

**60 Chapters to Learn about Libya (2nd ed.), Area Studies 59,
Kazuko Shiojiri ed. (Akashi Shoten, 2020)**

Maki Iwasaki

1. Background of the Publication of the Book—“Arab Spring” and Libya

This book is a general introduction to Libya (State of Libya), a country located along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea in the Middle East. This is the second edition of the book, “60 Chapters to Know Libya” (Area Studies #59), the first edition of which was published under the sole authorship of Kazuko Shiojiri, the editor of the second edition, in 2006. Within the approximately 14 years between the publication of the first edition and this second edition, Libya has undergone a major transformation. The “*people’s uprising*” took place in 2011, and as a result of the assassination of Mu‘ammar al-Qadhdhāfi (Gaddafi), who ruled the country for 42 years (1942-2011), Libyan society has fallen into a state of civil war that continues until today (October 2020). The so-called “*Arab Spring*,” the series of people’s demonstrations in the Middle East that started in Tunisia in December 2010, brought about drastic changes in the political system and social circumstances of many countries in the region, but the impact on Libya has been particularly substantial.

The editor specializes in research on medieval Islamic theology but had focused on Libya in the modern times during the first edition of the book. This focus was influenced in part by the fact that the editor’s spouse, Hiroshi Shiojiri, who is also a co-author of the second edition, had worked in the capital city of Tripoli for two years and nine months from June 2003 to March 2006 during his appointment as ambassador to Libya. During this period, the editor had stayed for a total of three months each year to conduct field work (p. 8), the results of her experience there were published as the first edition. After the collapse of the Gaddafi regime in 2011 and the major social changes that followed, the editor was joined by six co-authors to eventually publish this second edition after nine years from the time she first thought of publishing it. The six co-authors of the second edition are Hiroshi Shiojiri (former diplomat), Hajime Kamiyama and Yuki Tanaka (researchers on modern Libya), and three authors from Libya: Aḥmad Nailī (researcher and diplomat), Intiṣār K. Rajabāny (officer of an international organization), and Ḥātīm Muṣṭafā (researcher and politician).

2. Structure of the Book in Comparison with the First Edition

The following are the similarities and differences between the first edition and the second edition. First, although both editions consist of 60 chapters, the first edition has a total of 339 pages comprising 6 sections and 12 columns, while the second edition is thicker with 382 pages comprising 9 sections and 23 columns. In particular, the second edition, which includes Libyan researchers and Japanese researchers on Libya as co-authors, includes more details on the local situation in Libya. As to their contents, although details on Gaddafi's political ideas which were written in the first edition were deleted from Sections I, III, V, and VI of the second edition, they remained largely the same except for a few revisions and corrections. The second edition does not include the Japanese translations of "*Reference documents and speeches by Gaddafi*" included in the first edition. The rest of the book, namely, the major part of the Introduction, the first part of Section II, Sections IV, VII, VIII, and IX, and the "*Structure of the new Libyan administrations*" at the end of the book are new.

3. Overview of Each Section

Section I includes the geography, history, and the ethnic groups in Libya. Chapter 1 describes Libya as a country with rich nature—the fourth largest country in the African continent having the longest coastline of 1,770 kilometers among countries along the Mediterranean Sea coast, with 93% of the country covered by desert, and highlands, oases, wetlands, and lakes scattered across the country (p. 26-30).

Chapters 2 to 10 mention the current state of archeological sites listed also as UNESCO World Heritage Sites and talk about the history of Libya from the ancient times to its declaration of independence in 1951 and about the ethnic groups and languages of modern Libya. One of the interesting things is the account of its history until its independence, which describes the region near the Mediterranean Sea coast as being almost always under the control of foreign forces, beginning with the settlement of Phoenicians in 2000 B.C. and the rule of the Roman Empire, the Vandals, the Byzantine Empire, the Arabs, Spain, the Ottoman Empire, and Italy (p. 31). In contrast, the inland regions were inhabited by the nomadic tribes (p. 31), whose traditions have a major impact on modern Libyans.

Section II describes the life of Gaddafi, after discussing the people's uprising in 2011, which eventually resulted to his death. The section focuses on Gaddafi as a person and about his death.

Gaddafi was born to a family of six that belonged to one of the Bedouin tribes called

al-Qadhādhfah, which lived in the desert region south of Sirte, in 1942 (some accounts say 1940 or earlier) (p. 105-106). Despite the fact that many of his fellow tribe members were illiterate as was often in the case with the nomadic people in the region, Gaddafi was blessed to have the opportunity to study and was an excellent student, but he remained attached to the nomadic traditions throughout his life (p. 106-107).

