

Religion and Violence: The betrayal of tradition and the rise of modern extremist ideologies in Libya

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Abstract

Islam has played a prominent role in Libya's conflicts and upheavals, especially since the country was colonized by Italy in 1911. Al-Sanusiyya, a Sufi movement played a pivotal role in fighting Italian colonialism and in building the Libyan nation state after independence. After seizing power in 1969, Colonel Muammar Gadhafi worked hard to dismantle traditional religious institutions and destroy the possibility of any religious leadership to usurp his own. His efforts, though, only allowed extremism to creep into the vacuum he created. After decades of authoritarian rule, underlying structural disparities and a variety of ethnic, tribal, resource-driven, and other conflicts are percolating to the surface amid these vast societal changes, complicating the process of rebuilding the country.

The religious and ideological dynamics of Libya's turbulent transition are fueling debates about the relationship between religion and violence. How far Islamic tradition is to be blamed for violent extremism? How can we understand today's modern salafi Jihadist and takfiri movements in the context of postcolonialism and globalization?

Zahra' Langhi is a Co-founder and the CEO of the Libyan Women's Platform for Peace, a socio-political movement which aims at peace building, inclusivity and gender equality. Also she participated in the UN led peace process. She was also advisor to the Libyan National Dialogue. In her research she focuses on topics of peace building, women's leadership, Middle Eastern history, metaphysics, mysticism and female spirituality in comparative religions.