) Beirut, 1992.

⁵ *Najd* or *Nejd* means literally *highland* in Arabic, it is the central region of the Arabian Peninsula.

⁶ See: Ibrahim Al-'Utaibi, *The Organizations of the State during the Reign of King Abdul Aziz*, (Arabic), Riyadh: Al 'Ubaikan library, 1993. Also: Ghassan Salameh, *Society and the State in the Arab Levant*, (Arabic), Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1985. Also: Mas'ud Daher, *The Contemporary Arab Levant from Tribalism to the Modern State*, (Arabic), Beirut: The Institute for Arab Development, 1986.

and emergence of the Kingdom in 1926. This tendency toward unification appeared in several countries, such as Sudan (the Mahdist *da'wah* or proclamation⁷) and Libya (the Sannussi movement).⁸ Thus, a shift took place according to the Ibn Khaldoun model, from Bedouin agglomeration (or *umran*)⁹ to urban settlement, in an alliance between rule and *asabiyya* (social solidarity).

On the other hand, in Yemen, which represents one of the notable Arab cases regarding the presence of the tribe on the contemporary political scene, the modern state was formed in the context of a society characterized by a tribal social composition that remains socially and politically effective; the belonging of individuals to tribes is characterized by a social determinism that is not surpassed by belonging to political parties. The Yemeni political scene was not devoid of alliances among parties and tribes, with these processes taking place in a quasi-unique context due to the overlap and mixture between the political and social components (the “tribe-party”).¹⁰

As a result, political elites in Yemeni society are pushed by multiple motives to reproduce organic relations, and the state, which was designed on this basis, legitimizes the adoption of consensual representation for political positions –in proportion to the size of the tribal entity and its stature – which takes place in a tense environment constantly oscillating between coexistence and conflict. Tribal culture, therefore, has marked both the institutions of the society and the state, without neglecting the role of religious sects (*Shafi*¹¹ and *Zaidism* or *Zaidiyya*)¹².

Understanding the presence of the tribe – including its culture, consciousness, and actions – in contemporary Arab political reality requires concerted efforts and extensive studies that cannot take place in isolation from the study of other structures that abut, relate to, or resemble the tribes, including the phenomena of sectarianism, ethnicity, and regionalism: these are overlapping and intersecting phenomena that still affect, in many ways, the direction of events and the nature of institutions, from the nuclear family to the state itself.

⁷ In Sudan, in the 1870s, a Muslim cleric named [Muhammad Ahmad](#) preached renewal of the faith and liberation of the land, and began attracting followers. Soon in open revolt against the Egyptians, Muhammad Ahmad proclaimed himself the Mahdi, the promised redeemer of the Islamic world.

⁸ The Senussi or Sanussi refers to a Muslim political-religious order in Libya and the Sudan region founded in Mecca in 1837 by the Grand Senussi, Sayyid Muhammad ibn Ali as-Senussi. Senussi was concerned with both the decline of Islamic thought and spirituality and the weakening of Muslim political integrity. He was influenced by the Salafi movement, to which he added teachings from various Sufi orders.

⁹ *Umran* is too complex a term to translate in one word. According to Ibn Khaldoun, *umran* refers to the cultural, societal and material unfolding of history.

¹⁰ See: Abdel Baqi Shamsan, “The Tribe and the Party: A Sociopolitical approach to Yemeni Society”, Doctoral dissertation, (Tunis, 2004). Also: Fadhl Abu Ghanim, *The Tribe and the State in Yemen*, first ed., (Arabic), Cairo: Dar Al Manar, 1990. Also: Mohammad Al Zahiri, *The political role of the Tribe in Yemen between 1962 and 1993*, (Arabic), Cairo: 1990.

¹¹ Shafii is one of the school of religious laws (or *fiqh*) within the Sunni branch of Islam.

¹² *Zaidism* or *Zaidiyya* is a Shi'a Muslim school of thought.

There is a pressing need, therefore, to establish specialized think-tanks that can study such topics by adopting a new direction for the development of social sciences and humanities in the region, changing their course from copying, imitation, and crude applications of outside theories to research, analysis, comparison, and critique – an Arabization of social sciences. With new topics, problematics, and content, such a process should not be confined to the mere language of writing and publishing.

The need to understand such topics is driven by the emergence of many new practices, behaviors, and phenomena linked to recent manifestations of the tribal structure, including:

- The establishment of websites by some tribes in the region, both in the Maghreb and the Levant.
- The holding of gatherings, conferences, and symposiums in the names of clans, tribes and *araoush* in several countries, with the aim of unifying the ranks and collecting the legacy of the tribe.

New rules appeared for new leaderships that began, in some societies, to form political fronts that negotiate with political parties and the organs of the state. The intimate tribal component sometimes emerges in charitable social action by activists in some tribal groups or in political action, where the tribe participates in the electoral process. This component exerts pressure on civic actors such as parties, unions, and associations by resuscitating organic relations and using them for mobilization. To further explain this reality, I shall analyze two cases which bear demographical and geographical similarities but which have followed evolutionary paths in modern history. These are the Tunisian model, where the current Arab revolutions saw their initial spark, (which has multiple implications); and the Libyan model, which was affected by the first and followed its lead, albeit with different tools and mechanisms whose results are not yet clear.

II. Tribal political polarization and tribal manifestation in Libya during the February 17, 2011 revolution

Following Colonel Moammar Ghaddafi's 1969 military coup in Libya, his *Jamahiriyah* regime leaned continuously on the tribe, but this dependence was not without constant tension and a familiar anarchy in the use of concepts and the adoption of approaches. Between courting and conflict, exploitation and repression, the many contradictions of the regime become evident. This would be noted by any student of the modern Libyan political scene and is confirmed by the arsenal of texts and laws revolving around the regime's "holy text", Ghaddafi's "Green Book", which the 2011 revolution in Benghazi – in its beginnings – moved to excise, a symbolic act reminiscent of the demolitions of statues in other countries. This also was confirmed earlier, by

the host of measures used to gather the support of the tribes for the “Leader” in the regions he visited, the offering of gifts and the organization of equestrian competitions, for which large funds were devoted –during the years of austerity – as well as lengthy daily reports in the media. At the same time, the regime did not refrain from adopting methods of collective punishment, whether by imprisoning the sons of disobedient tribes, exiling their leaders and prosecuting them and their families, or using the youth from such tribes as cannon fodder during the war with Chad in the 1980s.

The situation was made even more complex by the regime’s having adopted, publicly or implicitly, other supra-national bases for identity, such as Islam, Arabism, Africanism, and internationalism. Thus, relying on the tribe in the actions and discourse of Ghaddafi represented a flagrant and open manipulation of those social structures – while the emergence of any other civil organization was harshly and strictly repressed. Even Ghaddafi’s design of the regime’s revolutionary committees involved matters of regional/tribal identity, and that also explains his passion regarding the Libyan tribal tradition. The regime’s use of the tribes was a refuge which – combined with its foreign alliances – allowed it to rely on intimate domestic relations, chiefly tribal ones. The tribe remained the social structure most capable of fostering individuals and controlling their political choices in the absence of other civic entities, such as parties, unions, and associations.

A close examination of the process by which the Ghaddafi-era political establishment of the Libyan state (the *Jamahiriyah*) confirms both the presence of the tribe in the schemes of the regime and the leadership’s continuous quest make use of this phenomenon. Tribal influences did not disappear from the political scene despite the informal character of the tribal relationship with the state. This had led to the acknowledgment of tribal political organizations since the beginning of the 1990s.

It is common knowledge that the main political structures in Libya remained centered on the secretariat of the General People’s Congress and the General People’s Committee, but to these were added popular organizations with a tribal character, such as the Associations of the Youth of the Tribes, whose headquarters were located in the capital, Tripoli.

In 1977, so-called “Tribal Clubs” were formed with the aim of “refraining narrow regional and local demands, which, by accumulating, could turn into protest movements.”¹³ These clubs were designed to monitor the movement of young people in tribal regions and explore points of potential tensions. The same objectives were set for the “**People’s Social Leadership** Committees”, tribal structures whose task consisted of observing and/or confronting opposition movements.

¹³ Al-Munssif Wannas, Authority, Society and Associations in Libya, first ed. (Arabic), Tunis: Al Wafa’ publishing, 2000, p. 81.

In addition to the youth associations, the Popular Guard militias were established, grouping elderly tribesmen who volunteered to carry weapons in order to defend the regime and “the achievements of the revolution”. Those volunteering for these organizations were granted privileges as well as both symbolic and material grants that confirmed these patronage relations.

Ghaddafi reinforced these organizations with relentless personal effort, conducting multiple visits to various regions and districts after thorough study, preceding each visit, of the features of the local tribal group and its history. Each visit concluded with the signing of a document of loyalty by the tribal group question. Herein lay the main objective of the visits: gathering support and working to secure the assimilation of tribal groups into the regime in a collective manner in order to reduce the possibility of individual dissent of individuals.

A. The political manipulation of the tribal dimension in the revolution of February 17, 2011

From independence in the 1969 coup until the beginning of the February 17 revolution, the political deployment of the tribal factor remained an active ingredient in the relationship between the state and Libyan society. As much as we saw a revival of patriotic feelings during the convergence of popular demands amid a revolution affected by its regional environment, as much as we gleaned the features of this tribal factor and its political interferences, this presence was felt more by the regime than by its opponents. This was natural given that the tactic of employing traditional social structures for political purposes was a hallmark of the regime’s policies during its reign; the uses witnessed during the revolution were a mere continuation of past methods of mobilization associated with phases of regime crisis and the appearance of opposition.

It is in this context that we can understand the regime’s attempts to mobilize cities and regions by provoking their tribal identity on the moral, military, and political levels. The official media discourse during the revolution included open calls that fell in this category, with various outlets stirring up old conflicts and depicting those rebelling against the regime as “conspiring terrorist groups that threaten the stability of Libya.” It was also in this vein that we saw the holding of “tribal conferences”¹⁴, which were periodically convened and issued statements of loyalty and pledges of support, refusing to join ranks with the rebels under various justifications, chiefly the rejection of “crusading” Western interference.

