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***"Libya: from one revolution to another"***

***"Libia: de una revolución a otra"***

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**Abstract:** The revolution that overthrew Gaddafi's regime in 2011 was deeply marked by the essential features of Libyan society, such as its lack of social integration or its widespread clientelism and tribalism. All these features are deeply rooted in the historical past of the country. The Gaddafist regime itself was also formed very much by these same factors, and at the same time, it helped to shape them to some extent. Thus, it can be said that this regime was a singular experiment of partial modernisation in combination with a pronounced conservatism with respect to other aspects of social life. Consequently, despite its enthusiastic revolutionary rhetoric, it appeared to be not very different from other regimes in the region. We believe it is on this basis that its ideology must be approached. Not only its actions in both the internal and external spheres but also those aspects that are most idiosyncratic and striking, such as the Green Book or the frequently histrionic behaviour of its leader.

**Keywords:** Libya, Gaddafi, Arab revolutions, Islam.

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## **I. The historical background of the Gaddafist revolution**

As this is being written, Libya seems to be emerging from a brief civil war. Regardless of whatever may come afterwards, the events of the past few months have taken a very different

course from those of Tunisia and Egypt. In these two countries, the overthrow of their respective leaders came quickly through a powerful mass movement that exceeded the police repression completely. As the moment for calling for the support of the Armed Forces came, the country's leadership split and the majority sector decided to get rid of both the dictator and his closest colleagues and start a process of controlled reform. The case of Libya, as well as the cases of Yemen and Syria, has been quite different. The rulers managed to retain the loyalty of the majority of the State and the military apparatus along with the support of a significant sector of the population, thus making the conflict longer and bloodier. However, in other countries such as Jordan, and especially Morocco, the governments have confronted weaker protests and were able to redirect them by means of some superficial concessions. And so we find three different dynamics. In the case of the former, whose paradigm would be represented by Morocco, the rulers retain the acquiescence of the majority of the governed through their excellent handling of clientelistic networks and an ideology which is widely accepted, albeit in different degrees, by almost the whole society (cf. Castien Maestro, 2011, p. 198-203). In the second approach, illustrated in particular by Syria, the regime has a lot less support than the former but it still retains the necessary internal cohesion in order to apply fierce and full-scale repression. When we come to analyse the third type, represented by Egypt and Tunisia, the capacity to frame the population is even lower, giving rise to a fracture within the coalition in power. Libya falls under the second model although it is also close to the third one, insofar as some members of its regime quickly change sides. It is somewhere in between the two aforementioned ideal types.

Of course, the degree of correspondence with each of these three general models is the result of a previous history during which each society and each State have acquired a particular configuration. Concerning the case of Libya, its main and distinctive characteristic has traditionally been a strong lack of internal integration. Libya is a deserted, thinly populated country. For many centuries, its population has mainly consisted of Bedouins. Both nomadic and sedentary people organised themselves in clans and tribes or in patrilineal lineages which could sometimes be in conflict and sometimes in alliance. They shared goods such as pastureland and water wells with one another and likewise, were required to help each other in case of conflict with a third party. Nevertheless, it was also possible to find other types of relations between these people. The bonds established with the mother and wife's relatives were considered to be very important, for instance. These bonds stem from the female line and were built up and undone by means of complex marital strategies which were also used to recruit military allies and economic partners. This was also the case for the regulatory trading of goods, especially with regard to providing proper hospitality to the visitor, which would often result in new marital alliances. Because of these relations, the most restrictive frameworks of lineage could be transcended and as a consequence, social structures acquired greater flexibility. They also provided unique access to the goods and the support of the partners, in contrast with the formal equality of rights and duties which is characteristic between relatives on the father's side. This is why those who had the ability to manipulate these new bonds succeeded in getting the necessary power to become leaders or *sheih*. They were surrounded by a clientele of followers linked to them through different means, not simply for the fact of sharing the same patrilineal filiation. Even this one was periodically rebuilt in order to adapt it further to the current situation (cf. Peters, 1990).

The local groups founded in this way also benefited from an almost complete independence, based in their high material self-sufficiency. Their obedience to any external authority used to be precarious and casual. Only in the narrow coastal strip sizeable cities could be found. These cities were the only places of the country that were permanently under the power of the State.

