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SYMPOSIUM: DICTATORSHIP AND SCHOLARSHIP

The LSE, Machiavelli, and Prudential Wisdom

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When I first heard about the political scandal around Saif Gaddafi and the Centre for Deliberative Democracy, my first thoughts were to some extent charitable: there but for the grace of God. British universities along with the BBC and many other worthy institutions in the United Kingdom have been severely under-funded for decades under both Labour and Conservative governments. The current economic crisis has only intensified these long-standing problems. These public institutions are now partially privatised and subject to commercial pressures. Universities offer training rather than education, because they are no longer regarded as an important foundation of citizenship and only an aspect of the economy. As a result, the pressure on deans and heads of departments to cut budgets and increase funding from private sources has been intense. Prestigious institutions such as the LSE have the advantage of name and location to attract funds. Such institutions have come under direct pressure from the government to take foreign fee-paying students and to increase funding from outside sources without asking too many questions.

Having myself been a professor at Cambridge University and currently the director of a research centre, I can well understand the external pressures. The temptations to accept donations are considerable. Indeed it transpires that Cambridge University is the recipient of donations from the Omani government amounting to over four million sterling and it received some eight million from the House of Saud to create a new centre for Islamic studies (Garner 2011). Oman is not Libya, but even in that prosperous sultanate youth protests broke out in Sohar on February 27 demanding job creation projects and political change, forcing Sultan Qaboos bin Said to replace three of his senior government officials. In addition to these considerations, it is also clear that social sciences, especially in the United States, have had a long association with the military. This association is all too clear in the case of anthropology where the American engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan has produced a new application of anthropological field techniques to so-called 'human terrain teams' and to 'ethnographic intelligence' when the war on the ground means that soldiers need to understand indigenous cultures if their encounter with local people is to be effective.

As the Libyan crisis unfolds, it is obvious that the LSE is not alone therefore in striking deals with external funding sources that later turn out to sit on a continuum between simple embarrassment and outright corruption. I am in any case especially fond of the School having been the Morris Ginsberg Fellow in 1981 and I have warm memories of Donald MacRae and others who made me welcome. I do not write this commentary therefore with any sense of *schaden-freude.* However, as more about this case around the Centre and the School has emerged in the early months of 2011 my initial charitable mood has evaporated. For one thing, the value of a PhD from the LSE has been compromised and the reputation of the entire institution called into question. Sir Howard Davies resigned as a result of these entanglements against a background of further revelations that a contract existed to train 400 Libyan professionals and public employees for some £2.2 million in addition to the £1.5 million for the Centre. There appears to be substantial evidence that Seif al-Islam el-Qaddafi's PhD thesis was plagiarised.

These British connections with Muammer Gaddafi obviously extend well beyond the LSE. In addition to these

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academic deals, Britain obviously had extensive economic ties to Libya. To take a few examples, Majorie Scardino, the chief executive of Pearson which publishes *The Financial Times* and *The Economist*, revealed that the company is now uncomfortable with its 3% Libyan stake. In Parliament the Labour Party has called on David Cameron to remove Prince Andrew from his position as a promoter of British business interests because, among other issues, of his ties to Gaddafi (*The New York Times Business Section* Friday March 2011, p. B6). *The Financial Times* (February 26–27 2011) which carried a large photograph of Tony Blair clasping the hand of Gaddafi was a further political embarrassment.

The business connections between Italy and France probably go deeper. In France President Sarkozy called on Alain Juppe to redefine French foreign policy after Michele Alliot-Marie the former Foreign Minister had offered French 'savoir faire' to quell the early protest movements in Tunisia. France has been slow to respond to the democracy movements in North Africa partly because some 400,000 French workers depend on French arms sales to autocratic regimes in the Middle East. Sarkozy eventually jumped at the opportunity to lead the no-fly zone in part for purely domestic political reasons. Italy faces a double crisis. Its government can no longer function effectively because of the distractions caused by the sex scandals around Silvio Berlusconi and its southern regions are threatened by a large number of foreign workers fleeing from Libya. Italy is the top arms exporter to Libya since the trade ban was lifted by the UN in 2004. Italy now imports one quarter of its oil requirements from Libya and in turn Libya's Banca UBAE has its headquarters in Rome. Berlusconi kissed Gaddafi's hand in March 2010 to solidify their international connections, but the real force in these relationships has been Eni, the Italian utility giant (Donadio 2011) Both Belusconi and Gaddafi represent what we might call the pinnacle of celebrity politics – a downgraded media version of Weber's charismatic leadership.