¹⁴ In a response to the conference organized by the “Local Libyan Councils for the Support of the National Transitional Council” on May 10-11, 2011, in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, the Libyan regime organized “The national conference for the sheikhs of Libya’s Tribes” in Tripoli on May 11. The official media claimed that around 2,000 tribes participated in that pro-Ghaddafi conference, ignoring the nature and size of the tribal map in Libya. And on June 7, 2011, Tripoli hosted a meeting headed by Lieutenant General El-Khweldi El-Hamedi (a prominent Ghaddafi regime figure) that was called “The national conference of the Libyan tribes”.

This could also explain the strategies of mobilization in support of the state that relied on the religious dimension (a known red line for the Libyan people), through which the regime attempted to embarrass its opponents and neighbors. The political employment of the tribe also affected the regime's political relations with its surroundings, especially within its African environment, where recruitment campaigns and the multiplication of statements of support led to the mobilization of the regime's relational credentials, which is based on what could be termed "the market of political positions."¹⁵

As for the rhetoric of the leaders of the Transitional National Council (TNC), while appearing to avoid mention of the tribal factor, they occasionally spoke of some support and loyalty offered by the Libyan tribes to the rebels – as a reaction to the tribal discourse employed by the official media.

The rhetoric of the council, on this level, was characterized by superior intelligence and political objectivity compared to the faltering official discourse with its familiar brand of populism. Regardless, the TNC announced in early May that it had received support in "a statement by 60 Libyan tribes", compared to the regime's claims of having received the support of nearly 2000 tribes.¹⁶ Opposition media also announced receiving statements from some regions, including "a statement of support from the tribes of Al-Saian in the Western Mountains on Monday, May 2, 2011."

The tendency of the revolution's leaders to marginalize the tribe could be explained by the nature of the revolution, which was proposing an alternative democratic regime that would delegate the responsibility of shaping the new identity of society to civic institutions. The tribal identities of the members of the TNC and the leaderships of the rebel militias prove that the revolution represented, among its ranks, the majority of Libyan tribal groups.

As for unilateral positions sometimes reported by the media (and in ways that raised suspicions and did not reflect pure intentions), most qualified as reactions to events of bloodshed. The most notable example of this was the announcement by the Ubeidat tribe, the tribe of Abu Bakr Yunis, who was assassinated during the revolution, that it would carry out its own investigation into the incident and take the appropriate actions.¹⁷ As a general rule, scholars should be aware that positions attributed to tribes here and there, in the midst of escalating conflict, are often in fact those of individual families; the signs and slogans carried

¹⁵ On May 11, 2011, Libyan state television said in a report that "the People's Social Association of the Tribes of the Sahara in the African Parliamentary Group" had sent a telegram of condolences and solidarity to Colonel Ghaddafi after the death of one of his sons and a number of his grandchildren during NATO's bombing of Tripoli.

¹⁶ The scene becomes a caricature when these claims are coupled with state television's images of the attendees, whose numbers did not exceed a few dozen faces recruited from among the Revolutionary Committees.

¹⁷ During Yunis' funeral, the Ubeidat tribe declared its loyalty to the TNC, but it also vowed, following a meeting of 90 of its leaders, that it would take charge of avenging the assassins of its son, Abd Al-Fattah Yunis. *Al-Hayat: July 30, 2011.*

by the media, especially the official media, do not necessarily express fully formulated stances of tribes or specific groups.

This is Libyan society, and such was the battle between the two warring factions, each mobilizing all of its resources in support of its position. In such circumstances, the tribe becomes a frame of identity, more effective as a political tool than a military one, despite the fact that in this case, choosing this or that side was determined according to the positions of the actors, their social strata, the political roles they were charged with, and their relationships with the state and its institutions.

The military character of Libyan tribes in the early 20th century

Tribe	Number of weapon pieces
Al-Darsa (Cyrenaica)	٦.٠٠٠
Al-Awaqeer	١٤.٠٠٠
Al-Zawiya	١١.٠٠٠
Al-Rajban and Al-Zintan	٢.٥٠٠
Al-Sayan	٥.٠٠٠
Al-Haraba	٥.٠٠٠

Source: `Ali `Abd al-Lateef Hameeda, *Society, the State, and Colonialism in Libya*, 2nd ed., (Arabic), Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1998, p. 82.

B. The collective form of protest

Sociological observation leads me to conclude that, since their beginnings and especially in the 1990s, movements of protest and insurgency against the regime in Libya acquired a collective regional aspect. These currents were also colored by political leanings, tribal belongings, and religious dimensions. This is an understandable process because the totalitarianism of the “*Jamahiriya* state” has prevented the existence of any civil organizations in Libya for 42 years. Therefore, intimate relations and organic links – in their regional, familial, and tribal contexts – remained deeply rooted in society, defying the loud slogans and cleverly maneuvering among domestic and foreign policies that were often inconsistent.

These relationships, which formerly had provided refuge for individuals, shielding them from economic, social, and political uncertainties, soon turned into popular organizations of armed resistance, announcing their siding with the revolution. This revolutionary potential had remained outside the regime's military/political apparatus – and dormant within it.

The distribution of authority under the post-1969 regime adopted the model of tribal power-sharing, which sabotaged the possibility of an organized civic evolution in Libya, confusing the current ongoing revolution, slowing its momentum, and depriving it of the opportunity to rely on civil society organizations, as opposed to the case in Tunisia and Egypt. Nonetheless, this did not prevent either the invoking or the activation of the historic legacy of Libyan social movements and the remnants of their organizations and leaderships – especially among those who were politically active abroad, despite prosecutions and harassment.¹⁸

The number of Libyan tribes is estimated at around 150 of various sizes, which are divided in turn into local branches. But this number is shrinking due to rising levels of urbanization and the overlaps among the names of cities and regions and those of tribal groups. After Ghaddafi's "September 1 Revolution", the Libyan tribal map witnessed significant alliances and dissensions in relations with the political regime, as well as in their relationships with each other, and within their spheres of influence. The February 17 revolution has sought to reshape these alliances by altering the basis of loyalty to the political regime. The political motives of resisting despotism and establishing democracy had an influential effect in this latest revolution, which took root in most of Libya, and with the participation of almost all groups. But the distinctiveness of this movement continued to stem from the Libyan tribal scene, whose repositioning and alliances did not cease during the evolution of political and military events, which resulted in expanding the sphere of influence of the new revolution. Since the beginning, most tribal groups were clearly in favor of the revolution, whose leaderships defected from the regime granting loyalty to the TNC the character of collective and communal allegiance.

In its current political state, the tribal scene is characterized by divisions, especially for groups that are divided between the East and the West of the country. A table showing the distribution of Libyan tribes according to their positions toward the regime and the revolution follows, but first a few explanatory remarks are called for:

1. Libya's tribal/regional scene is known for continuous fluidity, due to several reasons, including continuous events, interests, pressures, and other factors (an instance of this is the tribe of Msallata, which rose on the side of the rebels on Thursday, August 4, 2011).

¹⁸ Much of the world was surprised to learn, once the revolution against Ghaddafi broke out, that Libya is endowed with highly educated people, promising elites, and a youth bubbling with national and patriotic feelings, all of which testifies to the abilities of organizations and movements and analysis exhibited by these groups (journalistic, academic, political, religious, military).

2. As a general rule, the stances of tribal and regional groups toward the regime depend on their political and historical relations with the regime, whether negative or positive.
3. The positions supporting the new revolution were negatively affected after the aggressive speech made by Ghaddafi days after the outbreak of the revolution (“house by house, alley by alley”), which was filled with incitement and provocation.
4. Although many important tribes sided with the regime, certain opposition figures and sub-groups emerged within the tribes that have supported historically the regime (as in the case of Warfalla and Tarhuna). These individuals and groups are still backing the revolution. Similarly, opposition tribes produced figures supporting the regime who quickly took refuge in the cities controlled by the regime (e.g. Misrata, Al-Zawiya, Al-Zintan tribes).
5. The existence of many cities whose names are similar to those of the tribes, as well as cities that are more famous than their tribes, such as Al-Zawiya, Sibrata, and others.
6. Tribes of Amazig origin are distributed among the Western Mountains, the coast (Zuwara tribe), and the South (Twareg tribe).

The following table – on the distribution of Libyan tribes six months into the revolution – is but a basic attempt that is not without an element of subjectivity due to the aforementioned factors. Such attempts are necessary, however, because they help to diagnose the situation and to analyze and interpret the shifts on the current Libyan political scene.

Distribution of Libyan tribes according to their stances on the regime

Opposition	Pro-Ghaddafi
Al-Ubeidat	Al-Qadhafha
Al-Barasa	Awlad Sulaiman
Warfalla (East)	Warfalla (West)
Tarhouna (East)	Tarhouna (West)
Al-Zintan	Maslata
Al-Ruhaibat	Al-Amamirah
Qabaw	Al-Maaden
Adrassah	Al-Harabah
Nalout	Warshafana
Al-Ghazaya	Al-Mashashiya
Jadou	Tawourga
Yefren	Al-Magarha
Al-Qala	Awlad Yussuf
Kaklah	Al-Nawayel
Al-Awageer (Benghazi)	Al-Sayaan
Twareg	Al-Ujailat
Shakshouk	Al-Rukayaat
Zuwarah	Al-Rayayneh
Al-Zawiya	Al-Qawaleesh
Misratha	Al-Asabah
Al-Farjan (East)	Al-Farjan (west of Ajdabiya, Sirte, and also in Zliten)
Misratha tribes	Tribes of al- Khums
Zliten	Zliten

The protest movement, which turned into a massive revolution, quickly overtook most populated areas in the east and west of the country, and was able, to a large extent, to deprive the tribe of the function of internal conflict environments, which is inherited and the regime attempted to detonate. Thus, the social tribal heritage was transformed into a factor of power and solidarity among population groups, which confirms the rooting of the patriotic idea among the Libyan people, although it lacked a solid organizational infrastructure. The revolutionaries hope that the revolution will help expand this national identity by providing freedom and democracy in a political system based on a legitimacy that the Libyan people – from all factions, regions and social strata – have begun to construct. This is the missing democracy that the French historic Bernard Lugan¹⁹ spoke of when he examined the crisis of tribal alliances that were not built by history, but by the political regime in order to achieve its goals and confront its challenges.

The Sannussi movement, as a Sufi order, played an influential role in Libyan politics and civil society before the “September 1 Revolution”, presenting an ideological framework that helped to unify society in the four central provinces.²⁰ It did not have a noteworthy role, however, during the February 17 revolution, which exhibited a new discourse and practice, indicating a radical change in the social and political fabric of Libyan society, although the outbreak of the revolution in the eastern part of the country – the cradle of the Sannussi movement – may have been more than a coincidence.

