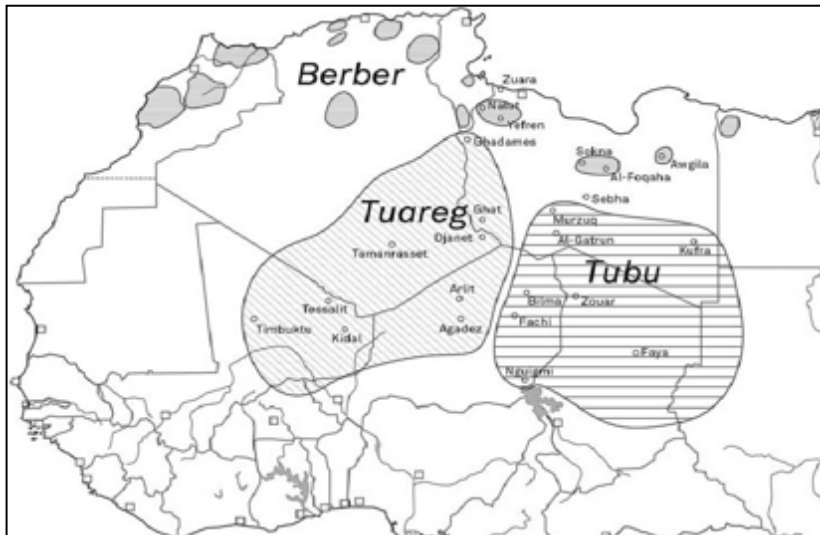




Toubou-Tuareg Dynamics within Libya

By Adriana Petre & Ewan Gordon



Key Points:

- Tuareg and Toubou tribes have both been systematically suppressed under Gaddafi's 42 year rule.
- Both tribes have ethnic and tribal links beyond the Libyan border, to the south of the country.
- The two tribes co-existed peacefully under the Mide Mide truce until September 2014.

- This change in the balance of power occurred in part-due to a conflict over oil fields and smuggling routes.
- The animosities between the two tribes still continue to shake the region's stability.

Fig. 1 INES KOHL, Institute for Social Anthropology, Austria - Settlement areas of the Berber, the Tuareg and the Toubou in North Western Africa

Introduction:

Under Gaddafi's rule, the Amazigh, Tuareg and Toubou tribes have been constantly neglected, politically underrepresented, culturally marginalised and denied citizenship rights. Following the removal of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, after his 42 year rule, Libya's ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities have been continuously attempting to get a voice in the country's new political and societal order re-shaping. They are calling for political participation, equal citizenship, and the recognition of minority rights.

In this section the post-Gaddafi era Toubou and Tuareg tribes shall be discussed, and the extent to which they might influence Libya's future. In order to better understand the dynamics and recent animosities between the two tribes, this section provides an overview of the ethnic and linguistic aspects of the Toubou and Tuareg, also making reference to the circumstances they have experienced under Gaddafi's rule.

Toubou (Tebu, Tabu) Tribes:

The Toubou are an African ethnic minority, dispersed among four states: Libya, Niger, Chad and Sudan. They primarily reside in the southern Libyan towns of Qatrun, Sabha, Kufra and Murzuq. They are thought to account for approximately 0.2% of the Libyan population, with 12,000-15,000 members. However, given their nomadic nature, the porous borders in the region, and the fact that under Gaddafi's regime the ethnic minorities were not recorded, the precise number of Toubou people is hard to be determined (Jaffer, 2016). They are considered to be one of the most distinctive Libyan tribe, mainly due to their dark skin colour. The Toubou people more strongly resemble sub-Saharan Africans, rather than their fellow nationals to the north. Their language, Tebu, is part of the Nilo-Saharan language family, and their basic social unit is the elementary family, organised into clans. Their main activities revolve around pastoralism, farming, substance smuggling and date cultivation (Oakes, 2014). Their hostile habitat, dire poverty, extreme living conditions and remote location means they have a reputation for being a tough people. Thus, they have often come into conflict with the neighbouring tribes and with the Tuareg people.