While the economic and political ties of France and Italy to Libya may have been more extensive than those of the United Kingdom, British co-operation – 'the hand of friendship' that came to be known as 'the deal in the desert' – is particularly repulsive give Gaddafi's proven involvement in the Lockerbie bombing of Pan Am flight 103 in which 207 people lost their lives. President Goerge W. Bush signed legislation making Gaddafi immune from criminal suits in the US when Gaddafi gave $1.5 billion to settle outstanding terrorism claims in 2008. Hillary Clinton however told the House of Representatives foreign affairs committee that she would consult with Robert Mueller FBI director and Eric Holder, attorney general, about the prospect of bringing Gaddafi to stand trial before the ICC. When it comes to describing Gaddafi as an international criminal, I am with President Ronald Reagan who called him a 'mad dog'.

Perhaps my concerns about academic scandals are almost irrelevant against the backdrop of the political movements against corrupt and authoritarian governments in the Middle East and North Africa. In fact these political movements are beginning to have global effects with the Chinese Communist Party showing signs of significant nervousness against Internet-driven protests. Given these globally important political changes taking place from Bahrain to the Yemen, who cares about shenanigans at the LSE? Perhaps we need to be concerned because there are linkages obviously between politics and political theory, and in this case the political upheavals are not unconnected with academic issues. At a professional level, I am anxious about the status of social sciences in the UK in general, and politics and sociology in particular, and surprised about the lack of engagement on the part of the British Sociological Association with the crisis.

To state the obvious, sociology in the UK has had few friends in high places and the role of Baron Giddens in this affair is cause for widespread professional concern. Giddens, who played a central role in establishing sociology at Cambridge, has been one of the very few British academics to have influence in the public domain, being instrumental in the development of British politics and the transformation of the Labour Party through his *The Third Way* (1998). An adviser to Tony Blair, Giddens was Director of the LSE (1997–2003) and closely involved with the development of the Centre. Lord Desai as the internal and Tony McGrew (previously at the University of Southampton) as the external examiner have also been drawn into the affair. To rub salt into the wounds, Saif Gaddafi addressed the LSE in May 2010 in a 'Special Miliband lecture' which was named after Ralph Miliband the famous Marxist intellectual, who had contributed significantly to British political theory.

To make matters worse, on an international scale the list of other academics that have had some involvement with the Gaddafi regime appears to be fairly extensive. Benjamin Barber the author of *Jihad vs McWorld* which was dedicated to the late Judith N. Shklar – one of the great theorists of American democratic citizenship- also visited Gaddafi. Did he talk to the Philosopher-King about the differences between tribalism and fundamentalism? Robert Putnam the author of *Making Democracy Work* (1993) who has authored famous accounts of the decline of social capital and its consequences for civil society and democracy in *Bowling Alone* (2000) also accepted a standard fee for a consultancy with Gaddafi.

Why should one be intellectually concerned, as opposed to politically opposed, to such connections between the academic world and a ruthless regime such as Gaddafi's? What strikes me first and foremost is the sheer naivety of

suggesting that 'deliberative democracy' (Held), or social capital approaches (Putnam) or McWorld (Barber) or theories of social democracy (Giddens) could have any purchase in Libya, which has been fought over for centuries leaving a society that remained culturally and socially divided between regions that were distinctive, namely Tripolitania, Fezzan and Cyrenaica – to give them their traditional designations. More importantly, Libya did not have the social strata who could be the carriers of deliberative democracy. Energy rich societies from Russia to Saudi Arabia are characterised by the resource curse in which rentier states become rich on the basis of energy extraction (typically oil and gas). Their profits are merely a form of rent; the consequences are typically a failure to diversify the economy and in social terms there is no middle class to speak of (apart from the professional and technical support staff on temporary visas).

