Book Review

al-Werfalli, Mabroka. 2011. POLITICAL ALIENATION IN LIBYA: ASSESSING CITIZENS' POLITICAL BEHAVIOR. New York: Ithaca Press. 216 pp. $69.73 (cloth).

Political Alienation in Libya: Assessing Citizens' Political Behavior, authored by Mabroka al-Werfalli, is made up of lists of tables and figures, a glossary, a preface, acknowledgements, six chapters, a conclusion, an afterword, a bibliography, an appendix, and an index. The book's thesis revolves around the issue of political alienation in the North African nation of Libya. The book brings to the fore two major concerns that have engaged the philosophy and scholarship of some Africanists on the matter of the legitimacy of the state in postcolonial Africa. It is, indeed, the case that in much of contemporary African politics it is often difficult to separate the state from the leader. In this context, the ensuing question is this**:** to what extent did the character of Colonel Qaddafi himself advance political alienation in Libyan society?

As in many African polities, the assumption is that Qaddafi was Libya, and that Libya was Qaddafi—just as Robert Mugabe is Zimbabwe, and Zimbabwe is Mugabe; Paul Biya is Cameroon, and Cameroon is Biya; and so on. A second query that emerges is whether, to further the state's legitimacy, citizens should be politically devoted to the nation-state (as in nationalism) or to the individual leader. For instance, before his death during the recent rebellion, Colonel Qaddafi claimed that "my people love me"—not that the people loved Libya so much that they would defend it without him being in power. It is around the foregoing queries and discursive conjectures that this book should be visualized.

In chapter one, "Surveying Opinion in a Suppressive Milieu," al-Werfalli provides the empirical foundation on which the analyses and conclusion in this text are made. They include a survey of citizens' attitudes toward the

state that was conducted in Al-Orouba, with a population of approximately 85,000, in the region of Benghazi (found on pages 3, 6–10; 195–205). The author further narrates the herculean task of conducting a "meaningful" survey in a repressive society, in which researchers are generally viewed with suspicion.

Chapter two, "The Quest for Legitimacy," is used by al-Werfalli to historicize his analysis. The Libyan state lacked political legitimacy following "native" resistance to the occupation of the territory by the Ottoman Empire (p. 11). Readers learn that the reign of the monarchy did not change matters either, while the author alludes to the tactics adopted by the military junta after the 1969 coup d'état to advance the regime's support. The author points out that the stratagem applied by the administration was revolutionary legitimacy, which justified the acts undertaken by Colonel Qaddafi to rationalize his continuing in power indefinitely. The other mode with which to advance his political legitimacy was socioeconomic performance (dubbed *eudaemonic*), seen as a legitimation ploy on which most authoritarian regimes relied, especially when resources are considered plentiful. This method of operation is based upon the role of government in providing social and economic benefits to its citizens (pp. 12, 19).

Meanwhile, other approaches adopted by Qaddafi to further his legitimacy, and not necessarily that of the state itself, included charismatic and foreign policy. He saw himself as the reincarnation, and heir in the Arab world, of President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, especially as he championed the dogma of Arab nationalism (p. 26). He did so almost like the enigmatic Russian Rasputin by deluding himself as one endowed with supernatural, superhuman, and exceptional powers (pp. 22–23).

Chapter three, "Aspects of Political Support," addresses the measure of support the regime had from the survey's outcomes. In particular, al-Werfalli studies the extent to which individuals attended meetings of the Basic Popular Congresses (BPCs), a political component of the regime. Whereas attendance was high in the late 1970s (65%), it dropped substantially in the early 1990s (to 27%), and it continued to dwindle (as shown on p. 53). This development suggested a deficiency of enthusiasm in the system and a lack of trust in the government to govern effectively (pp. 61–64, 67).

Despite the foregoing situation in the BPCs, "53.5% of members of the Revolutionary Committees preferred to keep the system as it was, while 31.2% believed that some modifications were needed for the system to function well" (p. 68). The plurality of support to retain the status quo in the Revolutionary Committees may have been due to rewards that members received from the existing system.

In chapter four, the author discusses "Sources of Political Alienation," whereby he delves into details as to why political legitimacy, embodied in an individual or based on personality and not the state, tends to crumble when the instruments with which authoritarian regimes hold a community together begin to deteriorate. Definitionally, "political alienation implies a breakdown in the individual sense of attachment to the government. It is

seen as a conscious rejection of the whole political system, and is defined as attitudes of estrangement from that system" (p. 73). Problematically, however, political alienation is prevalent in much of Africa. Directly, sources of alienation in Libyan society did include the poor quality of education and health services, an inadequate level of crime control, supply of drinking water, telephone service, and transportation systems. Added to this cornucopia of problems is the ubiquitous ogre of corruption (pp. 77–82).

When a political system is dominated by a clique and such a faction deliberately or unconsciously creates barriers that make it impossible for a large segment of society to participate in the system, such a governance structure is likely to lack legitimacy from the groupings that suffer from marginalization. The above supposition is the theme of chapter five, "Manifestation of Political Alienation." Such alienation is time and again furthered by a regime's inefficacy. When resources are scarce, limited assets are channeled to citizens loyal to the government; groups that do not support the government, or are lukewarm in their support, are frequently denied development projects, if only to teach them a lesson for not fully offering their support, as expected by the political leaders. Their voices are silenced or not taken seriously. Therefore, they retreat from providing inputs in the system because no one values their view. Moreover, their political alienation toward the system become more poignant because they cannot speak publicly, and, as a result, they remain politically powerless in a country they would like to claim as their own (pp. 106–112).

Chapter six, "Political Behavioral Orientations: The Effects of Political Alienation," situates the discourse in a unique theme. Within the context of this subject-matter, al-Werfalli states, "the hypothesis in the present study of alienated political behavior is that revolutions, reforms, and withdrawal constitute fundamental alternatives to identification with the political system in Libya. The aim here is to move beyond attitudes in order to examine behavior, to show that the attitude of alienation is a basic predictor of important political behaviors" (pp. 123–124).

Meanwhile, surrounding the trinity of revolution, reform, and withdrawal as methods with which to bring about change in the republic, supporting insurrection resonated most fervently among the youth (pp. 126–127). In such contexts, reform and withdrawal were likely to lead nowhere, especially if those who benefitted from the system were to dictate and implement a reform agenda. Little wonder, then, that the demise of Colonel Qaddafi and his regime came about, in part, through an uprising and violence.

The author's conclusion makes a brave assertion about some of the study's limitations. Al-Werfalli avers: "further research might consider different scales of alienation when studying, measuring, or surveying public attitudes" (p. 161). The validity of the foregoing thesis is irrefutable. Nevertheless, the book is a significant contribution to the literature in African politics, especially in view of contemporary political developments and the current imbroglio in Libya.