The Toubou people have long been subjected to persecution and discrimination in Libya. These practices were particularly notable during the Gaddafi rule, when they faced oppression and prejudicial treatment, by being denied access to "decent health care, education and skilled jobs, being classified and treated as national foreigners by the authorities and being 'stripped of their Libyan citizenship in 2007'. All these were part of the Gaddafi's Arabisation process" (Mitchell, 2015). As a result of this treatment, the Toubou people joined the rebels in the revolution against Gaddafi.

Toubou (Tebu, Tabu) Tribes cont'd:

After the fall of Gaddafi, the Toubou people have experienced a “cultural revival”, by asserting their non-Arab status and renewing their demands regarding citizenship rights and political integration. However, the ongoing political marginalisation still fuels Toubou grievances and their reticence to disarm.

The Tuareg (Touareg, Twareg) Tribes:

The Tuaregs are made up of roughly 2 million people who live in the Sahara Desert, covering the countries of Mali, Niger, Libya, Algeria, Chad and Burkina Faso (see fig. 1). The largest population is within Mali, with an estimated 950,000 Tuareg people. The Tuaregs’ situation can be likened to the Kurds in the Middle East. They are a large ethnic group, spread across many countries, but have no majority in any one country.

Elements within the Tuareg population have stated that they are a people with a unique history, culture and a right to ownership of the land, therefore deserving of their own state. This has led to a large independence movement amongst the Tuareg people. Independence movements, which have led to insurgencies, have been started by the Tuareg in Niger and Mali. These conflicts have had an important impact upon the Tuareg people’s recent history.

Historically, the Tuareg were nomadic, but in more recent times, have adopted a semi-nomadic and pastoralist existence. The Tuareg practice a mix of Sunni Islam and West African witchcraft.

The Tuareg in Libya are found in the south east of the country, concentrated in Ghat, Ghadames, Murzuq and Ubari. Estimating the population of the Tuareg population is difficult, with reports putting the populace figure between 10,000 and 100,000. This lack of clarity comes from the fact that population figures are difficult to find in the current Libyan conflict; many of the Tuareg minority were never given official citizenship under the Gaddafi regime, a situation that is not yet resolved, thus removing them from “official” data; the semi-nomadic lifestyle of the Tuareg people across Libya’s borders means the movement of people and a flux in population size.

Under Gaddafi’s rule, Libya’s minority Amazigh (Berber), Tuareg and Toubou populations were suppressed and their language and cultures banned. Gaddafi refused to give many of the nomadic people Libyan citizenship. The post-Gaddafi, Arab dominated governments have continued this discrimination, inflaming tensions between minority groups and the Arab majority.

The Tuareg (Touareg, Twareg) Tribes con'td:

However, going back to Gaddafi's rule, the Libyan dictator gained some level of support from the Tuareg population by promising economic rewards and citizenship if they would fight for him. Recognising their knowledge of survival and combat in the Sahara Desert, Tuareg troops became an important part of Gaddafi's military. Tuareg fighters were thus used to fight in Gaddafi's wars in Chad and for his regime during the 2011 revolution. Many Libyans view the Tuareg as Gaddafi regime supporters, an opinion that has led to reprisal attacks and continual discrimination against the Tuareg minority. The end of Gaddafi's rule gave the Tuareg a large stockpile of weapons and a supply of battle-hardened fighters.

In the post-Gaddafi era, the Tuareg have wanted: political representation in the new Libyan government, economic development, access to state jobs, and state support for "our language and culture" (as expressed by Mohammed Abdelqader, the Mayor of the Tuareg town of Ghat).

With little economic opportunities, many Tuareg have taken up smuggling across Libya's unsecure borders, with Libyan officials estimating that 70% of the Fezzan economy consists of this practice.

