

Qaddafi and Islam in Libya

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Islam, the dominant religion, has had a special place in traditional Libyan society, where the overwhelming majority of the people are Sunni Muslims, accepting the Quran and the Sunna as the primary sources of the Islamic faith. "Religion has dominated all facets of life, "significantly affect(ing) the structures, values, and attitudes of Libyan society. It is a primary unit of loyalty and identity."¹ Mu'ammarr al-Qaddafi, a devout Muslim, acknowledges that the effect of Islam is "very significant on everyone of us. We cannot deny that religion is an essential factor in the lives of all peoples."²

Prior to the Qaddafi-led coup in 1969, religious organizations and leaders played a major role in the educational, social and political life of the country, particularly in the institutions that regulated the society. Notable religious leaders not only dominated the judicial system but also important political committees and advisory councils.³ In this respect, Libya was a typical, traditional society where religion was entangled in the web of national politics.

This has been evident throughout Libyan history. The Sanusiyyah Brotherhood, a militant Sufi religious order founded in the nineteenth century, played a crucial role in the national resistance against Italian colonial rule and, subsequently, contributed to the shaping of the country's destiny in the post-independence period. Between 1951-1969, religion was "a political symbol of crucial importance in controlling and mobilizing the masses."⁴ King Mohammed Idris al-Sanusi, who was trained in Islamic theology and law (Sharia), used his position as Grand

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¹ Omar I. El Fathaly, Monte Palmer and Richard Chackerian, *Political Development and Bureaucracy in Libya*. Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath & Co., 1977, p. 11.

² *Thus Spoke Colonel Moammarr Kazzafi*. Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Al-Awda Publishing Co., 1974, p. 65.

³ El Fathaly, p. 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Sanusi to bolster his political power. His "official symbolism was largely limited to religious justifications" of the monarchical form of government.⁵ As some observers put it: There was "an inevitable association between family prominence and religious leadership."⁶

On September 1, 1969, the era of monarchy came to an end when the army, led by Qaddafi, ousted King Idris and declared Libya a republic. The Central Committee of the Free Unionist Officers became the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), under Qaddafi's chairmanship, controlling both the legislative and executive functions of the government. Having no religious legitimation for seizing power, Qaddafi emphasized the humble origins of the Free Officers and later declared that the ideology of the September Revolution "stems from the eternal message of Islam and from the Holy Quran."⁷

The purpose of this article is to examine Qaddafi's efforts to restore Islam to its "proper" place in Libyan society. The article is divided into three parts: (1) an examination of Qaddafi's measures to revive Islam in Libya with the cooperation of the religious establishments that were not affiliated with the monarchical regime; (2) an examination of Qaddafi's actions to weaken religious leaders when they came in the way of implementing his Third Universal Theory; and (3) an examination of the social basis of his theory, which calls for a return to religion.

REVIVAL OF ISLAM

From the start, Qaddafi emerged as the strong man in Libya, controlling the actions and decisions of the RCC. To secure his political power, he had the RCC move against the Sanusiyyah—the power base of the royal family. Its privileges were taken away; restrictions were placed on the operation of the Zawaya and Sanusi religious institutions.⁸ In October 1969, a supervisor was appointed for the remaining Sanusi property, mainly educational centers. A year later, the Sanusi-sponsored Islamic University at Baida was incorporated into the University of Gahr Younis.⁹

To counterbalance the Sanusiyyah influence on the masses, the RCC appointed a Grant Mufti—Sheikh Zahr Alzawi—in January 1970 and restored non-Sanusi Ulama to prominent positions in the society. The

⁵ Lisa Anderson, "Qaddafi's Islam." Published in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, edited by John L. Esposito, New York: Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 137.

⁶ El Fathaly, p. 12.

⁷ *The Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya: The Basic Facts*. McLean, Va.: People's Committee for Students of the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, September 1982, p. 64.

⁸ Ruth First, *Libya: The Elusive Revolution*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Inc., 1974, p. 122.

⁹ Henri Habib, *Politics and Government of Revolutionary Libya*. Montreal: Le Cercle du Livre de France Ltee, 1975, p. 27.

RCC threw its weight behind orthodox Muslim groups. It was hoped that these groups could be instrumental in rallying the masses, who are fundamentally attached to Islam, behind Qaddafi's revolution and his planned reforms to modernize the country. Qaddafi had no difficulty attracting the support of most non-Sanusi Muslim groups, which had been denied a proper place in the society for decades under the monarchy. Such support would continue as long as Qaddafi and the Free Officers were committed to revive Islam.

Under Qaddafi's orchestration, the RCC moved to restore Islam in Libya by getting rid of foreign elements that had been borrowed from Europe and had no place in a Muslim society. The sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages, allowed under the monarchy, were banned because they are forbidden by the Quran. Nightclubs and bars were closed along with adult, provocative entertainment, since their activities were contrary to acceptable Islamic practices and alien to Islamic culture. Churches and cathedrals were closed. In May 1970, pornography, obscene and vulgar performances, and provocation to fornication by word, sign or movement were banned. Anyone found guilty of employing Libyan women for obscene performances was subject to a large fine and harsh jail sentence.¹⁰

Furthermore, the use of the Muslim calendar was made mandatory in all public communications. Arabic replaced Latin script on street signs and public places.¹¹ The use of the Arabic language, the language of the Quran, was insisted upon in all documents, including passports. Beginning on January 1, 1973, foreign passports were required to be accompanied by an Arabic translation for admission into Libya. As Qaddafi explained:

We do not require aliens to present passports written solely in Arabic....(S)ince Arabic has been considered an international language and has been used by the United Nations Agencies, we will insist, starting from January 1, 1973, that Arabic must be one of the languages used in the passports of aliens visiting Libya, particularly as more than one language is normally used in writing passports.¹²

This measure was taken in an effort "to assert and emphasize the Arabic identity and personality" of the Libyan society.¹³

Qaddafi made no secret of his plan to make the Sharia the law of the land. In October 1971, he had the RCC initiate the first step to make the Sharia a chief source of legislation. A Legislative Review and

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 299; First, p. 122; and Anderson, p. 140.