Thus, as well as in the rest of the Maghreb, there was a strong opposition between the urban areas under State control and the anarchic rural world. Most of the people saw the State as an external and hostile entity (cf. Castien Maestro, 2009, p. 82-84). A tribal setting characterised by its autonomous position with respect to external forces, with weak social and political hierarchies, its noteworthy economic egalitarianism and a relative direct democracy stood in direct opposition to the State. It was on that basis that an austere, individualist and self-assertive *ethos* was beginning to take shape (cf. Davis, 1987; Peters, 1990; Vandewalle, 2006, p. 3-5). This state of affairs lasted for centuries. Between 1551 and 1911, the country lived under Ottoman rule, which grouped the three historical regions of Tripolitania in the northwest, Fezzan in the southeast and Cyrenaica in the east, under a single province with Tripoli as its capital. The Ottoman sovereignty was always weak and unstable and was turned into a meaningless formality with no practical consequences for long periods of time (cf. As-Sheij, 1994, p. 295-323). The Italian rule ran from 1911 to 1943 and became more aggressive when Mussolini came to power in 1922. The military campaigns to subjugate the whole country lasted until 1931 and might have resulted in hundred thousand deaths as a consequence of the battles, starvation, diseases, summary executions as well as the exile of a large proportion of the survivors. Once fully in place, the colonial regime undertook significant investments in the country which promoted a remarkable economic development. But it also carried out the expropriation of the best land for the benefit of many Italian settlers and it enacted a flagrantly discriminatory legislation against the native population (cf. Bessis, 1986, p. 25-60; Djaziri, 1996, p. 37-43; Evans-Pritchard, 1963, p. 104-229; Vandewalle, 2006, p. 24-42; Wright, 1982, p. 25-43). It was, in short, a brief and traumatic period. There was no time to modernise the traditional ways of life as thoroughly as it was done in other countries of North Africa and, on the other hand, it led to a profound mistrust of modern administrations on behalf of the Libyans. Thus, this disaffection reinforced the existing anti-statist positions (Vandewalle, 2006, p. 40-42).

In contrast to this discouraging situation, Cyrenaica embarked upon a thrilling experience of social integration along the nineteenth century, in which the Sufi brotherhood *Sanussiya* was a leading player (cf. As-Sheij, 1994, p. 327-362; Evans-Pritchard, 1963; Peters, 1990, p. 10-28). This mystic order takes its name from its founder, Mohamed Ben Ali As-Sanussi (1787-1859), *sherif* or descendent of the Prophet, native from Mostanaguem, Algeria, who had spent many years in Mecca where he was influenced by Wahhabism. In short, this doctrinal movement was devoted to purify Islam of any unorthodox ascription in order to regenerate the *Umma*, the Muslim community, and strengthen it against the increasingly daring and powerful Christian enemies. One of the privileged objectives of this Wahhabi offensive was precisely the Sufi brotherhoods, whose practices were criticised as unorthodox. In this context, it is important As-Sanussi's contribution to promote a new form of Sufism, free of reprehensible excesses, in favour of a closer followup of *Shar'ia* and much more combative in the face of the european outburst. When As-Sanussi left Arabia, he decided not to go back to his native Algeria, which were already under the French occupation, and settled in Cyrenaica instead. He founded here the first *zauia* or sanctuary of his brotherhood in 1843. Starting off from this first cell and taking advantage of the good reception of his austere and strict message on the part of the Bedouins, he gradually began to spread his congregation throughout the region. He soon threw himself into the desert in order to escape from the Ottoman rule. Traditionally, Sufi mystics managed to spread their influence nearly across the whole Muslim world through their role as mediators who helped to solve conflicts between different communities. In doing so, these mystics succeeded in becoming a key element of the social fabric. However, As-Sanussi went much further as he overcame this mere arbitration role and built up a sort of dynastic and theocratic

State, superimposed to the authority of the old *sheih*. The key to his success was his skill to form part of the Bedouin social fabric. Members of the Order spread out over the tribes and recruited new followers. Additionally, he and his companions, who came from different places of the Islamic world, married women of the region's most prominent families. This fact generated a new network of kinships and connected the Order with the whole Bedouin population which was progressively being defined and disciplined.