Given the sociological rule that every outside challenge leads communities to fuse together and strengthen their internal solidarity, the role of the Libyan tribe in resisting Italian colonialism from the beginning of the 20th century cannot be ignored. Tribal insurgencies in both the east and west of Libya played a key role that led to the unification of the country around the idea of “*jihad*”, and this was one of the bases for the formation of Libyan national identity.

This solidarity led to a diminution of conflicts among groups and coalitions, and a lessening of the diverse and mosaic character of society, which had been ruled over centuries by regional statelets and geographic specificities. This momentum toward unification was stronger than the tendency toward division, an equation that continues to be felt today, with the widespread feeling that “Libya is one tribe”, which contrasts with an instrumental position adopted by the Ghaddafi regime that was based on contradictions between discourse and practice, and even within the discourse itself.

¹⁹ A professor of history at the University of Lyon specializing in African affairs, he wrote an article on the Matunisie website describing potential post-revolution scenarios based on the existing alliances, including the possibility of a tribal war along the Somali model, which could lead to the formation of statelets. This scenario, I believe, lacks objective proof and tangible truths.

²⁰ Mohammad Najib Boutalib, *The Sociology of the Tribe in the Arab Maghreb*, 2nd edition, (in Arabic), Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2009, pp. 99

The former regime's position was characterized by intense passion for recalling history and invoking the Libyan tribal tradition, coupled with an unabashed exploitation of this political capital in managing public affairs, while simultaneously advocating a supra-national identity and slogans designed to break with traditional society.²¹ The broad employment of the remaining tribal structures due to their ability to mobilize and recruit²² explains the extent of the former regime's reliance upon these structures, since it failed to create alternative civic organizations.

If this contradiction were to be examined in the field, facts would confirm that the tribal structure has lost many of its characteristics due to the processes of modernization, chiefly education, the modernization of the administration, the building of state institutions, and the discovery of oil.²³ However, these elements did not prevent the persistence of features of Bedouin life in the city and the tendency of individuals and groups to adopt the values of traditional society.

These specificities of the Libyan social system have imposed the tribe as a latent social/cultural/political structure that is only effective when it employed in the social dynamic. In such cases, the structure that has been undermined but not completely by modernization becomes a tool for recruitment and enforcement. It is the refuge of the individual and the community from the state, and simultaneously the shield of the state against individuals.²⁴

Nonetheless, the presence of the tribe continued to produce positive aspects, chief among them the preservation of social cohesion and solidarity, and the domination of the independentist and defiant tendencies, in the "Libyan personality". Libyan social specificities are exemplified in this regard by the weakness of the role of the individual relative to that of the community. However, this community failed to preserve its former stature, contenting itself with moral authority and the appearance of communal spirit in times of political crisis. This would explain why most opposition to the Ghaddafi regime took a collective form (uprisings and coup attempts in the 1980s and 1990s, for example), as did the loyalists, who also represented a form of collective allegiance affiliated with tribal leaderships.

The opposition in the February 17 Revolution was part of this context, with groups engaging in the conflict under the banners and identities of regions, cities, villages, tribes, and/or families. That was exemplified by the youth joining the ranks of the revolutionaries, the migration of some families and the disappearance of others, and the spread of underground opposition. In the other camp, many who remained loyal to the regime did so due to intimate and familial relations, given the roles of the relatives and their political positions, or as a result of the alliances of their

²¹ John Davis, *Le système Lybien, les tribus et la révolution*, Paris: PUF, 1990, (translated from English).

²² Al-Munsif Wannas, *The State and the Cultural Question in the Arab Maghreb*, (Arabic) Tunis: 1995, p. 69.

²³ Mustapha Al-Teer, *The March of the Modernization of Libyan Society*. (Arabic), Beirut: Institute for Arab development, 1992. See also Al-Muldi Lahmar, *The Social Roots of the Modern State in Libya*, doctoral dissertation, Tunis, 2008.

²⁴ The state often reports the names of its opponents to their tribes, so that the clan would punish its own son.

communities and their commitments within the distribution of roles according to various power-sharing deals. Finally, the parties that remained silent were in a state of waiting due to fear of retaliation and punishment, but their silence will not last because they are probably awaiting an opportunity to defect to the ranks of the winning side.

Expressions of socio-political fusion based on familial and tribal factors could be seen in the relations of social solidarity and mutual help that prevented instances of the famine and homelessness that often accompany civil war. Social, familial, neighborly, and regional links became an element of strength in preserving the cohesion of Libyan society. These links helped to lessen fears of the destruction of the war and the impact of cases of displacement and siege. I was able to examine this, in the field, among displaced Libyan families in southern Tunisia, especially in those regions neighboring Libyan territory.²⁵

C- Taking refuge with the neighbors: a historical practice and a recurrent population movement

1. The present imitating the past (1858-2011)

Both modern and contemporary historical sources indicate that the year 1858 witnessed the migration to Tunisia of some 80,000 Libyans. These were members of the tribes that participated in the uprising, led by Ghawma Al-Mahmoudi (Mahameed lineage), against attempts by the Ottoman state since 1835 to impose direct rule on the Western Mountains. Mahmoudi's leadership benefited from neighborly relations and the overlap between Libyan and Tunisian population groups to build a broad alliance joining the tribes of Jabal Nafusa (both Arabs and Berbers), in addition to the tribal confederation of Warghama.²⁶ Likewise, when the famous 1863 Farafeesh uprising (led by Ali Bin Ghadhahim and involving the tribes and central and southern Tunisia) was put down, more than 100,000 followers of the revolution migrated to Libya.²⁷ Later, both leaders and supporters of the 1915-1918 Wadarna revolution in southern Tunisia fled for Libyan territory, especially the region of the Western Mountains. All of these historical events demonstrate that western Libya and eastern Tunisia have served as a mutual refuge for those fleeing the sword of the sultan or the injustice of occupation.

²⁵ Field research in the governorates of Tataouine and Medanine (May-June 2011) found solid internal solidarity among Libyan families hosted by Tunisian families. This included contributing to those in need, taking in orphans and widows, and psychological and social care for families that lost members during the war.

²⁶ *The Warghama Union* is a regional tribal confederation joining the tribes of the deep Tunisian South, most importantly: Shanani, Al-Duweirat, Qurmasa, Ghimrasin, Al-Julaidat, Al-Wadarna, 'Akara (*Awlad Salim, Awlad Abdel Hamid*) Al-Tawazin, Al-Hawaya, Al-Khuzur. See: Mohammad Najib Boutalib, "The Tunisian Tribe between changing Continuity, The Tunisian South East from Tribal Integration to National Integration", Doctoral dissertation, the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities in Tunis, *The Sociology Series*, Tome 8, first edition, 2002.

²⁷ Ali Abdel Latif Hameeda, *Society, the State, and Colonialism in Libya*, 2nd Edition (Arabic), Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1998, p. 84.

When security is undermined, local populations frequently agree on traditions and rules for cooperation, solidarity, and mutual aid based on a collection of treaties and alliances, while positions are unified toward the challenges facing them. In the crises described above, communities formed alliances known as “*sufuf*”, some loyal to the authority of the central state (Ottoman or colonial) and others to the opposition. Among these *sufuf* were the famous binary of Saff Yusuf and Saff Shaddad.

The *sufuf* system provided a suitable structure to organize regional political relations in a manner appropriate to the nature of local society, which consisted of the tribe, its space, economy, and unique social system. Alliances were used to respond to challenges of several natures, including military challenges (against other neighboring tribal coalitions or the army of the central state), and environmental ones (desertification, the scarcity of resources or the nomadic as well as family subsistence economic **pattern**). This is why these effective tribal groups were granted economic roles, consisting mainly in protecting desert trading caravans, throughout their history.

These alliances almost overlapped, especially in the regions of Tripoli and southern Tunisia in the 19th century. Saff-Yusuf included the tribes of the Tunisian south and the tribes of Western Tripoli, especially the groups of Warghama and the Western Mahameed; the competing Saff Shaddad included the tribes of the Eastern Mahameed, Nawayel, and Al-Sayan.

Despite the improvised, changing characters of some constituents of these alliances, their basic structure was so constant that its traces can still be observed in some regions. For instance, the population of west Libyan regions taking refuge in Tunisian territory was associated with important social and psychological symbols, chiefly factors of reassurance and comfort that those taking refuge in south Tunisian villages and towns expected to find with their neighbors. The environmental, social, and cultural affinities between the inhabitants of the two adjoining regions were an important drawing factor for the Libyan families that settled in the governorates of Tataouine and Medanine.

Field observations on the distribution of Libyan families arriving in southern Tunisia – especially the governorate of Tataouine, which borders Libya’s Western Mountains – in 2011 affirmed that where the refugees settled was heavily influenced by the geography and political history of the two regions, as well as the social origins of the populations. Based on factors of ethnic belonging, the groups arriving from the Amazigh region of the Western Mountains preferred to settle among their “cousins”, the Amazigh of the White Mountain and the Matmata Mountains, especially in the villages of Qurmasa, Shanani, and Al-Duwairat in the suburbs of the city of Tataouine. These towns were the destination of many who came from Lalut, Yafran, Wazin, Zleiten, and neighboring villages. In contrast, Tunisians known for belonging to Arab tribes such as Al-Wadarna, Al-Julaidat, and Al-Ababsa received the majority of refugees of Arab origins arriving from areas in either the plains or the mountains, such as Zintan, Rajban, Gharyan, Al-Qala, Kakla, and other regions of the Jafara and the Hamamda. Most of these eventually settled

in the city of Tataouine and the plains surrounding it, such as Ramada, Sumar, Al-Bir Al-Ahmar, and others. Naturally, this distribution was not programmed, but took place as a form of directed coincidence, and with a familial intimacy influenced by psychological and cultural factors with historical roots.

2- Remembering history and reviving the *sufuf* (or alliances)

The recent population movements recalled for some the region's political, social, and military history, especially during the first half of the 20th century, when western Libya served as a refuge for those fleeing the French occupation, and eastern Tunisia received those escaping the violence of Italian occupation.