¹¹ First, p. 122.

¹² *Thus Spoke Colonel*, p. 126.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Amendment Committee was established; it was headed by Sheikh Ali Mansour, the Supreme Court President, and composed of the leading legal experts in the country. The Committee was assigned two major tasks: The first was to bring all laws—personal, civil, criminal and commercial—in line with the basic tenets of the Sharia, in order to avoid any conflict between secular and religious laws. The second task was to overhaul the court system in order to eliminate the traditional separation between religious and civil courts.¹⁴

To broaden the consultation on the Sharia, the Supreme Council for National Guidance invited Muftis from all over the Arab World to a conference in Libya to debate the Sharia, its interpretation according to the Quran, and its application in contemporary societies. Following the debate and the completion of the tasks by the Legislative Review and Amendment Committee, a new law was proclaimed in November 1973, which incorporated the Sharia in all facets of the Libyan legal system. A series of Islamic laws, including several Quranic criminal penalties, had already been promulgated. A prominent example was the reinstatement of amputation of hand and foot as a punishment for theft and armed robbery. They were to be administered by utilizing modern medical methods, including anaesthesia.¹⁵ In addition, the civil and religious courts were merged into a single judicial system, thus ending the long-standing division between the courts.¹⁶ These changes made the judicial system primarily Islamic in nature and eliminated the elements that had been borrowed from Europe over the decades.

QADDAFI AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

With his demonstrated commitment to Islam, Qaddafi found the time opportune to move against religious groups which, in his view, served to breed sectarianism and factionalism. Libya's national experience has made Qaddafi suspicious of religious organizations since they often get too closely involved in politics. Such activities have led to divisiveness, schism and the undermining of national objectives. The way the orthodox Muslim groups cooperated with the Italian colonizers served as an important example. The Mufti had refused to declare Jihad (holy war) against the Italian colonizers and, instead, had chosen to acquire Italian citizenship in the 1930s. Another example was the Sanusiyyah support for the British military administration in the post-war period.¹⁷

Qaddafi's distrust of religious groups has led him to oppose the al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin (Muslim Brotherhood). He once explained that his opposition is based on the fact that

¹⁴ Habib, pp. 30, 228-229.

¹⁵ First, p. 136.

¹⁶ Habib, p. 229.

¹⁷ Anderson, p. 143.

The (Ikhwan al-Muslimin) in Arab countries work against Arab unity, against socialism, and against Arab nationalism, because they consider all these to be inconsistent with religion. Colonialism (is) allied and associated with them because colonialism is against Arab unity, against Arab nationalism, and against socialism. So the (Ikhwan al-Muslimin) movement cooperated with colonialism without being aware of this, or perhaps colonialism had to choose one group or another, and thus it chose them.¹⁸

Qaddafi, a practitioner rather than a theologian, was against "the old tradition of the royal regime which says: this has to be in accordance with this sect or that ism." He made it clear that "we do not want to be the followers of any particular theory, or limit ourselves to one religious interpretation....We must not restrict ourselves to one independent judgment in a legal or theological question."¹⁹ His objective is to "transcend sectarianism by going back to the origin"²⁰ because sectarianism leads to differences which, in turn, lead to divisions and subdivisions in religion.²¹ As he put it: "Sectarian tendencies are responsible for many political movements and conflicts—something which the Libyan people are not aware of."²²

Qaddafi, in a major speech at Zwara on April 15, 1973, announced the start of his Cultural Revolution which aimed, among other things, to abolish all existing laws in Libya. To assure the masses of the direction of his Revolution, he stated that "we are Muslims and apply the Islamic law. If you apply the law of God, it is impossible to wrong any person or threaten his security."²³ As he put it:

We are sure that we apply the sound ideology and the great humanitarian thought declared by the Prophet (Muhammad)...We adhere to the Book of God, as we believe that there could not be any other ideology as solemn and as profound as the Book of God....Any different ideology from other books is regarded as misleading.²⁴

Qaddafi also made it crystal clear that religious leaders were no longer the sole arbitrators on religion and their squabbles and disputes would not be tolerated since it had political fallout, creating divisiveness and undermining national unity. At Zwara, he promised that the law would

¹⁸ *Thus Spoke Colonel*, p. 61.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

²³ *The Basic Facts*, p. 60.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

come down hard on any group engaged in clandestine activity. As he put it:

Instructions will be given to the Minister of Interior to purge any group... If a member of the Muslim Brotherhood or the Islamic Liberation Party engages in clandestine activity, his activities will be considered sabotage against the Revolution which was triggered for the people.²⁵