He was a child during the Second World War, when German and British forces repeatedly engaged in fierce battles on Libya's Mediterranean Sea coast (p. 107). The editor surmises that "*it was probably during this period that he subconsciously developed anti-imperialism thought and aversion against not only the Axis powers of Italy and Germany, but also towards other foreign powers like Britain and America*" (p. 106).

Gaddafi, who was greatly influenced by the Islamic holy book *al-Qur'ān* and neighboring country Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser (in office from 1956 to 1970), matured early and started joining political activities when he was in junior high school. Later on, in 1969, when he became a Colonel of the army, he succeeded in leading the revolution when he was only 27 years old (p. 110). He then implemented policies that were hostile to the Western powers under a unique socialist system called "*Jamahiriya*" and ruled Libya as its supreme leader for 42 years. Gaddafi coined the word "*Jamahiriya*" by changing the Arabic word *jumhūr*—"public"—to its plural form, *jamāhīr*, to refer to a state or political system based on the rule of the masses (p. 104). However, the editor points out that since this system was "prone to autocracy" (p. 92), the public gradually resisted Gaddafi's prolonged rule, and as a result of their strong hatred against him, the people did not only overthrow him, but eventually killed him.

Section III discusses Libya's international relations with Western countries and Japan, depicting the strenuous efforts by citizens of these countries to build relationships with Libyans, after the lifting of the UN sanctions, which had continued for seven years, and Libya's official declaration of its reengagement with the international community in 2003.

Among the accounts of the authors' experiences of living in Libya, the reviewer found "*Column 6: Women's Revolution Memorial Day*" (p. 128-133) of this section particularly very interesting. On a certain day in 2005, the editor received a call at the ambassador's residence from Libya's protocol office. She was invited to a dinner party celebrating the Revolution Memorial Day hosted by Gaddafi's wife to be held in two days. The time and place were not made clear until the day of the event. Although unfortunately not recorded in the second edition, the account of Hiroshi Shiojiri in "*Column 5: Sirte Memorial Event: To an unknown destination*" in the first edition was even more interesting. Mr. Shiojiri was invited to a

ceremony commemorating the revolution, but the invitation came to the embassy at 9 pm of the previous day, so they only found out about it on the day of the event. The place was somewhere near Sirte, Gaddafi's birthplace, around 500 kilometers from Tripoli. Without knowing the exact location of their destination, they rode in a government-chartered plane and bus for several hours before finally arriving. Despite being an official event, he was only told of the initial meeting place, without knowing exactly where they were going, about the details of the event, and what time it would finish. He reminisced that although he was not very anxious because he went with more than a dozen people, he imagined that it would have been an unnerving experience if he was the only one invited.

One of the possible reasons for not disclosing the location beforehand was the personal security of Gaddafi and his wife, who had been targets of failed assassination attempts. However, these stories also point to the difficulties faced by Western countries and Japan in their efforts to build business and diplomatic relations with Libya. In regard to this, the book points out that "*even the Western forces trying to invade Libya, once they entered the country, were in no time thrown into confusion by the country's unique political system that was embedded with the peculiar political ideas of the Jamahiriya, by the irrational procedures that had taken root during its long period of isolation from the international community, and by the opacity of its chain of command and hierarchy of authority*" (p. 134).

Section IV discusses the problems surrounding the increasing number of immigrants and refugees entering Libya. Aiming to become the leader of the African Union, the Gaddafi administration granted entry visa exemptions to African natives. This attempt had led to an increase of immigrants particularly from countries south of the Sahara Desert, but after Libya reengaged with the international community in 2003, the government implemented a strict crackdown on illegal immigrants to support EU countries. Further, destabilization of the Middle Eastern countries as a result of the "*Arab Spring*" uprisings and the worsening of the economy of African countries have led to the increase of immigrants and refugees heading towards Europe via Libya. This situation has led to many problems, such as the drowning of immigrants due to failed attempts to smuggle into Europe and the abuses suffered by immigrants in detainment facilities in Libya (p. 165-166). There have also been many reports of violence, non-payment of wages, and other human rights violations by employers, as well as attacks, robberies, killings, and other abuses by the militia toward immigrants and refugees living in Libya (p. 172).

The subject of Section V is different from the previous chapters. It focuses on Libya's society and culture. More than 95% of Libyans are Sunni Muslims (p. 182). The Mālikī school,

a very influential Sunni Islamic jurisprudence school in Libya, is known to be conservative and prohibits drinking and smoking. According to the editor, however, tobacco was sold in Tripoli under the Gaddafi regime; and although alcohol was not, the country did not impose very strict inspections against bringing in alcohol from outside despite the supposed prohibitions (p. 186). Also, this section discusses in detail about the life of ordinary people, such as the food culture, educational systems, social advancement of women, etc., as gleaned from the editor's extensive experience living in the country.