The great achievement of Sanussya was combining the religious tie among the members of the same brotherhood with the links of parantage and marriage among the members of different clans and tribes. This would lead to a much more cohesive society and to an authority much more closely related to the population. The result was a partial overcoming of one of the old scourges of Maghrebi societies and States. Nonetheless, this strategy suffered from a clear limitation: it can hardly be implemented on a large scale. Those places out of reach of those links of parentage or not very receptive to the brotherhood's purist message were not vulnerable to fall under its political domination. Thus, although the brotherhood also established its headquarters in Tripolitania, Chad, Egypt and the rest of the countries of the Maghreb, it could not equal the political achievements obtained in Cyrenaica (Evans-Pritchard, 1963, p. 70-73). The strength shown in this region was evident during the Italian occupation. Sanussya organised a formidable resistance movement even though it ended up succumbing to the invader's material superiority. But the proven fighting spirit and strength earned Sanussi's leader and grandson of the Order's founder, Mohamed Idris (1889-1983), recognition as the king of the whole country on the part of the dignitaries of Tripolitania. This was a much richer region with twice as many dwellers as in the bastion of his brotherhood, in spite of being hampered by its endless fractional disputes. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Idris, whose relations with the British were excellent, become the best candidate to lead the new State when the Allied troops occupied the country in 1943. This new State was finally granted independence in 1951 (cf. Bessis, 1986, p. 63-75; Evans-Pritchard, 1963, p. 135-190; Wright, 1982, p. 60-76).

The newly established Kingdom of Libya was a very fragile structure (cf. Bessis, 1986, p. 79-93; Djaziri, 1996, p. 45-64; Vandewalle, 2006, p. 43-76; Wright, 1982, p. 77-118). Outside Cyrenaica and in the absence of religious bonds and links of relationship which could be activated, the new king turned out to be a stranger for many people. There hardly was a shared national identity that could be personified by the sovereign, and the majority of the population found no institutions that could take in as their own. The State fell in the hands of a small Idri's inner circle, almost all belonging to the most powerful families of Cyrenaica which had been linked to Sanussya for generations. The existing representative institutions had been stripped of meaning as a consequence of the banning of political parties and the obvious authoritarianism of the regime. At the end of the 1950s, the country became one of the main oil-exporting countries. Libya's oil was high-purity and abundant. Besides, by virtue of the fact that it is a mediterranean country, oil could be transported to Europe more cheaply and more secure than that coming from the Persian Gulf. The government was able to take advantage of these favourable conditions by taking a firm position in the face of oil companies which enabled it to sign advantageous agreements (Vandewalle, 2006, p. 53-61; Wright, 1982, p. 220-234). A rapid economic growth took place, but these new resources also strengthened the power of the ruling oligarchy and its capacity to generously reward its clientele. As in so many places, the new wealth boosted modernisation but at the same time, it exempted the country from the effort implied by a greater economic rationalisation. As a consequence, certain habits and traditional structures were reinforced. Even so, a sense of comparative grievance enhanced among the rest of the population. It did, especially, in the new and well-informed social sector which was

mainly composed of civil servants, intellectuals and military officers, many of them from a modest background but who had managed to have an education and a higher social status thanks to the new national wealth. However, they still felt overshadowed by those privileged by the regime. This first source of unrest was combined with another difficulty stemming from the pro-Western foreign policy of the government, at a moment when pan-Arabism and anti-colonialism were on the rise in the Arab world. Libya hosted US and British military bases and its government was not very enthusiastic about fighting both colonialism and Zionism. The country soon became the target of the attacks launched by Nasser. Nasserist, pan-Arabist and socialist ideology found support especially among the new *intelligentsia*. Pan-Arabism turned out to be very attractive in a country which was burdened by a weak national identity in view of its lack of internal articulation and historical tradition. Subsuming one's identity into a broader Arab identity seemed to be a good way of overcoming these local weaknesses (Martín Muñoz, 2004, p. 150). Social unrest was spreading. There were oil strikes and the government had to exert pressure in order to start a progressive withdrawal of foreign troops. But these measures failed to overcome the isolation of the Monarchy, which would be finally overthrown in 1969 following a bloodless coup d'état led by a small group of young army officers. Its leader, Muamar El Gaddafi (1942-2011), a captain who was born into a humble Bedouin family, represented a genuine referent of the emerging social sectors (cf. Arnold, 1996, p. 4-11; Djaziri, p. 65-80, 1996; Wright, 1982, p. 132-153).

## **II. A not-so-revolutionary revolution**

The new leaders subscribed Nasserism enthusiastically and took a complete turn in the country's foreign policy. The Anglo-American remaining forces were withdrawn in quite a short period of time and requests towards oil companies were made tougher, which allowed the possibility of substantially increasing revenues (cf. Arnold, 1996, p. 41-48; Audibert, 1978, p. 60-77; Vandewalle, 2006, p. 89-94; Wright, 1982, p. 228-257). These successes enabled to develop a hyperactive foreign policy in open confrontation with Zionism, the United States and their allies through the support to those armed movements that would go against their interests. As in many other cases, the promotion of conflicts with foreign countries was also an excellent pretext to justify repressive measures at home. The cost of this generally adventurous policy was, in the long run, burdensome and was reflected in the US bombing in 1986 as well as in decades of isolation and sanctions until the end of 1990s, when a strategy of moderation and reconciliation with the West was undertaken (cf. Arnold, 1996, p. 49-159; Bessis, 1986, p. 109-115, p. 130-158 y p. 173-187; Djaziri, 1996, p. 199-225; Vandewalle, 2006, p. 139-174; Wright, 1982, p. 154-173 y p. 201-219).