Qaddafi has successfully silenced independent sources of religious interpretation because, in his view, it has been divisive for society to have religious leaders advocate different views on religious matters. His main purpose, however, has been to limit their roles and to weaken their influence in the society in order to make himself the sole arbitrator of religious matters. He took this stance primarily because he was not happy with the different Islamic schools of thought. As he explained: Jurists "depended on the arguments of those people who lived before them... Everyone claims that he is basing his judgment on what was said by such and such a man... If we adopt such an extensive view, we would be transcending any difference and variation or divisions and subdivisions in religion."²⁶ He does not want sectarianism to exist in Libya because it affects politics. Instead, he advocated a return to the origin, the Quran, as the only source of the Islamic faith. This means that he rejected the Sunna, Prophet Muhammad's sayings and deed as recorded in the Hadith, which were widely accepted by Sunni Muslims as the second primary source of the religion. His pretext was that there are disputes about the authenticity of some Hadith. In addition, Prophet Muhammad never intended to make his tradition replace the Quran, which is binding on all Muslims. As he explained in 1978:

If the Prophet had said: the Hadith is mine, follow its path, that would have meant that he was working to replace the Quran, but he continually insisted on taking the Quran alone.... These words may seem strange. The reason is that we have strayed far at this stage, very far from Islam.²⁷

He also rejected the Fiqh (jurisprudence) as a means for elaboration on the Sharia. In doing so, he left the Ulama with no role to play in Islamic jurisprudence, while putting himself as the sole source of religious interpretation. This is evident in his rejection of the conventional date for the start of the Muslim calendar which began with the migration of Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina in 622. Instead, he ordered the Muslim calendar in Libya to begin with the death of Prophet Muhammad in 632.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

²⁶ *Thus Spoke Colonel*, p. 49.

²⁷ Anderson, p. 144.

THE THIRD UNIVERSAL THEORY AND ISLAM

Qaddafi's move against the Ulama was motivated by his desire to eliminate independent sources of power within the society that could challenge the substance and direction of his domestic policy. Another reason was to facilitate the implementation of his Third Universal Theory in Libya—a theory that made no mention of Islam in the sections dealing with political and economic matters. The main reason is that Qaddafi never intended to limit the application of his theory only to Muslim states. His vision is to make it applicable anywhere since it provides solutions to human problems that neither capitalism nor communism has succeeded in solving. Qaddafi mentioned religion only in the third part, dealing with the social basis of his theory and did not mention Islam but instead advocated a return to religion, any religion. As he later explained: "We do not present Islam as a religion in the Third (Universal) Theory. For if we do so, we will be excluding from the Third Theory all the non-Muslims—something which we evidently do not want."²⁸

Qaddafi was also concerned about the power that the Ulama had on the masses who are fundamentally religious in nature. He was worried that such power might impede the implementation of his direct people's democracy, especially at the local level where religious leaders have the most influence. This was evident in the first meetings of the Basic People's Congresses, where the Ulama dominated the deliberations. To eliminate their threats to his experiment, Qaddafi moved against their power base, the mosque, by calling on peoples committees to march on and take over the mosques. Qaddafi justified his action by accusing the religious leaders of hindering the march of the Revolution under a pretext of Islam, by fostering old ideas, and by distorting Islam in an effort to maintain their privileged positions in the society.

There was also religious opposition to his socialism. The Ulama objected to his move against private property, which, in their view, is in contradiction to the Islamic tradition. They had a self-interest in preserving private ownership to protect the Waqf—the endowment of private property for the upkeep of mosques and their personnel. Qaddafi rejected their argument and insisted that "Islam discussed justice and socialism before Marx or Lenin."²⁹ Thus, his socialism is consistent with the Islamic teachings. He argued that land belongs to God and people can only use it. As he put it: "Islam itself does not constitute an obstacle in the way of expropriation, nationalization or limitation of property." He added that "Islam provides for the realization of justice and equity. It does not give the right of any rich person to use his wealth as a tool of

²⁸ *Thus Spoke Colonel*, p. 124.

²⁹ Habib, p. 28.

oppression nor to exploit people on account of his wealth as a tool of oppression.” He argued that “limitation of property means that whenever capitalist oppression arises, the state has the right to curb it”³⁰ through appropriate measures. Regarding the rich, he stated that the Quran “order(s) us” to “Take away from their money and give them to the poor.”³¹ He concludes that “Islam stands against poverty, and firmly stands by the side of the working classes. Likewise, Islam stands against exploiting capitalism.”³²

Qaddafi contends that “every man has the right to live free and not to be dependent on others for his livelihood.”³³ Accordingly, “some people...have had their properties expropriated, for they had no right to own, as anything they owned proved harmful to human society. On the other hand, we left others (to) own what they had as long as this ownership has been beneficial to society and has not harmed others. We have also taken away a certain amount of property from others when it was proved that their properties have reached the level of exercising harm to others.”³⁴ Thus, every citizen has the right to own property or undertake any production or service through his own efforts to satisfy his needs without exploitation of others. Private ownership therefore will not be expropriated from one group and given to another nor will it be taken over by the state as long as there is no exploitation. However, Qaddafi insists that all gains that are beyond the satisfaction of individual needs should become the property of the people through joint ownership.³⁵ To him, “this is in full accord with the teachings of Islam. Islam teaches that one should support the poor and not allow the rich to tyrannize the poor by their wealth.” He cites the following verse from the Quran to support his argument: “Verily, man oppresses man should he see him in a great need.” He interprets this verse to mean that “if man becomes rich he oppresses others...politically, economically, socially and militarily, thereby harming them greatly.”³⁶

Qaddafi uses the Quran as a basis to achieve social justice and to satisfy individual spiritual needs. In the national context of Libyan society, his emphasis on Islam is natural because religion has always been strong in Libya and has been an important part of the Libyan search for self-identity as well as a national expression of their struggle against foreign domination and control.