The new daily life of displaced Libyans in Tunisia engendered a new process of integration, with the opportunity presenting itself to remember and retell the history of fathers and forefathers. Mixed groups in cafes, teashops, and family gatherings reminisce over the history of the relationship between the two countries, especially the border regions. There are many indices regarding this new process of integration, indicating that the coming phase will be important for rebuilding neighborly relations – which the former political regimes failed to do, despite the multiplicity of speeches, promises, and slogans.²⁸

The example provided by the two peoples today, and the confidence, solidarity, and complementarity that have been inscribed in the collective memory, will serve as a basis for the building of strong neighborly relations that are capable of transforming the border area into a promising economic magnet, thanks to the presence of several factors.

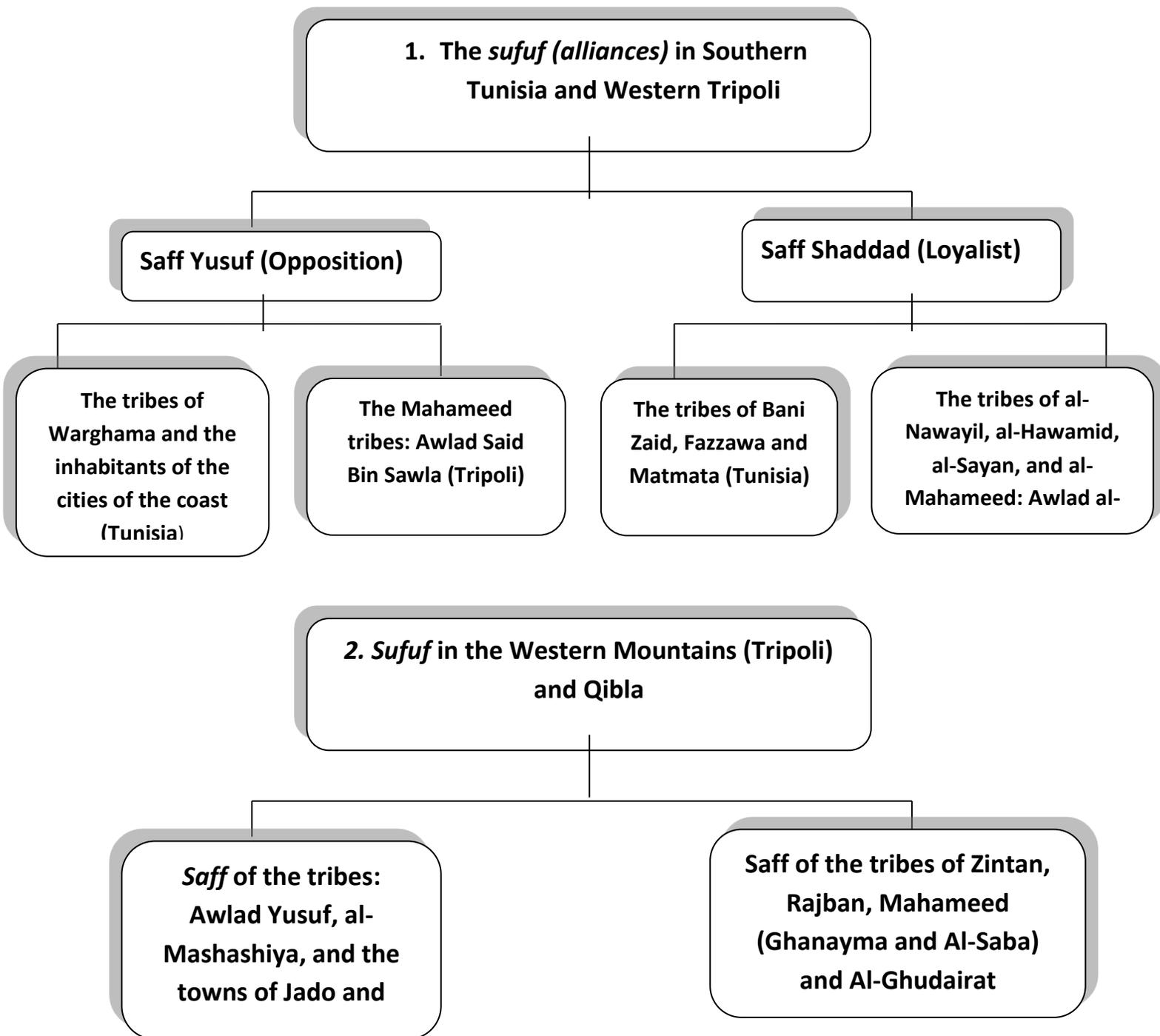
Neighborly relations between the Libyan and Tunisian peoples helped to soften difficulties and face challenges associated with the Libyan Revolution; the policies adopted by the post-Ben Ali Tunisian state and the TNC helped to ensure exit points for inhabitants of western Libya who dissented against the regime, despite the region's proximity to the seat of the Ghaddafi regime. The rebelling Libyans found inspiration in the liberal environment brought about by the Tunisian Revolution, and in the solidarity of the Tunisian people in their relations with their neighbors; the refugees also found an optimal sphere in which to promote their revolution and to mobilize political, material, and social support for it.

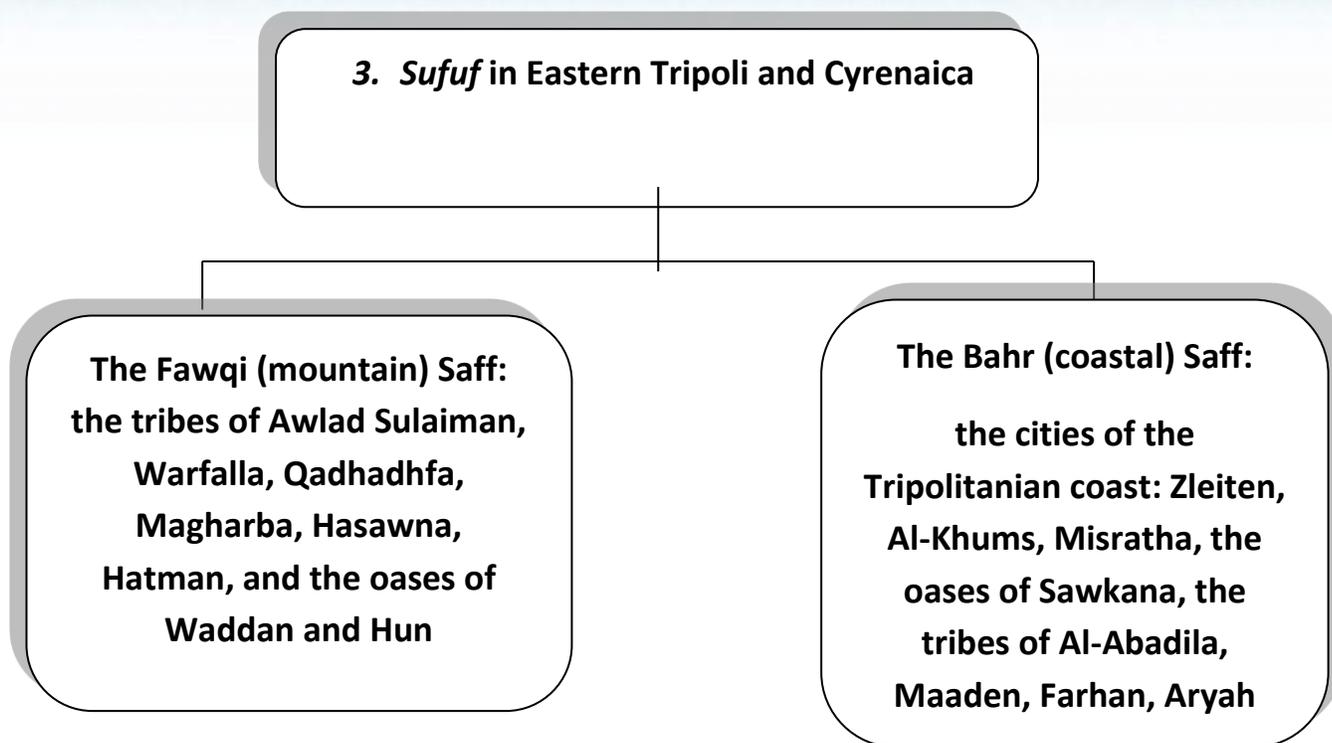
These elements contributed to the liberation of the Western Mountains and the region's transformation into an advance base for forces battling the Ghaddafi regime. Thus, the Libyan Revolution was able – with a high level of competence – to create for itself a base of support, and a breathing space for the inhabitants of the Libyan southern frontier region. This region also

²⁸ There have been many cases indicating social integration and interaction, including marriages, adoptions, buying real estate, deaths and burials in Tunisian territory, etc.

was able to provide strong support for revolutionaries in eastern Libya, and the harmony indicates the patriotic dimensions that motivate this promising revolution.

The tribal *sufuf* movement in Tunisia and Libya during the 19th century





Source: Ali Abd al-Lateef Hameeda, Society, the State, and Colonialism in Libya, *op. cit.*

3- Escaping the siege: taking refuge among neighbors

Statistical estimates indicate that more than 100,000 Libyans settled in southern Tunisia during the revolution. The governorate of Tataouine holds the greatest proportion of those, and displaced Libyans preferred not to settle in Ben Qardan, which remained a region of refugee camps for non-Libyans, because of its proximity to the border – and to the gates controlled by Ghaddafi loyalists.

Furthermore, the social and economic character of the displaced Libyans explains why they preferred one region over another. Djerba and Gargees, as touristic towns, attracted the wealthy class, especially those arriving from Tripoli, while Western Mountains natives chose to settle in the governorate of Tataouine. State officials and cadres who broke with the regime went to settle in the capital, Tunis, and those engaged in the revolution remained close to the Dhuhaiba border post, which was controlled by the rebels, in order to provide them with the necessary supplies.

Statistical estimates indicate that the average size of displaced families was eight individuals, surpassing the national average of six; this was due to the nature of the political phase and the specificities of the migrants, among whom the concept of a “family” also includes certain other relatives. Moreover, the majority of refugee families were made up of women, children and the

elderly, while the majority of the youth were participating in the revolution. The Libyan families arriving in Tunisia consisted of sons, brothers, sisters, as well as their children and spouses.