Although foreign policy is the aspect of the Libyan regime which has been at the centre of international attention, its internal policies have also been marked by a break with those measures previously adopted and a considerable recklessness shown on many occasions. In light of its ideological choices, the socialist orientation became one of its main identifying traits. The Italian settlers who remained in the country along with the few native Jews who did not leave it, were quickly expropriated. In addition, the economy was progressively brought under State control. Foreign companies, banks and large corporations were first nationalised and subsequently, small property-owners were grouped into cooperatives. State supermarkets were established in order to replace small businesses. Furthermore, an advanced social policy ensured the redistribution of oil revenues in favour of the most underprivileged parts of society. Ambitious industrial and agricultural projects were also launched, but the viability of some of them was questionable and should be understood as prestige investments (cf. Audibert, 1978, p.

35-59; Bessis, 1986, p. 158-176; Djaziri, 1996, p. 103-123; Haimzadeh, 2011, p. 151-153; Vandewalle, 1995 y 2006, p. 109-119; Wright, 1982, p. 260-275). Since the mid-1980s, the declining prices of oil along with the western sanctions made those inefficiencies within the system more visible and all this led to a relative economic openness like that undertaken by the neighbouring countries a decade earlier. This openness was combined with a certain level of political liberalisation aimed at facilitating the reconciliation with the West. Thus, small businesses began to be tolerated in the areas of trade and handicraft and many public enterprises were reconverted into cooperatives. Meanwhile, a new class of contractors closely linked to the State and inevitably recruited from among the regime circles was on the rise. Gaddafi's sons brazenly monopolised the most succulent businesses of the country (cf. Haimzadeh, 2011, p. 12-16 y p. 109-110). In line with many other liberalisation processes, the Libyan welfare State, the regime's major achievement, suffered significant cuts which especially affected the overall standard of living of the poorest sections of its population (Haimzadeh, 2011, p. 172), whose difficult conditions contrasted sharply with the ostentation of the privileged and the great wealth of the country (Haimzadeh, 2011, p. 123-124). In short, and like in many other places, the outcome of this turn to pro-market policies was rather contradictory.

The waste of resources along with the voluntarism, clearly evident in much of the foreign policy and economic projects, are more easily to understand if the concentration of power in the hands of small group of leaders is taken into account. The activity of these leaders was constrained neither by public opinion nor the logic of well-settled institutions. This authoritarian system, so hostile to the assumption of responsibility, was a legacy from the past which was preserved and strengthened by the new regime. Above and beyond their ideological choices there was, therefore, a continuity between the two political regimes which was rooted in profound reasons. The existing authoritarianism in Libyan society, just as in all other Arab societies, have its roots in the gap between the development of a relatively modern State apparatus and the lack of a well articulated civil society, something that was much more difficult to build (cf. Ayubi, 1996, p. 44-49; Castien Maestro, 2009, p. 84-88). This weak civil society does not succeed in constraining the power of its political leaders, who in turn subdue it by means of their security apparatus and their capacity to win the loyalty of a segment of this society through the systematic distribution of privileges, especially in the case of an abruptly rich State such as Libya (Davis, 1987, p. 29-34). Libya is a country with a small population which is not very organised. This represents a further weakening of its resistance against the will of its leaders (Burgat, 1995, p. 47-48), thus turning this country into a sort of extreme example of a much more widely disseminated evil. Realistically, such a fractured society can hardly remain united without an authoritarian regime which "from outside" can be able to provide the internal cohesion that this society needs. Because the repressive law enforcement and the clientelistic activity of this regime hampers the possibility of eventually achieving that necessary cohesion, authoritarianism proves to be both a cause and effect of this harmful social fracture.