³⁰ Speech delivered by Col. Mo’ammam El-Gadhafi in the Opening Session of the Euro-Arab Youth Conference, held in Tripoli, Libya on May 14, 1973. Published by the Ministry of Information and Culture, Libyan Arab Republic. (n.d.), pp. 48-49.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

³⁵ Muammar Al Qathafi, *The Green Book, Part 2: The Solution of the Economic Problem*. Runcorn, England: Astmoore Lithod, Ltd., (n.d.), pp. 24-26.

³⁶ Speech, May 14, 1973, p. 57.

Qaddafi believes that social relationships are best guided by an unwritten ethical code that cannot be enforced by law. However, such ethical relationships can be influential only when they emanate from individuals. This explains the emphasis he places on religion which provides the general outline for the relationship between God and man, between man and man, and between man and society. In his view, the rights of parents, children, husbands, wives, elders, youngsters, individuals and society toward each other "are well defined in the Holy Quran." To Qaddafi, "all these rights are considered holy and are fostered by religion"³⁷ in Libya, leading to emotional and social stability. As he put it: "We, here, do not need drugs or sedatives and we don't have to commit suicide. We do not suffer from psychological anxiety, we do not suffer from any confusion of mind."³⁸ In his view, these unhealthy conditions exist in other human societies because religion is not upheld in these communities. The lack of religion leads to emotional instability and social illness. To do away with these conditions, religion must guide people in their daily activity. It is only then that exploitation will be eliminated and the world we live in will be much better.

Qaddafi's revival of Islam is intended to liberate the Islamic heritage and to free the Arab mind from the destructive influences of alien cultures that were imposed during European colonialism under the pretext of modernization or Westernization. He argues that social classes were abolished by the Quran long before communism ever mentioned it. Classes are alien to the Islamic heritage and to Arab culture because there was no such tradition in Muslim societies prior to the coming of Europeans. Classes are unIslamic because Islam is based on equality and brotherhood, allowing individuals to rise to power through ability and training. A return to Islam, he believes, is the fastest way to eliminate the alien and artificial classes that were a by-product of European colonialism. Thus, his pragmatism makes it imperative to liquidate class differences by merging them peacefully and gradually in order to achieve an orderly transformation to a more egalitarian society. Unlike communism, he does not advocate class struggle out of fear that such action would disrupt the fabric of the society and hinder national development. He favors a gradual elimination of class differences through evolution, accomplished by a just distribution of wealth among the broad spectrum of people. He expects the masses and their popular organizations to act reasonably and responsibly to dissolve class differences harmoniously. He does not believe that law alone can do the job, but laws can be respected and obeyed only when people are in charge of their enactment and enforcement.³⁹

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

³⁹ *Habid*, pp. 29, 133-137.

Qaddafi also hopes that a return to the basic tenets of Islam will result in reawakening Arabs intellectually and politically and that this will help solidify national feelings and pan-Arabism by stressing their common origins and destiny. In his view, when nationalism and religion are compatible, harmony and stability can be achieved and the nation is in a stronger position to meet the challenge of development.⁴⁰

Religion and Society

Qaddafi advocates that “every nation should have a religion”⁴¹ because it is “a fundamental factor in the life of man and is reflected (in) so many social considerations.”⁴² Failure to do so could lead to “disputes within a national group.”⁴³ He believes that a return to religion will bring about cohesiveness and national unity.

Qaddafi made a point to stress that “we do not require that religion should be Islam.... Christians shall be true Christians by going back to the original Christianity, the Bible.”⁴⁴ As he put it: “We do not intend to make followers of other religions our enemies. We also are not fanatic for this religion or that. We believe that religion is the foundation of man’s life. We believe that every man should have a religion.”⁴⁵ This is because without religion man “knows no source of ethical obligations.”⁴⁶ In addition, religion helps solve social problems. It leads to emotional stability which, in turn, will lead to “social stability where there is no anxiety, no schi(z)izophrenia, social non-adherence, flight from reality by adopting hippie customs or becoming drug addicts or committing suicide.”⁴⁷

Although Qaddafi does not advocate that Islam be imposed on others, he believes tht there is a need to study the Quran, the holy book of Islam, because it is addressed to “all humanity and is not the property of the Arabs.”⁴⁸ In addition, Prophet Muhammad is “for all nations.” Another reason is that “the Bible has been distorted.... It has become a book composed by men. Only the (Quran) has not been distorted by anybody.... It is a modern book compared with other heavenly books.”⁵⁰ As he put it: “The Christian shall remain a Christian and will study the (Quran) or the

⁴⁰ Muammar Al Qathafi, *The Green Book, Part 3: The Social Basis of the Third Universal Theory*. Runcorn, England: Astmoore Litho, (n.d.), p. 10.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Speech, May 14, 1973, p. 25.

⁴³ Qathafi, *The Green Book, Part 3*, p. 10.