The distribution of the refugees in Tunisia was dependent on the origins and the ties of the family, , as well as the extent of their savings. The vast majority prefer independent housing, access to which is facilitated by two important factors: the relatively good material situation of most families and the suitable sociological and psychological climate they found among Tunisian families, who absorbed most of the displaced and hosted them in their homes for free.²⁹

Number of Libyans in southeastern Tunisia since the February 17 Revolution

Governorate	Region	Number of Refugees
Tataouine	Tataouine	30,000
	Zahabiya	3,000
	Ramada	5,000
	Al-Samar	2,500
	Al-Bir Lahmar	2,000
	Ghemrasen	3,000
Medenine	Medanine	6,000
	Gergees	5,000
	Djerba	7,000
	Ben Qardan	2,000
Qabis	Qabis	7,000

The total number of refugees during the revolution reached 500,000, including 250,000 Libyans.

Source: Field research, supported by the estimates of the Tunisian Red Crescent Organization, June 2011.

²⁹ Despite the extension of some services to the refugees, such as the Emirati camp in Al-Dhuhaiba (1,000 refugees), the United Nations camp in Ramada (1,000 refugees), and the Qatari camp in Tataouine (1,000 refugees), the majority of families live with Tunisian households, often without any exchange of money. The head of the TNC, Mustafa Abd Al-Jaleel, confirmed the importance and scale of this hospitality in a statement to the Tunisian National Television (Saturday, June 18, 2011), when he said that the percentage of those living in camps did not exceed 4%.

I conclude that the political polarization of the tribe in Libya during the revolution engendered two distinct positions:

- A planned and programmed position mostly represented by the Libyan regime, which sought – with all the means of both violence and incentive – to mobilize the tribal structure in the service of the regime, and to confuse political opponents. This position relied on a number of ideas, visions, and slogans formulated by the discourse of Ghaddafi and reiterated at every opportunity with the support of official media and political tools – particularly the conferences of Popular Committees.
- A spontaneous position among the leaders of the new revolution, which did not rely on the tribe as a politically effective structure, but also did not attack or incite it, viewing it as an existing social datum that could perform psychological and social roles in support of the revolution, including its preservation and the expansion of its achievements. The tribe is but a social and cultural frame for the protection of individuals which has lost the political and military foundations that distinguished it until the end of the Italian occupation; it cannot, therefore, replace the role of the civic structures that will – hopefully – be established.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of collective political protest did not obscure the continuing influence of tribal identities in Libyan society, which eased the screening of positions and alignments behind one party or another. At any rate, what is clear is that tribal structures, as spheres of belonging, have been able to shield Libyan society from manifestations of religious and political extremism, which contradicts hypotheses of the infiltration of Al-Qaeda as a political/military/religious organization. Tribal identities also protected society against social instability imposed solidarity, a phenomenon specific to neither eastern nor western Libya, nor even the country as a whole, but also including the entire provincial environment, as demonstrated by relations of solidarity with Tunisians.

III- The clannish (*or aroush*) phenomenon, the ‘surprises’ of post-revolution Tunisia

Modernized civic structures, despite their importance in post-independence Tunisian society for over half a century, were not able to abolish or replace all communal structures. The individual in local communities, despite changing conditions in terms of work, education, and social stature, remains under the authority of the organic community. Instances of soliciting favors from both close and distant relatives, or people from the same region, and the spread of political clientelist relations have continued to represent the easiest path for individuals to further their careers, more so than other paths determined by relations of citizenship and civic behavior. In addition, political competition in these societies does not always take place in these societies

according to formal laws and regulations, but instead within unseen networks of customs, relations, and favors based on personal and traditional ties.³⁰

What appear to observers both inside and outside Tunisia today as “surprises” (prompting some to fall silent and others to seek justifications and ignore reality), provide what I would describe – from an epistemological perspective – as an opportunity to re-question and contemplate new mechanisms and visions.³¹

The political environment following Tunisia’s January 14, 2011 revolution may have been among the main catalysts for this opportunity, due to the resultant freedoms. Political liberation provides the potential for epistemological liberation, which – in the context of my research subject – is mainly related to freeing Arab and Maghreb sociology from generalizations and value judgments built up as the discipline was being established in the local environment and its questions were being formulated. This process took place under the influence of intellectual and political ideologies, especially that of modernity, which was adopted – with great enthusiasm – following independence by the former regime in both stages (Bourguiba and Ben Ali), as well as by intellectual and political elites in general. But this opportunity may not be exploited and could therefore be lost, as Tunisian sociologist Abd Al-Wahhab Bouhdeeba has warned.

What some see as the surprising outbreak of “*Aroush*” (tribal) conflicts in Tunisia is a reflection of the failure to present a clear picture of the forms and models of the evolution of Tunisian society and its internal dynamics. Analysis of society has not taken place on society’s own terms, but according to interpretations influenced by projections, generalizations, and reductionism. For instance, the Tunisian countryside, despite the passing of more than half a century since the founding of the Tunisian University, has not been subjected to an exhaustive scholarly examination to accumulate social science knowledge that might have informed a consensus description of its stages of development, its characteristics, and its future prospects.

It appears that the drive of modernization programs, questions of development, and the construction of modern state institutions – with their expressed intent to build a new society – were built on the establishment of national identity while eliminating traditional links

³⁰ Mohammad Najib Boutalib, *The Sociology of the Tribe in the Arab Maghreb*, 2nd edition, (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2009) Op-Cit, p. 14.

³¹ The amount of scholarly studies on the tribal phenomenon in Tunisia remains miniscule compared to other states such as Morocco and Libya. With the exception of a few works by a number of – mostly foreign – historians and anthropologists, specialized studies could almost be counted on the fingers of one hand. There are good reasons to explain this shortage, chiefly political and ideological effects that (in one way or another) directed research topics toward issues of development, urbanization, immigration, family, and culture. Some of the studies that attempted to examine the theme of the tribe in its political dimensions were also dominated by a pontificating developmental tendency. The same could be said regarding the political religious phenomenon. In his article, “The Political, the Social, and the Cultural in the Revolution” (*Arab Affairs*, Issue no. 146, p. 25), Abd Al-Ilah BelKziz notes the transitional situation endured by the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, and does in a manner that may surprise and confuse analysts.

represented in clans, leadership, regions, families, and notables. This ideological complex may have led to exaggeration in spreading the notion that the Tunisian society had radically changed, and that it had entered a new phase with the establishment of a modern national state.

Despite the state's adoption of comprehensive modernization, and its success in building some civic institutions (which remained vulnerable to social conflicts, especially those described in the regions of the interior as "*aroush*" conflicts), organs of supervision and other institutions are still exposed to serious challenges, some of which reach the level of insurgency. As a result, these organs representing the state remain dependent on policies of postponement, avoidance, and marginalization, preventing in-depth studies of problems and the treatment of root causes.

Could these "surprises" (i.e. the recent outbreak of tribal tensions in some regions of Tunisia) be a reaction to the destruction visited upon local societies, especially under the tenure of former President Habib Bourguiba? Could the remnants of the tribal dynamic, which today we see exploding in various parts of the country, be a reaction against the "drama" of modernization following intense pressures during the phases of colonialism and the establishment of the national state? This hypothesis is supported by the manner in which the national state confronted traditional structures, i.e. with aggressive interventionism, as was demonstrated by the destruction of the *sheikhdum* (area governed by a sheikh or a local chief) institution, which was replaced in the late 1960s by mayoralties, by the manner in which the party entered the countryside, and by Bourguiba's speeches, which were often provocative. In addition, popular associations and organizations were subjected to dissolutions, forcible mergers, and other symbolically violent moves that were described by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, in his study of Algerian society, as processes of "uprooting". There are significant signs that can be invoked to explain the failure of the project of change adopted by the nation-state (in both stages since its founding) in abolishing and destroying traditional structures, most notably tribal ones. This kind of deconstruction is a complex undertaking if it does not take into account psychological and cultural aspects that represent the remnants of primary identities among individuals. While the state was able, to mimic colonialism by deconstructing the economic, military, and political bases of Tunisian tribes through a series of procedures – mainly administrative re-districting and the abolishing of the unsettled Bedouin lifestyle, replacing it with settled agriculture, spreading education and encouraging the activities of civil and political societies – it remained incapable of eliminating all aspects of tribal belonging: cultural, psychological and social. This explains the weakness of political performance and the slow pace of economic and social transformations, especially in the countryside, in addition to the stumbling of development projects and their adoption of a interventionist top-down character.

This deficiency in the country's center, south, and northwest led to the replication of social marginalization on the regional level and that of urban migrants, which facilitated the resuscitation of organic relations, whose protests did not take place without an invoking tribal

legacy, making it in some areas a hallmark of regional demands. This stage was an expression of the slow pace of national integration, fed by dangerous regional and local tendencies. This was dramatically expressed by sporting events that reignited the conflict on a weekly basis.

The process of recasting tribal awareness and action relies on subtle, unorganized and occasional appearances of the tribe in various manifestations, including political and union elections, ways of managing communal land ownership, and migration toward the cities and abroad. Such mechanisms can also be seen in the widespread instances of support and solidarity outside of the traditional geographical locale of the tribe.

1. The position of the tribe in contemporary Tunisian society

While the tribe still maintains its historic and cultural structures in some Maghreb states, especially Libya and Morocco, its presence in Tunisia has been exposed to a genuine process of fragmentation that has undermined its material, political, and military foundations.

While some aspects of tribal structure have survived in Tunisia's center and south through the continuation of the phenomenon of *aroush* estates – which still represents a major foundation for the reproduction of shared awareness and feelings among the tribal group – this does not constitute a threat to the structure of the new society is characterized by cultural, social, and political integration among population groups. It was not a coincidence that conflicts between tribal groups erupted in specific regions that were subjected to economic and political marginalization for many decades.

Despite the edification of the state apparatus in all regions, its intervention (through development programs in various parts of the country), and the media blackout accompanying most of these moves (which was an attempt to show the might of the state and its presence), protest movements with tribal catalysts did not disappear from the political arena in the center and south.

Certain events related to land holdings, and the legal disputes over them between individuals and groups, lead to significant conclusions that explain the reasons for the revival of struggle between local groups in the current era, including:

- The conflict between these groups takes a clear tribal form that engenders alliances which often invoke the local history of social struggle in the provinces.
- These conflicts take forms ranging from legal disputes and threats to the use of extreme violence and even the waging of actual battles; but such conflicts often wane due to the presence of mediators who prevent their development into factors of fragmentation; nevertheless, there is no risk of return to the tribal entities because they have lost their material and organizational foundations, given the radical shift that Tunisian society has undergone over the past century.