The preservation of certain traditional structures is something usual in the Third World rather than replacing them by more modern ones whose development will be further hampered by State action. However, these other traditional structures are recreated by means of clientelistic practices which are carried out for purposes of political control and also because of their frequent role as a parapet in the face of despotic and arbitrary authorities (Anderson, 1995, p. 228-231). Despite the fact that this preservation of what is traditional, partly represents a barrier in the social modernisation process, it also provides an institutional and cultural framework with which the population will surely experience a greater sense of belonging as well as reducing the reject rate (cf. Castien Maestro, 2009, p. 88-92). In the case of Libya, this

general trend has taken the form of a survival and recreation of the old tribal structures along with the concurrent development of a sort of anti-statist ideology whereby such structures could be adapted to modern life and also provide a more satisfactory existence than that provided by the typical State institutions (Davis, 1987, p. 58-62). From this point of view, we may draw some good lessons from the case of Libya in connection with a more endogenous and less traumatic modernisation (cf. Davis, 1987; Djaziri, 1996; Wright, 1982, p. 280). The recreation of the tribal bond by looking back on the genealogies and identities of each of them, the participation in meetings and celebrations, and especially, the fact that they show solidarity with those in distress, seem to have been highly useful for many Libyans. This is mostly due to the “inter-class” character of the tribe, whose members coming from different socioeconomic strata are also present in public institutions, thereby multiplying the number of “contacts” (cf. Haimzadeh, 2011, p. 87-94). However, it should not be forgotten that a large proportion of this population, mostly descendants of the old Ottoman personal staff and foreign traders, does not appear to have been part of this tribal system (Gil Fuensanta, Lorca y James, 2011, p. 49). Likewise, it is also important not to overlook the fact that neither tribe nor descent are a monolithic whole as in the past, but a mesh of social relations that are intermingled with other types of relations whose characteristics are different, like those derived from bonds of marriage or exchange of favours. That is why the relations between clientelism and tribalism are so complex and unstable. Indeed, the latter provides the former with a sphere of action which facilitates the performance of its activities, thus giving rise to a tribally limited clientelism system (cf. Castien Maestro, 2011, p. 196-197). But at the same time, this clientelism disrupts the egalitarianism among the members of the lineage; in the same way, it divides them among several clienteles and puts them into contact with people who are foreign to the lineage. For this reason, although both of them may converge to some extent, tribalism and clientelism are ultimately governed by different principles that might turn out to be mutually incompatible.

### **III. The dialectic between the old and the modern**

The specificity of all this modernising, authoritarian but also revolutionary and traditionalist experience is reflected both in its institutional design and in its ideological stances. With regard to the former, the revolutionary leaders were from the very beginning faced with the problem of being just a small minority surrounded by a rather apathetic population. They were not supported by a powerful party such as the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) or the Syrian or Iraqi Baath Party. Thus, they decided to imitate Nasser and strove to build a single party: the Arab Socialist Union, whose name was the same as that used by its Egyptian counterpart. The main role of this party was to mobilise, control and indoctrinate the masses as well as providing the recruitment of new members. The longed-for connection between the population and the political elite was thus established. Accused of being too bureaucratic in its operations, the party was replaced by a different organisational model based on congress system and people's committees. The whole population was now grouped in grassroot people's congresses and from there several people's committees would be formed. These committees were appointed by the people's congresses and were responsible for managing the different institutions such as municipalities, hospitals, schools, businesses, etc. Moreover, the grassroot congresses provided them with essential guidance and controlled their activity. They also made different proposals about more general political questions to be addressed by the General People's Congress, a sort of national parliament, which brought together representatives of the congresses, grassroot committees and unions. A General Committee would stem from this

Congress, functioning as a kind of government. This system intended to involve the whole population in the government of the country, thus bridging the existing gap between State and society. Its similarity with some historical experiences such as the Paris Commune (cf. Marx, 2003, p. 64-73) and the first Russian soviets (cf. Lenin, 1986) is especially noteworthy. This new institutional design motivated the reason for changing the name of the country in 1977, which moved away from the notion of Republic to be subsequently renamed *Yamahiryya*, a neologism developed from the Arab term *yamahir* (the masses) and that could be translated as 'the State of the masses' (cf. Audibert: 1978, p. 122-147; Djaziri, 1996, p. 139-177; El Gadhafi, s/d, p. 27-31; Vandewalle, 2006, p. 119-130; Wright, 1982, p. 175-200).