⁴⁴ Speech, May 14, 1973, p. 39.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

original Gospel before it was distorted. The Jew shall remain a Jew, and shall study the (Quran) or the Gospel or the Bible, as the (Quran) is not our property alone.”⁵¹ To facilitate this task, Qaddafi encouraged the translation of the Quran into other languages.

His recommendation to review the Quran stems from his belief in the universality, totality and vitality of Islam. He insists that “all the guidance a man needs in running a state is to be found exclusively in the Quran.”⁵² In June 1970, he told the *Le Monde* correspondent “read the (Quran) or re-read it. You’ll find the answers to all your questions. Arab unity, socialism, inheritance rights, the place of women in society, the inevitable fall of the Roman Empire and the destruction of our planet following the intervention of the atom bomb. It’s all there for anyone willing to read it.”⁵³

Qaddafi sees religion as offering a natural law that will not only satisfy individual spiritual needs but that also can be used to combat social illness such as discrimination and class differences. Without religion, morality would be eroded and social order would break down, creating chaotic conditions that law alone cannot handle.⁵⁴ This situation will cause divisiveness, instability and lawlessness—all of which will destroy national unity and hinder progress.

For Qaddafi, religion encourages morality and combats inequality, injustice and corruption. It strengthens the fabric of the society and improves social relations. It is seen as a key means of paving the way for establishing a classless society based on socialism and egalitarianism. As he put it: “We need to go back to our origins.”⁵⁵ In his view, it is only by applying the scripture that an ideal setting can be established.

Women and Society

In his egalitarian society, there is no room for any form of discrimination because Islamic values and principles will be enforced. He considers sex discrimination to be “a flagrant act of oppression without justification”⁵⁶ because all human beings have descended from Adam. As the Quran puts it: “Fear your God who created you from one being, and from this being he created his spouse and from these two he made many men and women go out.” The Quran further states that “He (God) created for you, from ourselves, spouses so that you live together.”⁵⁷

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁵² First, p. 124.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁵⁴ Habib, pp. 134-137.

⁵⁵ First, p. 23.

⁵⁶ Qathafi, *The Green Book, Part 3*, p. 26.

⁵⁷ Mohamed Al Jarrah, “Review of the Third Part of the Green Book.” Published in the *International Colloquium in Benghazi: The Green Book, 1-3 October 1979*, Vol. II. Tripoli, Libya: Foreign Liaison Office, General Secretariat of the General People’s Congress, (n.d.), p. 181.

Although there are biological differences between man and woman (i.e. menstruation, pregnancy, miscarriage, delivery, etc.), there is a role for each to play, matching their differences. He is concerned, for instance, that "to dispense with the natural role of woman in maternity—i.e. nurseries replacing mothers—is a start in dispensing with the human society and transforming it into a biological society with an artificial way of life."⁵⁸ Motherhood is the female's function, not the male's, because a child has a natural tendency toward her. Any attempt to take a child away from his or her mother is "coercion, oppression and dictatorship."⁵⁹ It is unjust and cruel to ask a pregnant woman to do heavy work or a breast-feeding mother to perform hard work. It is unnatural to transform women into men because each "must perform, not abandon, the role for which they are created."⁶⁰

His starting point for these views is a belief that women are exploited and oppressed in most present-day societies, whether advanced or developing. He complains that "all societies nowadays look upon [women] as no more than an article of merchandise. The East regards her as a commodity for buying and selling, while the West does not recognize her femininity."⁶¹ He therefore recommends a worldwide revolution to put an end to all materialistic conditions that hinder women from performing their natural role in life and that force them "to carry out men's duties in order to be equal in rights."⁶²

In his view, the question of whether or not women should work is "a ridiculous materialistic presentation."⁶³ Society must provide work for all men and women who need work, "but on condition that each individual should work in the field that suits him [or her], and not be forced to carry out unsuitable work."⁶⁴ All human beings are created equal and free. Freedom, however, means that every person gets the type of education which qualifies him or her for doing appropriate work. In his view, although there is no difference in rights between man and woman, "there is no absolute equality between them as regards their duties."⁶⁵

Qaddafi has paid special attention to the plight of women in Libya. In 1970, under his leadership, the RCC invited all women to a special congress to air their problems and needs. He participated in the session and later saw that their resolutions were implemented. He has

⁵⁸ Qathafi, *The Green Book, Part 3*, p. 30.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

encouraged women to organize themselves politically and to actively participate in the political process as part of his drive to put the instruments of government in the hands of all the people. Women are now participating on an equal footing with men in the popular congresses and People's Committees.

As a result of the Revolution, women have made some important advances in Libyan society. All professions are open to them. For example, in 1973, eight women were trained as pilots. They are now working in the field of communications. The *Majalat al-Beit*, a major magazine, has a female editor. Three women were included in the Libyan delegation responsible for drafting a constitution for the ill-fated proposed union with Egypt. Qaddafi and his colleagues on the RCC had also done much to bring about greater participation by women in the political life of the country. Many laws have been made to grant women equal rights. Women now receive equal pay for equal work and have been granted equal rights in legal procedures for divorce. Education is used widely to provide women with opportunities to receive education and training that will help liberate them from past bondages.⁶⁶