- These tensions tend to appear during specific seasons and occasions –political, natural, social ... etc.
- Representatives of the state deal with these tensions according to political agendas that adopt negligence, postponing resolution, marginalization, or mediation and confession.

Given these recurrent phenomena, the position of the state appears to rely on political opportunism and both direct and indirect manipulation of these tensions in a manner that serves the security and stability of the state, even though that stability is ephemeral and unable to conceal local animosities.

The available evidence does not indicate genuine will on the part of the state and its representatives to resolve problems with tribal roots in some regions; these local tensions are often addressed with methods that lack seriousness in seeking solutions and holding dialogues with the real actors. This process is not without confusion and grave pitfalls, such as those associated with granting official recognition to representatives of tribal groups and holding dialogue with them despite their not enjoying legitimate representativeness. This official recognition also points to a contradiction in the ideology and policies of the national state toward the traditional components of society, which might lead to what I may call “the pitfall of recognition”, which would set a precedent for further recognitions and concessions that may reach the point of political recognition through the implicit acquiescence to electoral candidates representing tribes, *aroush* and families that monopolize traditional leadership in regions and provinces with strong tribal legacies.

Nonetheless, this reality does not deny, the fact that Tunisian society is distinct – compared to other Arab societies – in the fields of cultural, political and social integration, and in the capacity of the state and the elites to create a homogenous national identity. In Tunisian society, it is difficult to find tribal or ethnic divisions except in the microsociological sense, in some small marginal areas, or in few occasional instances. The social makeup does not indicate the possibility of dangerous divisions or destructive conflicts, a matter of consensus among most scholars and observers. The tensions observed, despite their apparent conflicts and contradictions, are part of the dynamic and mobility of society. All I can confirm in this study is that the current political situation still requires careful study to clarify existing realities, diagnose its internal dynamics, and identify the most influential factors. This would reduce the rhetoric of some observers and analysts about “surprises” and “threats”, which are often attributed to spurious reasons and causalities. As for analyses attributing the tensions to incitement by “figures of the former regime” in the context of “counter-revolution”, they tend to that lack accuracy and objectivity.

Discussing the integration of tribal groups in post-independence Tunisia must not ignore the difficulties and tensions that have slowed the process of social and political construction for six

decades. Despite the efforts of the nation-state and the political and cultural elites in order to complete this process, it remained marred by gaps in analysis, understanding, and conceptualization, including:

- Viewing the tribe in a negative light – i.e. as a cause for retarded development, stagnation, division and return to the past – while neglecting the positive roles played by the tribe, especially in terms of resisting occupation and in maintaining the cultural and social character of Tunisia.
- Ignoring reality and its conflicts and manifestations, failing to study the roots of tension and protest, and projecting pre-judgments on reality which assume that processes of modernization have radically changed society.
- Acquiescing in the city imposing its culture on the countryside, engendering feelings of psychological, social, and cultural injustice in some marginalized regions and provinces.

Most regions with a tribal heritage were not subjected to radical transformations in their economic and social structures that would constitute ruptures with social models linked – in the collective memory – to mechanisms of primitive nomadic and agricultural existence. Actors in these regions found no alternative to their self-satisfaction except by relying on tribal histories that tend toward independence, protest, and threatening violence in the face of the state, whose existence is still linked in local memory to the model of the “*makhzan*” and hegemony over regions viewed as mere sources of tax revenue, which explains the weakness of the state’s legitimacy in these parts.

2. The drama of the tribe as part of the drama of modernization: reviving what was destroyed by force

Some sociological works on the tribal question in Arab Maghreb societies attribute the resurgence of tribal consciousness in social behavior and political practice today to the eruption of social struggles once pressure is applied on societies.³² These struggles had been neglected by the nation-states and civic political movements, which led national liberation, rebuilding and modernization in a manner containing considerable symbolic violence.

Latent tendencies tend to reappear, and the eruptions originate in social alienation and uprooting³³, which was exerted on the social fabric from above in order to alter it. Following the logic of this analytical statement leads me to say that this pressure explains the mercurial nature

³² Mohammad Najib Boutalib, *The Sociology of the Tribe in the Arab Maghreb*, 2nd edition, (Arabic), Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2009, op-cit, p. 10.

³³ Bourdieu, Pierre, and Sayad, Abdelmalek, *Le déracinement: la crise de l’agriculture traditionnelle en Algérie*, (Paris: éditions de Minuit, 1964).

of new manifestations of tribal feelings and behavior in non-tribal societies, including in the diaspora, where the intimate family ties of immigrants to Europe plays a major role in the reproduction of the traditional culture of the village and the clan. Domestically, this manifests itself in the increasingly common practice of relying on traditional support, e.g. taking refuge among the extended family living in modern cities.

On a different front, another hypothesis may help explain what appears to be a contradiction in political practice in light of the developments ushered in by the new atmosphere of freedom, especially freedom of expression. To what extent do the oppressed – consciously or unconsciously – reproduce an oppressive culture?

The period since the January 14 revolution has witnessed confrontations between inhabitants of various neighborhoods, villages, and cities, as well as the re-emergence of provincial and tribal tendencies, which Bourguiba had tried to replace with the idea of national unity. However, his programs failed to eliminate tribal structures due to the provocative style he adopted in provinces with strong tribal legacies, such as Al-Qasrain (Al-Farafeesh tribe), Qafsa and Sidi Bouzid (Al-Hamama tribe), Al-Qairawan (Jlas tribe), the two adjacent districts Medanine and Tataouine (Warghama tribe), and others.³⁴

As for the “November 7 era” (the reign of Ben Ali), perspectives on the tribal question were notably absent, with the domination of a pragmatic and formalist political tendency in an atmosphere of promises of change that were largely confined to appearances. Despite the optimism at the beginning of the effectuation of reforms, especially those relating to uneven development across regions, developmental disparities actually widened, which perpetuated the phenomenon of protest. This included tribal tactics to protect individuals from the authorities by resorting to collective protest that often took on a familial or clannish character. In most tribal protests witnessed by the two adjacent districts Tataouine and Medanine in recent years, the security authorities were unable to arrest or prosecute any of the protestors.

3. The new political actors and tribal familiarities

At the level of official discourse, all political and unionist organizations in Tunisia refuse to rely on the tribal component.³⁵ On the practical level, however, this component is often present in the

³⁴ Tunisian intellectual Mohammad Ali Al-Yusufi says in an interview published in *Al-Sabah* newspaper (April 10, 2011): “The problem is that when we inhabit the urban centers where tribal links have dissolved, we assume that the entire country resembles its capital and large cities. The old culture is reproducing itself in the absence of a real alternative culture. All the decisions of Bourghiba were top-down. Such decisions can only work under the authority of a dictatorship ...”

³⁵ Rachid Al-Ghannushi, leader of the Nahda Party, expressed this sentiment in his visits to the provinces, especially when he toured the region of the Mineral Basin. At the Ibn Manzhar House of Culture in the city of Qafsa (on Sunday, April 10, 2011), he exclaimed: “The revolution rejects all manifestations of tribal conflict and *Jahili* (pre-Islamic) fanaticism, for this represents a threat to the social fabric”.

methods of political and unionist activism, especially during electoral campaigns and the formulation of alliances and agreements. Tribal bonds appear to be stronger on the local level in political discourse and practice, a fact that was known among scholars and political actors during both the Bourguiba and Ben Ali eras. Since January 14, 2011, the escalating conflicts indicated to the perpetual importance of intimate familial identities and tribal alignments, especially through social engagement with some new organizations that have appeared on the political scene.

Aligning behind relatives (*“les proches”*) – blood relations or otherwise (through loyalty, neighborly relations, or tribal coexistence) – has become no less important than ideological, occupational, and political alignments during this phase. This can be justified on the sociological front for two major reasons. The first relates to the nature of the close relations embedded in local identities dominated by a culture of “the relatives are more deserving of our vote.” The second relates to the nature of the escalating struggles when society is experiencing a state of high emotion, and when individuals and communities want to prove their presence and change the conditions that have been in stasis for decades or even centuries.

It was natural that this struggle to prove oneself would escalate during this phase, when new hopes are emerging, individual and communal freedoms have been liberated from censorship and supervision, and social ambitions are taking rein. This exceptional and explosive historical moment foretells possibilities for micro-sociological shifts, turning many individuals who were social actors in specific fields (justice, education, students, media, unemployment, etc.) into political actors, each according to his or her own environment and the extent of opportunities provided by the revolution.

However, the conditions for exit from a state of political latency and marginalization differ from one individual to another. Some exploit the absence of authority, while others benefit from the freedom of expression, and others yet are prompted by ambition or adventure to take specific actions, and so on. At any rate, the positive facet of this historic moment is that new political actors are mobilized within a new phenomenon, which reflects the rise in the rate of political participation, especially among the youth.

4. The rise of organic loyalties in the context of political liberation

The wave of protest that accompanied and followed the revolution has been one of the most important forms of expression ever deployed in Tunisia. What also deserves mention, however, is that these protests have included an unfamiliar extremism, one with a local or regional character that sometimes reaches the level of narrow tribal behaviors that surpass their local contexts and enter the realm of political and social demands.

The intellectual model set by Al-Jabiri in his “The Arab Political Mind” could be useful in analyzing this matter. According to Al-Jabiri, the foundations of Arab political mind are: the

tribe, the dogma, and the booty.³⁶ Some of the demands of these protestors appear to involve a quest for “booty” from the revolution, primarily in the form of material spoils in the role oil plays in other Arab cases. In the Tunisian case, this involves phosphates in the Mineral Basin and both oil and gas in the southeast. These resources form the axis of negotiations for the protesting youth, who demand that priority be placed on their employment in these projects before those originating from other parts of the country – enshrining a new regionalism that contrasts with the more familiar version.

Such tendencies among some communities in certain regions have led to the expulsion of workers originating from other parts of the country. The mentality of booty is clearly seen in the transformation of the protest environment in some regions into the blocking of national highways and the occupation of public spaces, as well as the sabotage of economic activity. The situation appears to be normal, representing extreme protest and a desire to prove oneself after decades of marginalization that have led to rampant unemployment and poverty in these regions. However, these manifestations have raised concerns among public opinion that may threaten the achievements of the revolution.