Nevertheless, in practice this system of direct democracy was being deeply undermined. To begin with, the army, the security forces and the vital oil industry were withdrawn from its power, implying a lack of control over the State funds among other things. On the other hand, the fact that all these bodies were outside its sphere of influence might have enabled a more streamlined and efficient functioning, in line with a usual bureaucratic hierarchy (Vandewalle, 2006, p. 118-119). There was also a second power structure made up of revolutionary committees (cf. Mattes, 1995), whose mission was to orientate, spur and control all the work undertaken by the people's congresses and committees, as well as the work of the rest of the associations and institutions all over the country. This was aimed at fighting the tendency for certain members to look after their own interests, and also the passivity and absenteeism of a large proportion of the population that would not attend these congresses meetings very often. This primary and more ideological function was subsequently strengthened by one of more practical scope whose aims were to persecute "the enemies of the revolution" and safeguard the moral principles of society. To do so, it acted as a paramilitary organisation which had the power to arrest, incarcerate and execute people, outside the country's laws. The number of members of these committees was significantly lower, since they were exclusively made up of regime supporters who had been recruited by means of a cooptation system. Allegedly, many of them came from the poorest strata of society. Gaddafi, who no longer held public office since 1979, was monitoring these committees by means of a Coordination Office. Its function within the Libyan political system was equivalent to that of the typical single vanguard party (Martín Muñoz, 2004, p. 153), but the difference here lies in the fact that the committees had a very lax organisational structure with a genuine rotation amongst its members. All of them were vertically subordinated to the Coordination Office, and hence to Gaddafi himself. Each revolutionary committee had regular contacts with this office to render accounts on its activities and provide any type of information. In contrast, horizontal linkages between these committees appear to have been non-existent. This fact was supposed to prevent the possible emergence of a new nucleus of power that could directly threaten the leader's political power. However, and as had happened in China during the Cultural Revolution (deliberately taken as an inspiration), both bureaucratisation and corruption were fought. The way of fighting this was by mobilising the most committed sectors of the population, thereby abstaining from the establishment of a solid legal and institutional system. On the one hand, this system could have been able to control these evils to some extent but on the other hand, it would have represented a serious obstacle to the absolute power held by the top leadership (cf. Cavendish y Gray, 1970). The outcome of this institutional weakness seem to have been a noticeable inefficiency which was mitigated, at least, by oil revenues. The government's military failures, notably the war in Chad, could also be understood by virtue of this fact. Notwithstanding, in order to prevent possible military revolts, the Libyan army was fragmented and subjected to an internal promotion system in which political loyalty prevailed over professional competence (El-Fathaly y Palmer, 1995, p. 170-173).



Although the formally democratic character of the public institutions is undermined as a consequence of such a repressive environment, sometimes these people's congresses seem to be able to put forward a view different to that of the governing powers. An example of this was their strong opposition to the women's empowerment policies promoted by Gaddafi (Djaziri, 1996, p. 130; Martín Muñoz, 2004, p. 154). On a more day-to-day level, these people's congresses also allowed the expression of criticism towards the management of local issues. So there was indeed some degree of direct democracy, but it was a limited one, since the members of the revolutionary committees ensured that complaints would not go beyond a certain point. If necessary, they were allowed to ban access to the congress to the most unruly individuals. Apart from this, this limited freedom of expression had a double function since it provided those in charge of the regime with information about the mood amongst the population, and acted as an outlet for popular discontent. The removal from office of people who, being previously appointed as a scapegoat, were in charge of governmental positions was used as a way to alleviate this popular discontent (cf. Haimzadeh, 2001, p. 96-105). The political liberalisation in the late 1980s did not fundamentally modify this state of affairs. Greater protection for property rights and personal privacy was established and the abuses on the part of the revolutionary committees were brought to an end. Even the *Great Green Document on Human Rights* was enacted in 1988. But the experiment had its limits. The right to freedom of expression and association outside the institutional framework provided and controlled by the regime, was explicitly denied. Similarly, any opposition activity would be prosecuted by stating that this would be a threat against the power of the people which was already in the government. Here as elsewhere, this superficial radical democratism had come to serve as an interesting alibi for the exercise of power of a small group of oligarchs (cf. Anderson, 1995; El-Fathaly y Palmer, 1995).