Despite these gains, change is coming slowly because of the traditional way of life in the Libyan society. Most women still regard the family as the cornerstone of the Libyan society and, consequently, family comes first. As Mrs. Rabab Adhams, an educator and principal of a girl's high school, put it, for example, "the family is my empire."⁶⁷ So far, she has managed to balance the family and her career but if there is a conflict, the job will have to go. Under no circumstances would she be willing to sacrifice the family. This seems to be the attitude of most educated Libyan women—an attitude that is grounded in Islamic values. The majority of Libyan women do not want to imitate Western feminist movements by demanding equality. They instead ask for "equal consideration and reciprocal confidence."⁶⁸

Minorities

Qaddafi believes that "no people have the right to oppress other peoples...and no one may offend another."⁶⁹ He recites the Quran to support his argument which says:

We have created you males and females and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another. The noblest of you in the sight of God is the best in conduct.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Habid, pp. 21-25.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Speech, May 14, 1973, p. 64.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

He therefore pays attention to the problems of minorities which are caused by artificial barriers that are created by the majority who seek domination of power and wealth. He argues that minorities have their social rights that should not be encroached upon by the majority because such action is "an act of injustice." He insists that "the social characteristic is personal and is not to be given or taken away."⁷¹ He warns against viewing the minorities as political and economic minorities because such a view is "dictatorship and injustice."⁷²

Qaddafi claims that minorities cannot "exist simply because of religion or beliefs." He argues that "every race has a majority religion and....a majority nationality." He therefore concludes that "it is a mistake that a person adopts a religion other than the majority religion of his race."⁷³

He insists that minorities are based on race, not religion or culture. In his view, there are only two significant types of minorities. The first involves minorities based on race that no longer have nations or homelands of their own. They are the remnants of people whose nations disappeared in the course of history. Examples are the Gerkas and the Gypsies. These minorities, having lost their homelands, have settled in new nations and have become part of them politically and economically. Despite this degree of assimilation, they have retained their own traditions, habits, religion and often language. Those minorities should be free to practice their own social and cultural habits.⁷⁴

The second type is the minority that lives in another nation despite the fact that an identifiable homeland and race continue to exist. Examples are the Armenians and the Kurds. In his view, these minorities "should be free to return to their homeland"⁷⁵ because their problems will continue as long as they are denied the right to have their own nations. The only solution therefore will be to create politically independent Armenia and Kurdistan. Otherwise, keeping them under subjugation by force is "a barbaric venture."⁷⁶

Qaddafi makes a distinction between such minorities and the Jews who, in his view, "are not a minority."⁷⁷ In Israel today, there are two groups: the Oriental Jews, who constitute 55 percent of the Jewish population, and the European (Ashkenazi) Jews, who account for 45 percent of the Israelis. He argues that, because European Jews have homelands and nationalities in Europe, they therefore have no right to

⁷¹ Qathafi, *The Green Book, Part 3*, p. 43.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁷³ *Qadhafi's Thesis*. Ottawa, Ontario: Jerusalem International Publishing House, October 1981, 4th Edition p. 26.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

settle in Palestine and to forcibly evict the Arab population. To Qaddafi, European Jews "have no right to leave their (European) nations to form a racist imperialist society in Palestine."⁷⁸ The Zionist claim to Palestine as a homeland is "a false claim,"⁷⁹ which has precipitated the long-drawn-out conflict in the Middle East, has threatened peace and security in the region and might cause a third world war. On the other hand, he argues that only the Oriental Jews have the right to remain in the Middle East. Thus, European Jews should return to Europe, namely the countries of their origin. It is within this framework that he calls upon the Libyan Jews, who are now living in Europe, to return to Libya because they have the right to live in their native country just like other Libyans. As he put it: "I would welcome and will provide for the return of the Libyan Jews in Europe, if they wish to live in a new and free Jamahiriya. They will have equal rights and duties. They will be able to sit side by side with other Libyans in the Congresses, and decide with others the fate of their nation. Yet they will be able to practice their own religion freely, at home or in the synagogues. In the Jamahiriya society, all the people...have equal rights to power and wealth."⁸⁰

Since the problems of minorities have continued to exist in both capitalist and communist societies without any apparent relief in sight, he believes that the only solution rests in his Third Universal Theory where power, wealth and arms are placed in the hands of all the people. Minorities will automatically become an integral part of the larger community through direct participation in the political process and by granting them political and economic rights on an equal footing to all. In doing so, they will become conscientious and responsible members of the society because they are no longer treated differently from the majority and are no longer placed in the periphery of the community. Once the political and economic problems of the minorities are solved, Qaddafi believes that nationalism, the most potent source of social unity, can become stronger.

Blacks

In his search for a new social order, Qaddafi could not ignore the problems of black peoples who have suffered tremendously from racism, which manifested itself both in European colonization of Africa and in servitude in North America. In his view, both colonialism and slavery were manifestations of European hatred of the black race. They were the product of the same coin, that is, the Anglo-Saxon doctrine of white supremacy. The net result of centuries of enslavement has been a bitter feeling and the search for satisfaction derived from needing to

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

rehabilitate a whole race. This condition has given birth to "a psychological motivation in the movement of the black race to vengeance and domination."⁸¹

Qaddafi saw no justification for one race to despise another or for a person "to boast at the expense of another"⁸² whether it is because of color or national origin. Thus, discrimination or segregation is morally wrong because human beings are created equal. As he explained: "We believe that all of us are the sons of Adam and Eve and do not discriminate between whites and non-whites." He therefore argues that there should be no distinction based on color.