Tuareg - Toubou conflict:



The Toubou and Tuareg present one of the most challenging tasks for the government in its attempt to create an inclusive Libyan society. These tribes live along important trade routes, which were traditionally used for moving drugs, weapons and people through the Sahara. Compared to the northern militias, which are more politically and economically integrated into society, the southern tribes remain more culturally distinct (Stratfor, 2012).

The battle between the Tuareg and Toubou tribes in the south of the country, in the oasis town of Ubari, is a battle for power, economic assets of the oil fields, smuggling routes, and the tribes' place in the post-Gaddafi era Libya.

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Fig. 2 BORZOU DARAGHI, Libya's Badlands, Financial Times

Tuareg - Toubou conflict cont'd:

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The Tuareg and Toubou had a non-hostile relationship in southern Libya from the late 19th century to 2014, under the "Midi Midi" ("friend friend") truce, which was necessary to divide the economically important trade routes in southern Libya. These routes are currently being used to smuggle foods, fuel, cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, weapons and migrants into Libya, from neighbouring Chad, Algeria and Niger. The Midi Midi truce even lasted though the 2011 revolution, when many Tuareg fought with Gaddafi, and the Toubou on the opposing rebel side.

This truce lasted until September 2014, when fighting between the two tribes broke out in Ubari, an important town in southern Libya which controls smuggling routes as well as the nearby el-Sharara oilfield. By July 2015 clashes had reached Sebha, the largest city in southern Libya. So far, attempts to broker a peace deal between the two tribes have failed.

The breakdown of the Midi Midi truce can be put down to two factors. Firstly, The National Transitional Council gave control of Libya's southern borders to the Toubou, who had fought for the revolutionaries. As a result, the Toubou and Zintani tribes took control of the oilfields and pushed the Tuareg out. Secondly, the power balance over the trade and smuggling routes changed after the 2011 revolution. The Midi Midi truce established that the Tuareg tribes controlled the routes on the Algerian border, and the Toubou, the Chad and Niger routes.

The cross-border tribal and ethnic links play an important part in these routes i.e. Libyan Tuareg links with Tuareg in Mali, and Niger and Libyan Toubou links with Chadian Toubou. It is interesting to note from Tuareg sources that they call their Toubou adversaries "African", "Chadian gangs" and mercenaries from the justice and peace movement, "a Sudanese rebel group." On the other side, the Toubou blame the Tuareg fighters as "terrorists from Mali". This highlights reports that fighters and weapons are coming from ethnic groups across the Libyan borders to support their tribal brethren. Possible spill-over from such clashes in Libya between the two tribes may occur in the future in neighbouring countries such as Niger.

The control of these smuggling routes is very likely to have inflamed the Tuareg – Toubou conflict. Algeria has increased its border security in recent years, and the French intervention in Mali has put pressure upon smugglers. Consequently, the extra pressure put upon the Algerian and Malian borders has meant smugglers have altered their route to Niger, through the Libyan border. This has changed the power balance away from the Tuareg tribe to the Toubou tribe, who control the Niger-Libya border region.

Tuareg - Toubou conflict cont'd:

In addition, what started originally as a local fight for resources has now turned into a proxy war between the two opposing governments. Libyan Dawn in Tripoli supporting the Tuareg, Libya Dignity in the east of the country supporting Toubou.

Future scenarios:

The conflict between the Toubou and the Tuareg tribes in Libya is indicative of Libya as a whole. Due to the lack of security and economic opportunities, tribes are now responsible for their own security and incomes. Due to the lack of economic resource, tribes who were once on good terms are fighting each other for control of these lucrative economic resources. There may be a chance of reconciliation between both the Tuareg and Toubou tribes if they agree to a new truce like their previous Midi Midi truce. This, however, seems implausible. The lack of legal job opportunities and security (both interlinked when dealing with the issue of smuggling) combined with outside interference from tribal actors from outside of Libya and support from different government factions within Libya means the Tuareg Toubou fighting will continue indefinitely.

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