Qadhafi's Social Theory as the Basis of the Third Universal Theory

SAMI G. HAJJAR

University of Wyoming, Wyoming, U.S.A.

This essay seeks to provide an explanation and a critical analysis of Mu’ammar al-Qadhafi’s social theory as reported in Part III of his Green Book. My basic thesis is that Qadhafi’s social theory, especially its distinction between “natural” and “artificial” social organizations, constitutes the proper framework within which his political and economic theories, respectively the topics of Parts I and II of the Green Book, are to be understood. Specifically, this is to say that comprehending the Third Universal Theory requires, as a prerequisite, familiarity with its social aspects which thus necessitates reading Part III of the Green Book prior to Parts I and II.

In two previous articles I dealt with the political and economic aspects of Qadhafi’s thought. In these regards, it was found that Qadhafi’s primary focus was on the issue of freedom. His analysis and proposed solutions were demonstrated to parallel those of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the realm of politics, and Karl Marx in the sphere of economics. My conclusion was that Qadhafi’s theories, with minor exceptions to account for modern-day nuances, offered little that was new.

In addition to lack of novelty, the reader is confronted with the problem of how the various expressions of the Third Universal Theory are related and integrated. The Green Book appeared in three parts with a time interval of approximately two years between the publication of each part. In view of this, each part seems to stand independent of the other two, and given the publication sequence with the social theory appearing last, gives rise to the impression that the theory is fragmented. This is particularly true if we accept the assumption that the social theory is the context within which the other parts of the theory can be properly understood. I propose that integrating the three elements of the Third Universal Theory is treating its social aspect as the independent variable while regarding its political and economic parts as the dependent variables. By approaching the Green Book in this manner, Qadhafi’s thought emerges in a new light, revealing the homogeneity of his Third Universal theory, and to an extent, the originality of his thought.

Unlike his political and economic theories, Qadhafi’s social theory is not based on any one discernible intellectual source. Rather, its intellectual roots are embedded in the main stream of modern sociological theory. The
remainder of this article will survey and assess the main components of this theory.

Social Structures

Qadhafi's social theory can be divided into three categories for analysis. First there is a definition of the concept of group and the nature of group relationships, by far the most important discussion. Second, Qadhafi chooses to focus on the group phenomena of women, minorities and blacks. Third, he examines the group activities of education, arts and sports. A specific thesis is associated with each category, and all three theses constitute the essence of Qadhafi's Third Universal Theory in its social as well as political and economic expressions.

Like Aristotle, Qadhafi adheres to the proposition that man is by nature a social animal who is drawn to the formation of social groups. Group "realities are innate in the life of man and are not rational conjectures" (p. 25). The natural groups that he identifies are the family, tribe, and nation which together form the world community. Also, in the manner of Aristotle, who regarded the state as the most complete social organization which is teleologically prior to the organizations of the family and the villages that compose it, Qadhafi considers that "the social factor, namely the national factor, is the genuine and permanent driving force in history" (p. 25). In other words, the nation is the more complete social entity. More important, it is the focal point of social life and the condition for group survival. (See pp. 8-9). In this sense, it may be argued that Qadhafi regards the nation as teleologically prior to the family and the tribe. Using his analogy, it is "the nucleus which is the focus of gravitation for the atoms around it" (p. 9). Qadhafi's first social thesis, then, is the notion that there is a natural progression from family to tribe to nation and that the aggregate of these social structures constitutes the world community whose bond is humanity. (See pp. 15, 18).

The family is the fundamental social organization and its importance to the individual far exceeds the importance of the state. To the individual person, the family "is his cradle, his origin and his social 'umbrella'," (p. 11) and "the individual without a family has no value or social life" (p. 12). Given the brevity of Qadhafi's discussion of the family, the reader can, nevertheless, deduce that its primary function, aside from the obvious biological function of procreation, is psychological. The family is what bestows on the individual his sense of identity and affords him the feeling of psychological security. The existence of the family along with its unity and strength are, furthermore, the preconditions for the existence of a flourishing society. Qadhafi points out that "if human society reached the stage where man existed without a family, it would become a society of tramps, without roots; like artificial plants" (pp. 12-13).

The tribe is the link in the teleological chain between the family and nation. By definition, the tribe is an extended family and a potential nation.