Qaddafi recognizes that "the black race is now in a very backward social situation" stemming from centuries of slavery and colonialism. He also points out, however, that

Such backwardness helps to bring about numerical superiority of the blacks because their low standard of living has protected them from getting to know the means and ways of birth control and family planning. Also their backward social traditions are a reason why there is no limit to marriage, leading to their unlimited growth, while the population of other races has decreased because of birth control, restrictions on marriage and continuous occupation in work, unlike the blacks who are sluggish in a climate which is always hot.⁸³

He argues that the only way for the black people to reverse these conditions is to fight "to regain their dignity and respect." He feels that time is on their side and that the black race will eventually "take over power in various parts of the world."⁸⁴ He bases his prediction on the inevitability of the social historical cycles. Since the yellow and white races have had their hey days of expansion and domination, it could be expected that the black race will have its turn to rise and prevail.⁸⁵ In his view, their ascendance to power will be the first step toward regaining their respect and placing themselves on an equal footing with other races.⁸⁶ Blacks, whether they are in North America or Africa, have many incentives to struggle to gain their proper place in the world community. American blacks, for instance, are fighting for social, economic and political emancipation; they are struggling to eradicate past injustice from centuries of oppression and deprivation. As he put it: "The rise of the black Americans is not due to the political or economic situation in America, but rather due to the hereditary drive and the...hidden anger

⁸¹ Qathafi, *The Green Book, Part 3*, p. 45.

⁸² Qadhafi's *Thesis*, p. 29.

⁸³ Qathafi, *The Green Book, Part 3*, pp. 45-46.

⁸⁴ Qadhafi's *Thesis*, p. 29.

⁸⁵ Qathafi, *The Green Book, Part 3*, p. 45.

⁸⁶ Qadhafi's *Thesis*, p. 29.

against oppression. Socially, economically and politically, the blacks want to be free from the daily oppressive and unjust and arbitrary control of the Anglo-American majority.”⁸⁷ He predicts that the burning desire for equality, freedom and justice will drive blacks toward revolution, which aims at eradicating this “barbaric U.S. culture which fosters (discrimination)...to maintain a system of domestic colonialism and (external) imperialism.”⁸⁸

The Family, the Tribe and the Nation

Qaddafi argues that a society has several social structures centrally important to its vitality; they are the family, the tribe and the nation, all of which are non-political in nature. These social bonds are essential to the individual as a source of differing advantages, privileges, values and ideas. These are strongest at the family level and progressively weaker at each higher level. Qaddafi fears that these values, along with their material benefits and social advantages, are threatened by extinction whenever any of these social institutions are lost.⁸⁹

The family is the most important social structure, the one in which man has close, direct and personal relationships. It plays a significant role in his evolution and development. For this reason, Qaddafi insists that any attempt to disperse or to weaken the family is “inhuman and unnatural” because an “individual without a family has no value or social life.”⁹⁰ In contrast, if individuals are permitted to grow naturally within the family, both the family and the society will flourish.

As for the tribe, Qaddafi believes that it is “a natural ‘umbrella’ for social security.”⁹¹ Like the family, the tribe provides man with benefits, advantages and ideas; it also influences his behavioral pattern. Although many countries have attempted to weaken, if not destroy, tribes in the name of progress and modernization, Qaddafi believes that the tribe has a special role to play in the socialization process. From childhood to adulthood, persons gradually and systematically absorb tribal customs and traditions which influence their values, mores, ideals and behavior. Qaddafi suggests that this practical life experience in tribal acculturation can benefit society if it is transformed into a social education. To him, such education is not only practical and valuable but also much “better and more human than any [formal] school education.”⁹²

Qaddafi contends that the nation, an important unit, is often born out

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Qathafi, *The Green Book, Part 3*, p. 15.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

of a common origin and grows with a shared destiny through affiliation. The nation is the individual's political and social umbrellas whose bond is nationalism. It is a wider social structure than that of the family and the tribe, both of which are limited in their membership. Although he argues that "national fanaticism is essential" for national survival, he warns that it can get out of hand and become "a threat to humanity."⁹³ He feels that it is vital for societies "to maintain the cohesiveness of the family, the tribe [and] the nation...in order to benefit from advantages, privileges, values and ideals yielded by [their] solidarity, cohesiveness, unity, intimacy and love."⁹⁴

Qaddafi makes a distinction between a nation and a state because, in his view, the state is an artificial economic, political and sometimes military system "with which mankind has no relationship and has nothing to do."⁹⁵ It is created by either nationalism or by religious, economic and military factors. The national state is composed of a single national group; it is viable because the political structure is consistent with the social structure. Such a state is likely to survive unless it falls victim to external aggression (i.e. colonialism and imperialism) or to internal strife (i.e. clashes with other social institutions such as tribes, clans or families). Even under these circumstances, states will reemerge as a national struggle breaks out to put an end to foreign domination or to express a resurgence of national unity. Another state is born out of religious, economic and/or military factors; it usually encompasses several national groupings. Its structure is artificial and liable to break up as each group gains independence under the banner of nationalism. This outcome is inevitable whenever the political structure is not consistent with the social structure.⁹⁶

Qaddafi stresses nationalism as the basis upon which nations are founded and survive because, without it, nations are threatened with extinction. He argues that each group has its own social structure which binds its people together and produces common needs that, in his view, must be fulfilled collectively, not individually. Group members are bound by a single nationalism and share common needs, rights, demands and objectives. Qaddafi considers national liberation fronts as social movements instigated in support of nationalism, since they strive to achieve liberation from the domination of another group.⁹⁷