The spread of protests affecting economic activity benefitted from the protesters’ weak political organization and, in a tense media environment, the dissemination of rumors that sometimes amounts to incitement. It is evident that, in such conditions, intimate organic relations would find space for revival through online social networks amid the new phenomenon of unfettered free expression. This transformative moment was accompanied by an undermining of the so-called “prestige of the state” and its administrative and security institutions, providing an opportunity to express repressed demands and unspoken desires. At this point, the overwhelming urge to press demands reaches unreasonable limits, including instances of using force, threatening chaos, sabotaging the system, and otherwise breaking laws.

These identity-based movements are characterized by the fact that they do not rely on the logic of argument, representativeness, or elections, as was usually the case with traditional communities during times of tension. Due to the current exceptional conditions, these movements often rely on traditional means similar to those employed during tribal wars, battles, and raids, such as the use of sticks and other weapons, in addition to the incitement of feelings of blood loyalty and reviving a local oral history that supports the tribal spirit that had been fragmented by modernization and the uprooting of local structures due to top-down development and political tutelage. The lack of real representation in many internal regions has brought local conflicts and tensions to the surface and furthered the idea of resorting to tribal representation in “the councils of the protection of the revolution”.

³⁶ Mohammad ‘Abid Al-Jabiri, *The Arab Political Mind, its Determinants and Manifestations* (Arabic), Casablanca: Arab Cultural Center, 1990. P. 102.

The political dynamic since the revolution carries several indicators of the persistence of the tribal catalyst, including:

- Enrolment in some parties (now numbering more than 100) has taken on a familial and regional character. Many of these organizations rely on organic links in recruiting and mobilization, especially the practice referred to in Tunisia as “*benamism*” (*cousinism* in Arabic).
- The rallying of political support and the recruitment of members by these organizations have led to their accepting behaviors that are banned in their stated principles, such as the inclusion of figures who were active in political parties whose activities were marred with suspicion.
- Tribal loyalties have been stirred by some actors in the countryside providing their relatives with premises to carry out their activities, means of transportation, and guesthouses, which has caused confusion in the alignment of political positions and stances. The long-awaited leadership and political gains push relatives to set aside their political differences.

5. The dimensions of tribal incidents after the revolution

Following the January 14 Revolution, Tunisia witnessed bloody tribal (*aroush*) incidents, especially in the South. Since then, the protests struck the Mineral Basin in the governorate of Qafsa, especially in Al-Mutalawwi, Al-Sanad, and Mudhaiylla. Tribal tensions also erupted elsewhere, including the cities of Al-Nufaida, Tunis, Qasr Hilal, and Jibnyana.

Given the factors that stirred these tensions, and by examining the forms of violence practiced before, during, and after the revolution, it could be argued that the main reason for these tensions lies in the lack of integration of communities in both their original locations of settlement and their new ones. The roots of this deficiency can be traced to forms of economic, social, and political marginalization, and to the spread of deprivation, poverty, and developmental unevenness among different regions of the country.³⁷

In the capital, confrontations broke out among inhabitants of some poorer neighborhoods who are involved in the informal and unregulated commerce that has come to dominate popular markets. The center of Tunis saw quarrels between unlicensed hawkers, natives of Jalma in Sidi Bouzid, and youth cliques from the districts of Bab al-Jadeed, Nahj al-Jazeera and others. Some

³⁷ Al-Habib Al-Darwish, “Local Development in Tunisia” in: Munir Al-S’idani (editor), *Local Society and Development: Strategies and Challenges*, (Arabic) Safaques University Sociology Department 2006. P. 99. Also see: Robert Chambers, *Développement rural, la pauvreté cachée*, (édition KARTHLA, CTA, 1990).

of these incidents, including riots, involved the rallying of clannish and/or regional loyalties. Other areas saw instances of illegal building and the blocking of public roads. The revolutionary environment is allowing some to break the law and take refuge in primary identities, following the dictates of an old tribal adage: “count your men, then go to the water source.”³⁸

The Tunisian experience also has exhibited new and unfamiliar customs and behaviors, which could be described as “the tribes of professions.” Organizational and political liberation has led to the appearance of unions and syndicates within institutions that did not have such organizations beforehand, especially the security services, customs, and prisons. Sociologist Michel Maffesoli had referred to this phenomenon in a different, albeit similar, context in his book “Le Temps des Tribus.”

A- The significance of the events of Mutalawwi

The Mutalawwi city (in Qafsa governorate) , which is part of the Mineral Basin, saw violent confrontations between members of the Jiraidiya and Awlad Bou Yehya tribes in which rifles and other non-firearms were used. These events led to rioting and the looting of both public and private property that caused considerable damage and engulfed all the districts of the city. On June 4 and 5 alone, 13 individuals were killed and more than 100 injured, while another 100 were arrested.

The tribal and regional makeup of the Mineral Basin region

REGION	TRIBAL CONSITUENCY							
Al-Mutalawwi	Al-Magharba	Al-Trabulsiya	Awlad Bouyehiya	Al-Khamailiy	Awlad Salama	Al-Jaraidiya	Al-Sawafa	
Umm al-Arayis	Awlad Salama				Al-Jaraidiya			
Al-Radaiyf	Awad Ubaid		Al-Harbiya		Awlad Bouyehiya		Awlad Salama	
Al-Mdhaiyella	Awlad Mammara	Al-Akarma	Al-Qatariya	Awlad Tlaijan	Awlad Bouyehiya	Al-Maqadmiya	Awlad Salam	Al-Jawabir

³⁸ Other instances of clashes with tribal and/or regional characters took place in Qasr Hilal (a coastal industrial city) and nearby Al-Makneen, where hundreds of people demonstrated and incited violence (*Al-Sabah* newspaper, May 1, 2011). Similar incidents took place in Al-Qasrain, Al-Hamma, Mukathar, and others. In Jibniana, clashes broke out on August 4 between groups from Jibniana (an urban center) and Al-Masatriya (a rural area), leading to extreme violence and a destabilization, prompting *Al-Shuruq* newspaper to headline “The curse of tribalism strikes again” (August 5, 2011).

The table above shows the variety in the origins of the inhabitants of the Mineral Basin who gathered, over a century ago, around the phosphate mines that transformed the region into an urban one centered on a dynamic economic magnet.

The region attracted a large and varied labor force from the internal and coastal regions. With time, the population adapted to its surroundings, leading to an active political and unionist movement during the eras of colonialism and independence. Coexistence and neighborly relations engendered deep integration, which can be seen through intermarriages, collegiality, and common action.

Like any other heterodox constituency that witnesses perpetual dynamicity and competition (rendered more acute due to economic crises, the economic marginalization of the region, and the clamping down on its political activism), an impression was created among the ruling circles that the region was a hotbed of opposition, which only increased its developmental marginalization.³⁹

B- Employment and the system of tribal power-sharing deals

Oral history recounts that during the 1970s, a dispute took place between local officials and notables from the governorate of Qafsa over the tribal identity of the individual who would receive a ministerial post that had been promised to the region. When conflict between the region's tribes escalated, a powerful local official implored the prime minister to divide the promised post into several lower-level positions so that all clans could be satisfied. This anecdote bears important significance for the explanation of local struggles among tribal groups, and of the fact that the enrollment of south Tunisian tribes in the administrative apparatus of the regime, its party, and its organizations in no way meant that they had abandoned their sub-national identities. The principle of power-sharing deals was regularly adopted by the state to satisfy the largest number of actors and to win their loyalty.

This principle also was evident in the relationships of influential political and unionist groups in the Qafsa region with state representatives on the one hand, and with officials of the Qafsa Phosphates Company on the other. Those with influence in local groups, with the mediation of party and union representatives in the region, recommend candidates for official posts according to a set quota, a method that has been employed for many years and persisted

³⁹ News of these violent incidents caused reactions among political parties, including the Nahda Party, which described them as "regional sedition", while the Progressive Unionist People's Movement warned of the threat of such clashes spreading to other parts of the province. The National Association for Human Rights, on the other hand, claimed that a foreign conspiracy was the cause of these events, one that must be exposed and foiled.

following the revolution but faced some criticism that was fed – according to observers – by “false rumors” aimed at incitement.

Neither national public opinion nor the media supported the maintenance of these traditions, and many observers never imagined that local unions and the organizations of the ruling party would adopt a system of power-sharing deals based on clannish principles and acknowledging the representativeness and presence of the tribe by reproducing its structures.

In other regions, not too far from Qafsa (Kabylie, Medanine, Qabis, Tataouine, Sidi Bouzid), similar practices are supported by an influential presence and unmitigated acknowledgment of structures built decades ago: so-called “Councils for Managing Socialist Lands”, whose members are elected according to inherited tribal customs, are charged with coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture, especially regarding the resolution of land disputes among local groups.

This exposes the rampant disregard of reality by some analysts as they describe the transformations in the structures of contemporary Tunisian society and its social and economic shifts. Some view acknowledgments of the tribal factor by the state as mere exceptions having to do with isolated pockets of reactionary behavior that have no bearing on the overall societal progress.

Analyzing the political dimensions of this phenomenon leads to a focus on socio-political and socio-economic indices relating to the notion of the “lack of integration.” Western schools in the social sciences provide us with multiple examples of this phenomenon; notably, the case of Chicago following the Great Depression and World War II, when industrialization led to a massive wave of migration toward the city, which began to host communities of different races and ancestries. One of the byproducts of the broad process of industrialization was an increase in violence caused by emerging imbalances in cultural, social, and economic standards. This led specialists in social psychology and industrial sociology to form the theory of integration, which offered explanations for, and solutions to, the social problems in Chicago at the time.

Returning to our subject, away from academic projections and mechanistic explanations, and in light of the aforementioned theory, events involving tribal groups in some Tunisian regions lead to the following conclusions:

- Not everything that appears to be tribal is actually so. Many of the groups involved in the current struggle have no historical tribal legacy, such as Al-Jaraidiya in Al-Mutalawwi, who originally hail from Jareed, a non-tribal region.

- The lack of social, economic, and political integration⁴⁰ among population groups of varying origins in many villages and towns, whether engendered in a programmed or unintentional manner, explains the non-cohesion of these groups and their lack of assimilation despite proximity and neighborly relations. The situation is further fed by developmental deficiency and economic scarcity, in addition to political pressures and censorship. During crises, all of these factors lead individuals to seek refuge within their primary identity groups.

Conclusion

The political dimensions of the stirring of tribal tendencies in the region: comparative conclusions (Libya/Tunisia)

1. The Arab region is currently witnessing movements, uprisings, and revolutions that promise fundamental political transformations relating to both the nature of the state and the nature of political society. Despite these transformations, the tribal factor has not been absent from the political scene, taking dangerous roles such as interference in political events that took a violent form.