Section VI focuses on Libya's natural resources and its relations with Japan. According to the editor, Libya is one of the few countries producing internationally high-quality crude oil and not only has the 10th largest oil reserves in the world, but also harbors potential petroleum and natural gas reserves in its undeveloped regions, which comprise more than 70% of its territory (p. 218). Petroleum was discovered in Libya in 1959, and Gaddafi, who came into power in 1969, fought off the domination of Western oil majors by increasing the crude oil price by almost 40% and nationalizing the industry. However, as a result of the successive economic sanctions imposed on it, the country's oil production volume went down from 3.3 million barrels per day in the 1970s to only 1.7 million in 2006, further going down to 250,000 barrels per day due to the civil war (p. 219-220). Under the ongoing civil war, there is tension surrounding the regulatory authority over oil facilities between the armed organizations and the government as they try to secure sources of funds (p. 234).

Section VII to the last section, IX, chronologically detail the people's uprising, the collapse of the authoritarian regime, and the birth of a new Libya and the ensuing chaos that occurred within the approximately 10-year period from 2011 to the end of 2019. Section VII describes the people's uprising and the civil war, followed by an account of the collapse of the Gaddafi regime. While the first part of Section II covers most of these topics from a broad perspective, this section includes more detailed events.

Section VIII discusses the establishment of the interim government and the ensuing confusion as "*birth pangs of the new Libya*" (p. 267). The National Transitional Council formed by anti-Gaddafi forces (hereinafter, "anti-regime forces") was recognized by the United Nations Assembly in March 2011, and Libya's first free national election was held in July 2012. Although the election itself went generally smoothly, and a transitional cabinet was launched in November of the same year, clashes between the tribes and the paramilitary groups and attacks on international organizations and government agencies continued, leading to an increasing deterioration of the peace and order situation (p. 291-293). Through these developments, General Khalifah Haftar (1943-), who had once been disavowed by Ghaddafi

and was forced to live in America for almost 20 years, came to prominence. Haftar, who had close ties with the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency and the CIA, returned to Libya during the 2011 uprising and organized the Libyan National Army (LNA) in May 2014 to strengthen his presence among the anti-regime forces (p. 315-317).

An election of the House of Representatives to replace the General National Congress was held in June 2014, where many seats were won by members of the liberal faction, leading to the defeat of the Islamist bloc (p. 318). However, members of the old General National Congress who did not recognize the legitimacy of the House of Representatives organized themselves to form the National Salvation Government (NSG) (which became the Government of National Accord (GNA) in 2016) in Tripoli (p. 318-319). This transition did not only result in divisions in Libyan politics and society, but also led to intervention by other countries. The old General National Congress (Tripoli Government), which was composed of the Islamist bloc, was supported by Turkey and Qatar, while the House of Representatives (Tobruk Government), which is composed of the liberal faction and federalists, is supported by UAE and Egypt (p. 319).

Finally, Section IX describes the efforts of various political forces towards the unification and rebuilding of the country. The book's description of the extremely complicated and chaotic situation of the country today would most likely leave the readers—as was the case of the reviewer—in a state of gloom. The conflict between the Tripoli Government and the Tobruk Government, the war with the “*Islamic State*,” and the military intervention of Western and Middle Eastern countries with competing interests have become major hindrances to the establishment of the new Libya. Also, the stagnation of administrative functions due to the removal of politicians and public servants who played an active part during the old regime also significantly affected the life of the people (p. 347-348). The parliamentary and presidential elections announced to be held by the end of 2019 have not happened until today (p. 356).

Moreover, today, Libyan society is said to be in search of a new charismatic leader in place of Gaddafi. One person that fits the bill as Gaddafi's successor is his second son, Saif al-Islam (p. 351). The editor herself has attended a lecture by Saif al-Islam, whom she felt was an “*educated person*” (p. 352). However, the “*emergence of a longing for another “charismatic leader” to bring the intricately intertwined chaotic situation in the country under control*” (p. 349) in Libyan society, “*which had supposedly deposed a dictator in its quest to build a democratic state*” (p. 349), speaks of the difficulty of running a nation in the aftermath of the collapse a dictatorial regime.

