

*'The evil that men do lives after them; the good that men do is oft interred with their bones...'*

Muammar Gaddafi was a tyrant, a thug and a despot. He murdered his way into power forty-two years ago and through a long reign of terror in his country suppressed any dissent. His foreign policy was an eclectic blend of the bizarre (all Africa united into one country), the brave (standing up to international oil executives) and the psychopathic (support of various international terrorists). However, Muammar Gaddafi also had a fair amount of courage, charisma and tenacity. Few things in his quixotic, bloody life did him as much credit as his last few months.

Since the fall of Tripoli everyone, both inside and outside of Libya, knew the war was lost. Yet Gaddafi did not run into some plush, Swiss-Bank account funded retirement like Uganda's Idi Amin, Tunisia's Ben Ali or a host of other deposed third-world dictators. He did not flee into a neighbouring country like much of his family and try to live undercover as Osama bin Laden successfully did for ten years. He did not run to China or Russia and make deals with them. Rather Gaddafi swore that if he lost the war he would die on Libyan soil, and he did so. His fighters also showed great courage. It is reasonably easy to pick up arms and fight when you know a war is won. It takes extraordinary resolve to know that you have no hope, your cause is almost over and you will probably die – but to keep on fighting. Yet this is what Gaddafi was able to inspire in some of his people and they did it.

There have also been lots of snide comments about Gaddafi being found cowering in a drainage pipe. I have seen the aftermath of air strikes in both Iraq and Kosovo, and in that type of war there are no live heroes. The very air that you breathe shakes and trembles. Hiding in an underground hole, of whatever kind, is a very good idea during those times, so do not be fooled by the bravery of people making jokes thousands of miles from the fighting, where Gaddafi was found makes no difference in his last stand. At the end of a largely foreign-won 'civil-war', Gaddafi and his fighters showed courage.

I do not want to turn this into paean of praise to a sometimes bloodthirsty and always despotic ruler. But I do want to get some much-needed balance to the western media coverage of Gaddafi's death. In the last few days, we have seen slew of bizarre parodies and rituals about Gaddafi. I do not mean from Libya – where there are long lines of people queuing to check that the man who ruled them for two generations is actually dead (taking photos of a corpse and e-mailing it to your friends and families is, in those circumstances, perfectly logical). I mean the weird orgies of celebration that have appeared in western media. We have been treated to analyses of Gaddafi's taste in clothes (irredeemably tacky) - his choice of interior décor (*'dictator chic'*) – a series of gloating jokes and gibes about the last few hours of his life.

In general, all this nonsense shows that we are a society who has forgotten the horrors of war and death. Contrast the tone of our coverage in the last few days to the largely sombre voices after the end of fighting in Europe in May 1945. A generation who really

knows the sickening terror of war, does not indulge in an orgy of bad jokes. There is a reason why our grandparents chose to mark Remembrance Day with silence.

However, specifically, by dragging up comics and lightweight thinkers to make fun of the death of a tyrant, we miss the important warnings from this conflict. What Gaddafi's last stand shows is that there is something else going on inside Libya aside from the paradigm of an *'unloved dictator dies, mourned by no one'* that we have seen spouted across our television screens for the last few days. Despite his murderous rule, despite his apparent lavish bad taste and disdain for international conventions, Gaddafi still enjoyed popularity and very strong support in certain sections of his country. To ignore this fact, is to significantly under-estimate the challenges that Libya faces in its post-war world.