This institutional framework was traversed by a jumbled net of informal relationships in which ties of kinship and a sense of tribal belonging were extremely important. Gaddafi and his inner circle (his closest relatives and the primary coup plotters who managed to survive) exercised control over these relationships, thus controlling the country's institutions. They resembled the old *sheih* in a way, and similarly they acted as many past and present traditional Arab monarchs. Beyond all the grandiloquent rethoric, the general tenor of daily life was the clever arrangements that took place between competing interests and the gentlemen's agreement. As has been observed in other contexts, the gap between official ideology and daily practice may even prove functional, since the latter is unhindered by the former, even if it partially destroys its legitimising effects (cf. Castien Maestro, 2011, p. 199-200). As for the base of the system, things seem to have developed in a similar way. According to the British anthropologist John Davis (1996), the practical operation of people's congresses and committees was marked by the rivalries and alliances between the different clans and tribes. The lack of explicit ideological debates hampered the emergence of alternative forms of association, and those clientelistic and tribal forms further increased the depoliticisation of society. The *sheih* had not official recognition but they were the ones who mobilise these groups in favour of certain leaders and decisions. Thus, an interesting confluence between the traditional and the revolutionary institutions had taken place. Similarly, for the majority of the population, the involvement in these people's congresses and committees seems to have represented a way of linking themselves, at least to some extent, with those clientelistic networks which permeated the State and were maintained thanks to their high redistributive capacity (cf. Anderson, 1995, p. 231-234; Haimzadeh, 2011, p. 105-115).

A similar convergence between revolution and tradition can be seen on the ideological level. The Gaddafist regime constantly strove to show that its policies were in accordance with the

precepts of Muslim religion. This way, the system based on people's congresses and committees was equated with the practice of *shura*, or consultation (Martín Muñoz, 2004, p. 152). Gaddafi always displayed a profound personal piety. His role as a charismatic leader, surrounded by his loyal supporters, resembles that of the Prophet and his Companions as well as that of the old leaders of Sanussyya. However, the Islam he promoted was quite peculiar. Just as the classic Salafism did, like Sanussi's for example, he called for a return to the primary foundations of Islam but went further than any other salafists, since he recognised no authority other than that of the Koran and rejected the Hadiths, or the sayings or actions of the Prophet, as sources of law. He only accepted them as a guiding tool for the private life of those who chose to do so. This innovation, largely heterodox in fact, exempted him from the obligation of sticking to the meticulous rules of behaviour that are found in these prophetic sayings and helped him to elaborate an appropriate interpretation of Islam which was compatible with his project of moderate modernisation (cf. Davis, 1982, p. 62-74; Djaziri, 1996, p. 16-25 y p. 83-89). It is in this sense that *alim*, who promoted a more orthodox and conservative Islam, were marginalised by his regime and that he proved to be a bitter adversary of Islamists (Arnold, 1996, p. 35-56; Martín Muñoz, 2004, p. 153 y 158; Wright, 1982, p. 185-186 y p. 197). The improvement of women's legal statutes operated within this context, and apart from all other considerations, served as a way to indicate withdrawal from these dangerous adversaries. He also threatened the power of possible rival bodies by placing further emphasis on his policy of social atomisation and claimed the monopoly on interpreting religion, with a clear totalitarian intention (cf. Joffé, 1995). A good example of this monopolistic ownership of Islam was the decision to establish the beginning of the Muslim era from Muhammad's death in 632 A.D. instead of the year of the Hegira in 622 A.D., just as the rest of the Muslims did. The ambivalences of the Gaddafist project regarding social modernisation were once again highlighted. The fight against the most conservative social sectors, the liberalisation of customs, the economic development and the redistributive policies, all of them positive in themselves, were just going to reinforce an authoritarian and clientelistic system which represented in itself the greatest obstacle to trigger future progress.

This is the context of systematic reinterpretation of tradition in which *The Green Book* takes on real meaning. The aim of this book written by Gaddafi was to set out the basic orientations for the construction of the new society, and this provided it with certain functional homology with the Koran. It certainly is a confusing book with a poor wording in which a lot of bromidic statements can be found. As a result, and as with its author's personality, the book was easy to deride. However, when looked at more closely, we will find in it an attempt to legitimise many of the policies undertaken in Libya. This legitimisation was only partially achieved. It is also important to point out how the text shows agreement with some aspects of tradition and the Bedouin *ethos* (cf. Arnold, 1996, p. 12-22; Davis, 1986; Wright, 1982, p. 192-198). This is the case of his defence of a system based on councils and committees, a self-managing and cooperative socialism and a women's empowerment that would allow them to keep playing their traditional roles. There is also a requirement for the positive law to be aligned with the social uses, linked to religion (El Gadhafi, s/d, p. 33-35), which constitutes an abstract statement of the very nature of his project for society. Accordingly, the advantages of the tribe are defended as representing a mediation role between family and nation, a foundation of the indispensable collective solidarity and a guarantee of appropriate behaviour amongst its members by means of the social control exerted on them (El Gadhafi, s/d, p. 93-94). When it comes to understanding this obsession for agreeing with the traditional *ethos*, it must be taken into account the fact that this one seems to be current. As Patrick Haimzadeh (2011, p. 72-74) reminds us, despite the fact that Libyan society has become predominantly urban, maybe more than any other country in