The tribal factor is widespread in the Arab world, and methods of dealing with the tribe differ substantially from region to another, with its presence ranging from that of acknowledged and influential political actor to that of a mere cultural and psychological element, shaping affinities that affect the political scene from afar.

Given this notable presence and variety, the question appears to be in need of further investigation and analysis, a task that can only be delegated to the social sciences and humanities, which are still seeking their place in the Arab countries. This research mission will probably be effectuated by the nascent Arab research centers and observatories.

2. The presence of the tribal factor in the political life of the Maghreb region appears to be linked to the state's attitude toward it, and to the nature of the state's visions and programs regarding the place and role of tribal identity in the contemporary period. Here the situations of the two cases under examination are different. In the Tunisian case, decades of policies seeking to demolish and fragment traditional structures have led to a near-total transformation of the social

⁴⁰ It is evident that young men in Tunisia are engaging in tribal violence in a spontaneous manner. What prompts this educated youth to turn the educational institution that has taught them, and their parents, civic educational lessons, the principles of citizenship, and the values of modernization for over thirty years into a miniature tribal warzone? Leading to the closure of the school for weeks and the imposition of a curfew over their district? (2 dead and 43 injured). For further information on the indices of local and regional development in Tunisia, see: Amor Belhedi (coordination), «Quelques aspects du développement régional et local en Tunisie», *Cahiers du CERES* N° 20, 1988.

structure and its replacement with solid national and civic structures. However, as a result of the weakness of the programs of political change within the state and the inconsistency of its social policies, especially developmental programs, Tunisia was not spared some tremors resulting from desires for social justice between regions and provinces. More so than an expression of the need to re-acknowledge traditional structures, including the tribe, this allows us to safely dismiss the possibility of the tribe's return to the political scene in Tunisia.

In Libya, on the other hand, because of the stated policies of the regime in acknowledging tribal structures, allying itself with them, and mobilizing them in the service of its security and survival, these structures maintained a strong presence despite the undermining of some of their mechanisms. This presence is especially strong on the levels of social, political, and cultural action, prompting some analysts to fear the return of regional divisions and the hegemony of the historical components of Libyan society, which continue to await an opportunity to challenge the state.

These fears are intensified by the weakness of the political construction of Libyan civil society, and by the frailty of official and opposition political organizations that might provide political alternatives following the revolution.

3. Revolutions help conceal manifestations of social and regional divisions due to unity of purpose toward great challenges. This usually leads to the spread of tendencies of national solidarity, facilitating political and social assimilation despite the pluralism promised by a democratic revolution, with the possibility of competition among national programs and projects, thus enriching the political dynamic. In Libya, solidarity and unity were clearly exhibited between the inhabitants of the eastern regions (Benghazi, Darna, Ajdabiya) and the western ones (Nalut, Gharian, al-Zintan, al-Zawiya).

In this regard, hopes for political freedom and social justice ushered in by the revolution after decades of political repression and social and economic confusion may lead to the edification of patriotic feelings and greater solidarity and unity. But these will not be immune to threats and difficulties imposed by the nature of the military conflict, as well as the potential reactions later on, including tendencies toward accountability and revenge. There is no doubt that the revolution, after its victory, will require intense programs for the rehabilitation of human resources, the building of a new national consciousness, and the treating of the wounds and other repercussions of the civil war.

In Tunisia, on the other hand, the results of long-term civic action, and the specificity of the former political regime, appear sufficient to shield society from the tensions that could be incited by tribalism. Despite the tensions and inconsistencies involved, the march, since independence, of building national elites and their organizations eventually succeeded in undermining the foundations of despotism and regionalism.

Among the most important demands raised by the revolution was equality among regions. Acknowledging the phenomenon of regionalism is not equivalent to acknowledging the phenomenon of tribalism. Nevertheless, regionalism and its associated economic and social injustices allowed tribalism to emerge as one of the expressions of opposition to those injustices. The general national consensus on rejection of the events of the Mineral Basin, coupled with the initiatives presented by some parties and intellectuals to investigate the roots and origins of the phenomenon – in order to fully resolve it – is a positive sign indicating the desire to place the dynamic of social transformation on the right track.

Nonetheless, diagnosing reality and tracking its interactions confirm the presence of confusion in both cases under examination, especially the Tunisian one. This can be attributed to the fact that the perceptions of social and economic transformations are still not subjected to national and scientific studies and reports. This situation has led to considerable hypocritical tendencies in the political discourse, as well as the sociological one, as a tool for political actors who raise the slogans of change in denying responsibility. This confusion, mixed with an elitist tendency that overlooks reality, has led to an avoidance of objective and scholarly analysis that could lead to embarrassing conclusions.

4. Based on the foregoing, continuing to ignore and overlook reality could lead to dangers, chief among them losing control over the country's political directions. The challenges facing these societies require the use of knowledge and science to study the paths of evolution, uncover threatening phenomena, and eliminate obstacles to progress, including:

- The risk of the spread of political opportunism with conflicts of interest among some actors seeking to extract benefits from the revolutions. Already there is evidence of this kind of instrumentalism, manifested by the fluidity of political positions, the seeking of money, narrow interests and denying the past. This applies to both cases under study.
- The possibility of the revival of old alliances, and the stirring of racial and cultural sedition. This relates chiefly to the secessionist current and the cultural revival of Amazigh identity due to external catalysts, which is made clear by multiple media reports discussing mountain areas in Libya and Tunisia. The situation requires constant awareness of outside schemes that seek the fulfillment of foreign interests.
- The threats posed by the project of fragmentation⁴¹ being promoted by extremists in Western decision-making circles. This project threatens Libya more than others because

⁴¹ In a study of Middle Eastern politics at the University of Cambridge, expert Khalid Hroub points to division and fragmentation as potential repercussions of the Arab revolutions, warning: "it appears that the threat of geographic division to one extent or another is present in Libya and Yemen and even Syria; the faltering regimes in these countries have labored to incite tribal, ethnic, and sectarian conflicts in the course of their crazed defense of themselves [and] the collapsing regimes in Libya and Yemen used the card of division, threatening it openly and without change, with the political and national discourse of both regimes relying on a hateful tribal and regional

the Libyan case presents experiences of secession into older entities that are not too far removed in the past. This potential is fed by the frailty of national civic organizations, whose resources remain modest compared to the three main threats: the tribe, Salafi Islam, and the military boot. This calls, with urgency, for the rapid emergence of organizations and movements on the Libyan scene to protect the achievements of the revolution and secure its path.

5. The political future of the region appears to be linked to the nature of the ongoing transformations, and to the nature of the elites that will emerge from this phase – elites that appear to be endowed with a rich activist experience. As such, the future will depend on the capacity of these elites and their organizations to manage conflicts and absorb contradictions. This can only take place through political programs based on dialogue and an acknowledgment of the collective role of all the actors believing in the necessity of change. This process requires an atmosphere of free expression, the lifting of the barrier of fear, and abstaining from deal-making, especially formal and informal tribal power-sharing deals. Such measures would help increase the rate of political participation, especially among the youth. Furthermore, there is no reason to believe that the wave of demands and social, political, and religious protest – no matter how heterodox and persistent they turn out to be – will lead to the fragmentation of society and its division, as long as the processes of change and protest are taking place within the framework of laws and regulations that everyone agrees to respect, especially that the Libyan Revolution is flanked by two promising counterparts.

6. If one were to approach the question of building post-revolution political communities with optimism, one would say that the current political transformations will necessarily lead to the recasting of national identity in a manner that strengthens it and aids in its dissemination. Such a process would constitute a “fourth” shock to the Arab tribe (after those of Islam, colonialism, and the nation-state); will this “final blow” arrive, this time, from the Arab Maghreb?

These revolutions will contribute to the recasting of the social structures of the societies in which prevail. The tribal component is still resisting the attempts of state and society to end instances of complicity with tribal structures and their alignments; similarly, the power of the tribe will attempt to resist the spread of patriotic sentiments and broader popular engagement in the process of change. Achieving the goals of change will be conditional on a number of factors, including the democratic construction of solid civic institutions.

As a general rule, the post-independence Arab state has suffered a perpetual crisis of legitimacy, which was reflected in its relationship with the traditional forces in society. The state never attempted a rupture with these actors, preferring tactics that varied from dialogue to political

rhetoric that incites a part of the country against the other part.” (See: “Arab Revolutions and the Arab Regime: Deconstruction and Reconstruction” in *Arab Affairs*, issue 146, summer 2011, p. 14.

employment and mobilization, adopting the logic of power-sharing deals and tribal quotas as well as that of the “dual discourse”. Thus, the outward slogans and policies of the state did not match reality, especially the notion of the “nation-state”.

In Libya, the former regime’s approach to the tribe ranged between different extremes – flirting and aggression, employment and persecution – which led to an imbalanced relationship between the two sides: acknowledgment and political employment on one hand, and negligence, intimidation and violence on the other. These policies led to a society lacking in civic organizations (whose necessity is made very clear today), leading to wagers on regime-change being linked more closely to the outside than to domestic actors, despite the apparent movement of resistance and rebellion.

Reassuring elements remain dominant over risk factors due to the overwhelming tendency among the current popular movements to seek unity and solidarity in Libyan society rather than fragmentation, despite the tragic conditions of the military conflict. The rebels were able to respond to the incitement for division fed by the regime through its “Congress of the Tribes” with the slogan “Libya is one tribe”. This internal cohesion remains in place as alternative institutions are gradually being built.

In Tunisia, on the other hand, the tribal tendency reappeared after a period of hibernation, and despite top-down attempts to uproot it. Furthermore, as political actors undergo a phase of ebullition, they struggle to impose their respective visions or seek novel formulas for consensus; under such conditions, they may not refrain from employing all the resources existent in society, including intimate and organic links represented by regional and tribal tendencies.

Among the positive signs embedded in the wave of change sweeping the Arab region is the fact that the ongoing popular revolutions allow a historic opportunity to re-read and understand reality. In a similar vein, revolutions allow the new actors the opportunity to recast this reality and to formulate plans in order to confront the challenges of the future with a new horizon – free of the illusions and mentality of the post-independence state, which has ruled for long and accomplished very little. These new horizons may provide Arabs with a chance to leave a substantial mark in history.

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