4. Academic Significance of the Book

As a researcher on related fields, one of which is folk religious practices of the people in modern Egypt, the reviewer found that the breadth of scope and depth of treatment in each section of the book was remarkable. Probably no other document in Japanese comes close to the book in terms of the depth and breadth of its coverage on Libya, making the book an extremely valuable resource. Although the number of Japanese researchers who focus on the Middle East has been increasing, those specializing on Libya still remain few. Thus, as far as the reviewer is concerned, there are few Japanese documents focusing on Libya; in particular, there are not so many references delving on the situation in modern Libya other than this book and the references mentioned in it. Ordinary Japanese people, therefore, who want to know more about Libya, would have to depend on mass media news reports, which are in fact also scarce in Japan, with majority of the recent ones dealing mostly with the terrorism and the civil war in the country. This tendency has resulted in Japanese people having mostly an image of Libya being a dangerous country. Even at the university where the reviewer teaches, a lot of students equate the Middle East with being a dangerous place. Amidst this kind of bias, this book serves as an excellent introduction to Libya as it provides a clear explanation about the country based on the authors' experiences and using many pictures to depict the rich history and culture of Libya and its people as "*sincere and mild-mannered*" (p. 81) and as "*people who have not lost their kind-heartedness*" (p. 360).

The book, however, also deals with specialized information. Akashi Shoten's "Area Studies" series are considered as general-interest books, but this book's account of the ever-changing domestic political affairs and international relations after the collapse of the Gaddafi regime makes substantial reading even for researchers specializing in Middle Eastern studies. The "*Structure of the new Libyan administrations*" at the end of the book (p. 372-373) provides a straightforward graphical representation of the complex flow and relationships of political organizations after the collapse of the Gaddafi regime, which could only have been possible because of the author's expert knowledge on the subject and excellent communication skills.

The reviewer believes that this book also offers a certain ethnographic value. Other than the fact that there are only a few Japanese literature on Libya, the country has not been easily accessible for Japanese during the Gaddafi regime, and it is more so now due to the ongoing civil war. In fact, when the reviewer was a graduate student under the supervision of the editor, she had visited Libya upon the invitation of the editor and her husband; the preparations and procedures to enter the country turned out to be the most complicated and time-consuming among the more than 20 countries that the reviewer has visited. If a researcher

of the Middle Eastern studies has difficulty entering the country, ordinary Japanese people would all the more find it difficult to visit and learn about its society and its people's customs. This book, with its depiction of the people's religious practices, food culture, educational system, women's social advancement in modern Libyan society, and the inner workings of its diplomatic relations, is therefore significant as a valuable primary resource for Japanese people.

In closing, the reviewer would like to point out a few issues regarding the structure of the book. Although the current contents of the book are sufficient in themselves, Section II and part of Section VII include similar discussions regarding the collapse of the Gaddafi regime. The reviewer feels that it would probably be easier to read if these two sections instead focused on different topics; namely, the personal background and ideas of Gaddafi in Section II and the collapse of the regime in Section VII. This observation, however, is not a denial of the outstanding quality of the book.

Although the reviewer knew about the extremely harsh conditions that Libya fell into compared with the other Middle Eastern countries after the "*Arab Spring*," reading the book has left her shocked because the severity and complexity of the situation was beyond what she imagined it to be. At the same time, however, it evoked nostalgia and flooded the reviewer with warm personal memories of the peaceful streets of Tripoli under a wide blue sky. She earnestly hopes that peace would soon come and that the people can live in safety again.

Note

¹ Although the term "Arab Spring," which was coined by western media in reference to the popular movements that occurred in Middle Eastern countries starting the end of 2010, is also used in Arab countries, many people from the Middle East and researchers of the Middle Eastern studies object to this reference. Some of the reasons for these objections are: that the movements and changes it has brought about were not peaceful as the word "spring" suggests, and that the term only looks at the situation based on one criterion set by Western countries, i.e., as a movement towards democratization, whereas in fact there were various demands from different groups and sectors that led to these uprisings (Eiji Nagasawa, "Another view on the modern history of the Middle East—Looking back on the five years of the Arab Revolution," *Understanding the Modern Middle East: Political Order after the Arab Revolution and Islam* (edited by Akira Gotou and Eiji Nagasawa) Akashi Shoten, 2016, p. 29-31 (in Japanese)). The reviewer has also many friends and acquaintances living in the Middle East, and instead of "Arab Spring," they use the Arabic word "thawra," which means "revolution." Although the book does not give any particular explanation about the term, it first refers to it as "the so-called 'Arab Spring'" (p. 3) and consistently uses quotation marks when referring to the term throughout the book. This terminology indicates that the authors are not using the term "Arab Spring" uncritically.