the Maghreb, the Bedouin culture has been given particular attention and it is regarded as an ideal conception of beauty and a paradigm of human virtue. The old geste of the desert are still recited, just as in the Arabian Peninsula it is a tradition to go back to the desert from time to time in order to recreate the simple and frugal life of yesteryear for some days. This survival of the past, conveniently updated, is probably easier to understand if we bear in mind that the colonisation suffered by the Libyan people was shorter than that suffered by their neighbours. It is also important to note that they have hardly emigrated and have not received many tourists (Burgat, 1995, p. 47). It is in this context that the much-vaunted Bedouin practices publicised by Gaddafi himself such as the famous *haima* and the daily consumption of dromedary milk, lose some of their extravagance. The same goes for the austerity he displayed for such a long time and that would contradict other habits he used to practice along with his inner circle. This contradiction might have had lethal effects on the legitimacy of his power.

The truth is that *The Green Book* is significant for what it says but also because it says very little about any subject. This brevity and paucity were an added advantage for a regime based on an individual, omnipotent and charismatic leadership, which allowed it to overcome any obstacle that may arise from doctrinaire and elaborate principles. Something similar happened with the aforementioned weakness of the institutional fabric. In this case, the effect would also allow a freer exercise of authority on the part of the supreme government, while making this exercise structurally more necessary. Like in other historical experiences, the formally “hyper-democratic” character of this system along with the weakness of the intermediate institutions was the basis for the huge concentration of power on the part of the elites. This was also the result of the activation of both formal and informal mechanisms. Thus, the institutional and doctrinal weaknesses of the Libyan regime can be interpreted not only as deficiencies, but also as the conditions which enable its lifelong charismatic personalism. This is a personalism which is still present in the region and applies for both the revolutionary and the most conservative States, by which the leader, namely the president or the monarch, is put above the institutions and the law. The leader is vested with a legitimacy which is outside both of them and this allows him to act within and outside them as deemed appropriate. The aim is to recreate a sort of direct link with his people at all times, regardless of mediating institutions, what gives him an additional legitimacy as the authority which corrects the abuses of his subordinates (cf. Castien Maestro, 2011, p. 203-205). The capricious and histrionic behaviour of the leader makes him unpredictable and at the same time, it disorients people making them more vulnerable, something that will further reinforce his power (cf. Haimzadeh, 2011, p. 59-60 y 118-120). It is well known that Gaddafi was particularly prominent in this regard but many other dictators across the world have not been far behind. This is why the explanations that focus exclusively on individual psychology to analyse the character are inadequate; they must be framed within other references that help us to understand the nature of the specific social fabric in which this character is embedded. It is possible that part of the foreign policy which was undertaken for decades by the Libyan leader can be understood as an attempt to transfer the recipes used for the internal governance to this area, although with a lower success rate. In the same way, patronage practices were also generously implemented, especially with the sub-Saharan Africa leaders (Haimzadeh, 2011, p. 113-114).

It is at this point that we can focus our attention very briefly on the questions raised at the start of this article. The Libyan regime was extremely dictatorial and repressive. Its distinct totalitarianism along with its refusal to recognise the ideological plurality of society prevented it from integrating all its component sectors and therefore would clash with a large part of these. Its lack of internal flexibility caused a head-on collision with the dissidents, with no possibility

of reaching agreement. The high levels of social discontent can be explained through the governmental authoritarianism, the internal and external fiascos as well as the scandalous lifestyle on the part of the ruling elites and its religious heterodoxy. However, their strategy of modernisation, which proved to be not very transgressive, along with their clever way of handling the clientelistic relationships and their remarkable social policies seem to have allowed them to keep the support of a substantial part of the population. In particular, the coordination between clientelism and tribalism provided the regime with a great loyalty on the part of certain groups. For this reason they could hold the complacency of the bulk of the state apparatus almost up to the end. On the other hand, this partially tribal clientelism also earned them the enmity of those who did not benefit from it or did it on a very limited scale. This applied in particular to the old fiefdoms of Sanussya, which suffered the consequences of a noteworthy economic abandonment (cf. Haimzadeh, 2011, p. 130-153). The lack of internal cohesion within Libyan society has become evident throughout the whole process. The same can be said about the impact of this factionalism during the course of the second revolution in which both tribal and regional affinities and hostilities have played a leading role. In such conditions, the future of the country remains uncertain.

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