In Qaddafi's view, the national factor is the social bond that can "[work] automatically to impel the nation towards survival."⁹⁸ Thus, when nationalism is broken, nations are threatened by civil strife, violence and

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-23.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

danger of destruction. The same is true when individuals begin to disregard nationalism, their lives are damaged and so is the life of the nation. In his analysis, the social factor is essential for national unity. Although it can be challenged by religion—which may divide or unite national groupings—such rivalry would end, however, when the social factor gains sway.⁹⁹

According to Qaddafi, historical records reveal that there is a conflict between the social factor (nationalism) and religion whenever there are different nationalities grouped together in one nation. He argued that although religion might be victorious at the beginning, nationalism will eventually triumph. This was evident in the recent history of the sub-continent of India. In the post-war period, the sub-continent was divided into two states along religious lines, so that the Hindus ended with India and the Muslims with Pakistan. Religion, however, was unable to contain the rise of Bengali nationalism in East Pakistan. The Bengalis finally broke away from Pakistan and founded their own state—Bangladesh.¹⁰⁰ These events give credence to his argument that where there is a conflict between nationalism and religion, nationalism will prevail.

CONCLUSION

The Qaddafi-led coup in 1969 marked a decisive turn for Islam in Libya. From the outset, Qaddafi used Islam as a means to consolidate his power and to rally the masses behind his revolution. In the early years, he got the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) to initiate measures that would eliminate foreign elements that had been incorporated into the country's culture over the decades and that would, instead, uphold the basic tenets of the Sharia (Islamic law). He also sought and received the support of orthodox Muslim groups that had previously been denied a prominent role in Libyan civic affairs under King Idris, the Grand Mufti of the Sanusiyyah Order.

This marriage of convenience ran into problems when Qaddafi began to implement his Third Universal Theory, which sought to carry out socialism in Libya and to put the instruments of government into the hands of the people. Qaddafi insisted that his socialism is in accordance with the Islamic teachings. As he put it:

Islam discussed justice and Socialism before Marx or Lenin, it called for humanism, it freed the Negro and encouraged learning...it upheld the rights of the oppressed before Marx, Lenin, or Mao, or Castro ever uttered a word on the subject. It supported the poor and the blind.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Speech, May 14, 1973, pp. 44-45.

¹⁰¹ Habib, p. 28.

His argument, however, did not convince the Ulama to change their minds on his socialism. Their opposition put an end to his cooperation with religious groups and leaders. He weakened their positions in the society by ending the role of the Ulama as the final arbitrators on religious questions. He did so by making the Quran "the law of the society."¹⁰² This meant that he considered the Quran to be the only primary source of the Islamic faith, thus downgrading the Sunna, the other primary source of religious matters. In doing so, he eliminated the role that the Ulama could play in religion, particularly in the Fiqh (jurisprudence). He also made himself the sole arbitrator on religious issues, thus putting both religious and secular power into his own hands.

This outcome facilitated his relentless drive to shape Libyan society along his theory, which did not mention Islam in its political and economic sections. Furthermore, it was religion as a concept, not Islam in particular, that was referred to in the social part. This is primarily because Qaddafi did not want to limit the application of his theory to Muslim societies. His objective was to spread it to other nations as a replacement for both capitalism and communism, which, in his view, have failed to solve human problems.

Although Qaddafi advocates that each nation should have a religion, he recommends that the Quran should be read by non-Muslims because it embodies all the guidance needed to run a state. In addition, the Quran was addressed to all peoples and is not the property of the Arabs alone. This stance might explain the influence that Islam has had on his proposal for an egalitarian society, where there would be no classes or discrimination based on sex, color or creed. In his view, a return to religion will help eliminate social injustice and will strengthen the fabric of the society, bringing about emotional and social stability as well as cohesiveness and harmony.

Qaddafi's examination of contemporary societies led him to conclude that they are "essentially composed of predetermined models built (on) exploitation, oppression and injustice."¹⁰³ This intolerable condition has come about as a result of inequality, lack of freedom and a straying from religion—all of which have led to the hegemony of one class over another and the rise of different forms of discrimination based on sex, color or creed.

To solve these problems, Qaddafi suggests "a radical change in society and culture so that life will be founded on healthy bases."¹⁰⁴ His objective is to encourage the masses everywhere to "destroy the predetermined models" and to set up a new society that is based on respect for life "as nature demands."¹⁰⁵ He seeks to introduce a new social structure that is

¹⁰² *The Basic Facts*, p. 68.

¹⁰³ *International Colloquium in Benghazi: The Green Book*, Vol. II, p. 117.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

based on equality, freedom and a return to religion in order to wipe out social injustice. This is not an utopian society but one that is based on upholding religion and rehabilitating human values that have been suppressed or disregarded when the process of industrialization was accompanied by dehumanization.

Qaddafi's theory has already been put into practice in Libya. He is reorganizing Libyan society along new lines in an effort to prove the soundness of his ideology and to encourage other nations to use it. It is too early to tell whether his experiment will succeed in Libya, however. This will depend to a great extent on the Libyan people's commitment to his theory. It is true that, since 1969, Qaddafi has dominated Libya's policies by the sheer force of his personality and charismatic leadership, both of which have been instrumental in imposing his ideas and structure on Libya. This raises a serious question of whether Qaddafi's structural changes will survive a change in the Libyan leadership in the future.