Virginie Collombier and Wolfram Lacher (eds.). 2023. *Violence and Social Transformation in Libya*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 363 pp.

This volume on post-2011 Libya benefits not only from the efforts of financial and aid specialists, but also in several cases contributors who are Libyans themselves and who have worked in or visited the country over the past fourteen years. In the past five years we have had little information coming out of Libya, and what is "known" (is it really known?) has frequently been fragmentary or even contradictory. This book takes steps to remedy that information void, and if in some segments we are given anecdotal information, that is still better than no information. The overarching question here is, if, with the collapse of the central government, Libya today is divided into two main centers of power, Benghazi and Tripoli, with several largely autonomous regions, such as Fezzan, finding their own way, what general trends can we discern in a society where local militias loom large as centers of authority? The contributors divide this inquiry up thematically and geographically.

Rima Ibrahim's essay on women's roles and opportunities since 2011 points out that while in an initial period after the fall of Qaddafi there may have been more opportunities for women to "emerge from the house," they tended to retreat back there in periods of local civil strife (i.e. usually militias fighting), or when there was a clear lack of security. Clearly, in locales where authorities (again, frequently militias) adopted a more conservative religious discourse and posture, the daily mobility of women became problematic.

In several of the categories of inquiry, the soporific effects of oil wealth linger, distorting choices of the younger generation, facilitating the longevity of some pre-2011 elites, and presenting a misleading or completely inaccurate picture of public wealth. For example, several national wealth funds which are demonstrably still extant are shrouded in mystery, meaning: who is controlling that wealth? Where are the bank accounts and investment fund administration offices? Managers of these funds and accounts answer to who? There are amounts in the hundreds of millions of U.S. dollars at stake here.

Many revolutions (think of China after 1949, for example) completely sweep away or hound out of the country the old elites, but this has not happened in Libya. Virginie Collombier and Misbah Omar point out in their essay, "The Re-emergence of the Jamahiriya Networks after 2011," that many individuals managed to make the transition, not from *azlam* (remnants) to *thuwwar* (revolutionaries), but at least from *azlam* to "active." In the latter category would be military and security officers who came back (usually from Egypt) to join Haftar's forces in eastern Libya, some individuals who participated in the Government of National Accord after December 2015, and some members of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) after 2020. So, it would be misleading to say that a completely new post-revolution elite has emerged. What becomes clear here is not that the pre-2011 networks have re-emerged, but many individuals did find their way back to public position after periods in the wilderness. Also, as noted above, some of the Qaddafi-era state financial structures are present but occluded (where are the accounts? where are the funds?).

Volume editor Wolfram Lacher points out in his essay that the collapse of the central authority by no means meant there was no longer a public sector allotting jobs and disbursing funds—indeed, after 2014 in particular there were more public employees than ever before (to

many readers this may sound impossible: it is not). The importance of these positions declined; in some cases, the employees were not working at all, they were merely on the payroll, but the public sector existed and expanded.

Regarding international mediation and intervention, all readers know there would have been no speedy overthrow of Qaddafi without European and U.S. air activity, and Arab state support for various militias and interest groups after 2011 was open and significant. Christopher Thornton's essay on mediation efforts relates a series of failures between 2011 and 2023, but he does note the shrewd efforts of UN secretary-general Special Representative Stephanie Williams, who helped set up the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum, with over twenty-two percent female members. Thus far, the LPDF at least managed to nominate an interim prime minister and a three-person Presidency Council.

Even residents of post-2011 Libya have frequently been unable make sense of more than their local power structure encompassing militias, currently active civil servants, clan leaders, and others, but this welcome volume brings us a little way towards a broader view of what is happening in the country.

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