After 1955 oil exploration and exports obviously improved Libya's finances, but the wealth was concentrated in the hands of an elite. Instead of an indigenous working class emerging, Libya along with other oil-producing societies in the Middle East has played host to a large migrant work force of low-skilled workers. There was a short period of time when from the 1930s onwards Italian settlers developed small industries including a Fiat motor-works and highways were built under Mussolini's regime. But at independence in 1951 Libya remained underdeveloped with relatively low literacy, no middle class and no colleges. The population of this region was relatively diverse including Berbers who were an important nomadic group. These people were studied by Edward Evans-Pritchard who had been a postgraduate student at the LSE and subsequently became professor of social anthropology at Oxford University. Being posted in 1942 to the British Military Administration in Cyrenaica, he published the influential *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (1949) which was a study of the Sufi order of which Idris as–Senussi was the religious leader. Although the Sanusi Sufi lodges were a site of resistance to Italian colonialism, they have not emerged as components in the current unrest along the coastal cities. I refer to Evans-Pritchard simply to point out that intelligent and important research on Libyan society had in fact been undertaken by academics with connections to the School.

To simplify my argument about civil society, one of the truly great accounts of the rise of democracy in comparative and historical sociology came from Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966). I can both compress and somewhat distort his argument for the sake of making my point: no middle class, no democracy. The oil rich rentier states have blocked or squeezed out the middle class, dividing society sharply into the dynastic families who own all the wealth and foreign migrant labour that does all the work sending remittances home to China, Pakistan, Vietnam and the Philippines. There is a small cosmopolitan elite of advisers and support personnel who by now will have fled Tripoli for Manhattan, Rome and London, leaving the trapped migrant working class stuck at the Libyan borders. With no thriving middle class and a regime that is suspicious of any autonomous set of institutions or social groups, there is an under-developed or non-existent civil society. These social conditions have not historically provided a favourable environment for democracy or social capital or any other form of participatory politics. It is not clear that the 'end game' of the current crisis will lead to a flourishing democracy.

The dependency of the West on these authoritarian countries and their dynasties in the Middle East is well known, but the situation is changing. The West is now more than ever reliant on oil and gas from authoritarian regimes as oil production in the North Sea and Alaska has declined. Saudi Arabia, Russia and the Gulf States are now the only nations able to maintain or increase oil exports. The West has become dependent on these family dynasties which ironically in the case of Saudi Arabia are also exporting Wahhabi-style radical Islam, especially to Asia. While rising energy prices are keeping Vladimir Putin in power, alternative energy sources and successful hybrid automobiles are still someway in the distant future. What happens if the Gaddafi regime survives the current uprising or the imposition of a no-fly zone? What happens if Libya disintegrates into regional governments with Gaddafi left in control of the capital Tripoli? Asian governments appear to be willing to continue trade relations with the generals of Myanmar and so we might expect a similar compromise with the Gaddafi family if the opposition and the coalition of the willing fail to dislodge him quickly or not at all.

Did the Gaddafi family absorb the theory of western deliberative democracy? Gaddafi claimed that his Green Book which was published in 1975 was a third universal theory and not an account of democratic deliberative politics. The Green Book rejected liberal democracy in favour of direct rule of the masses, but in fact the revolutionary committees that ruled over the country crushed any sign of civil society. One suspects that Saif Gaddafi was not seriously reading David Held's works on politics and globalization or Giddens's publications on third-way politics. One might speculate ironically that Saif Gaddafi and his father were reading Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince* – or at least Leo Strauss's version of it in *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (1958). Machiavelli as the Second Chancellor of the Republic of Florence was all too familiar with the question of advice to men in power. For Machiavelli the two pillars of princely rule were ideology and terror. The Gaddafi family learnt this lesson only too well.

In the aftermath of this affair, what might the students at the LSE be recommended to read to replace theories of deliberative democracy? I would make two modest suggestions. The first is that they should revisit the tradition of the virtue of prudential wisdom from Aristotle to Jacques Maritain and Raymond Aron, since the academic visitors to Gaddafi's tent appear to have been short on practical wisdom and long on science. The second would be Fred Halliday's *Arabia without Sultans* (1974).The late Fred Halliday who had been the Montague Burton Professor of International Relations and a member of the School from 1985 to 2008 clearly had plenty of prudential wisdom as for example when he advised the School in his 'Note of Dissent' not to tangle with the Libyan regime. Halliday argued that the sincerity or otherwise of figures such as Said Gaddafi was irrelevant and that it was important to realise that liberal elements in such authoritarian regimes are not there to bring about change but to reach compromises with hard-liners thereby reducing pressure from outside. Unfortunately Sir Howard Davies and the School did not take his advice. We are now all paying the price of greed over prudence.

Further Reading

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