



**Dr. Housamedden Darwish**

## **Critical Ideas in Arab Political Thought, the Syrian Revolution, and the Issue of Asylum**

### **Critical Ideas in Arab Political Thought**

In philosophy and thought in general, and in Arab thought in particular, the critic's status, meaning, role and importance remain a problematic issue in both our thought and reality. Over the past few months, this problem has manifested itself clearly, in particular in the discussions that followed the death of the critical thinker Sadiq Jalal al-Azm. In these discussions, two oppositional attitudes were raised: On the one hand there is an attitude showing little esteem for critique on account of its supposed lack of creative and constructive structural features, regarding it as parasitic research living on the texts of the creative writers and thinkers whose contradictions, negative aspects or errors it aims to show. On the other hand there is an attitude towards critique tending to evaluate its priority, importance, permanent ability as a creative and constructive technique, and its continuous necessity, regardless of it being a part of a wider theoretical project, or its direct practical (dis)engagement in a specific or required project.

In the critical ideas that I shall present here, I am going to adopt the second attitude toward critique and assert its importance through critically discussing some texts.

In this vein, it is important to provide a brief definition of what I mean by the word "critique" on the grounds that the critical feature is the main link between the ideas in this paper.

'Critique' is defined as a reasoned evaluation based on justified reasons in its dealing with any text or thought; (2) and/or also an internal assessment - critique is based, at least partially, on the values and ideas adopted in the criticized text or perspective;( 3) and/or as far as possible a balanced focus on both negative and positive aspects of the subject discussed; (4) and/ or the endeavor to pursue a positive and a constructive approach. In the following pages, I shall critically discuss some ideas and arguments in diverse fields.

## **The Correlation between Nationalism and Democracy**

In his book *On The Arab Question: An Introduction to an Arab Democratic Manifesto* (2007), Azmi Bishara speaks, on the one hand, about the 'Arab question' represented in Arab nationalism as 'the largest contemporary nation that has not attained the right to self-determination through becoming a sovereign nation and then the chance to struggle to become a nation of citizens'. On the other hand, he speaks of the 'Arab exceptionalism' represented in the absence of a democratic system of governance in all Arab countries. In this vein, the concept of pluralism shows that the two sides of the aforementioned dichotomy oppose or at least contradict each other; because "nationalism, in its core, leaves no room for pluralism and allows no room for it." In contrast, there is no democracy without pluralism (Plurality of opinions, plurality of parties, etc).

Despite his awareness of the aforementioned contradiction between democracy and nationalism, however, Bishara seeks to affirm the necessity of democratizing the national orientation and nationalizing the democratic orientation in the Arab World. According to him, the solution for this initial contradiction is represented in the concept of 'the country of citizenship' or 'the state of citizens'. Here, the question coming up is: How can we attain such a state?

The scholar first emphasizes the need to reject any attempt to establish democracy through a foreign colonial intervention. In this context, his criticism is addressed at both those who support foreign intervention and those who say that the structure of Arab societies does not allow for the establishment of a democratic citizenship state. This criticism of these ideas is considered a first phase which paves the way for a later

emphasis on the importance and effectiveness of the political role of the human agency in this context.

In his research, Bishara shows the lack of a theory accurately explaining the democratic transformation and some of the factors commonly seen as obstacles to democratic transformation. These obstacles are represented in: the rentier economy, weak democratic culture, tribal and clan structure, Islam as both a religion and a civilization, ruralization of the city, the rural roots of the military leaders who staged coups, the weakness of the middle class.

Bishara sums up his argument with two basic conclusions: first, these obstacles do not represent causes that could prevent the transition to democracy. Second, these obstacles cannot be understood without understanding their intersection or close association in Arab countries with the Arab issue.

He maintains that it is necessary to 'democratize' the pursuit of democracy in the Arab countries, not only because the factors of its hindrance are linked to the absence of the solution of the national question, but also and especially because solving the national question in a kind of unity - at least on the level of the country - core states may prevent sliding into their sectarian, tribal or regional loyalties, affiliation or tendencies. This slide into such social fragmentations could replace democratic pluralism. According to Bishara, "in every Arab country, democratic pluralism needs national agglutinant adhesive" (Bishara 2007:214) On the other hand, it is necessary for the national endeavor to be democratic on the grounds that " democracy is the road to unity"( *ibid*).

This aforementioned thesis raises many problematic issues, the most important being the reduction of the theoretical and / or practical possibilities and the adoption of a mono-ideological narrow perspective. According to Bishara, establishing the Arab nation-state is a necessary and indispensable stage in order to pass from the country-core state into the state of citizenship, since the failure of the country-core state "to form a civil nation on the basis of citizenship rights" leaves us with only two alternatives: either both a political and cultural Arab nationalism or tribal and sectarian political affiliations, some of which are border-crossing and some of which are confined to states' boundaries.

I argue that this is a reductionist view since it completely excludes the possibility of building local non-Arab identity by the country-core state or establishing the country of citizenship without passing through the proposed concept of the 'Arab National state'.

Furthermore, I argue that it is impossible to judge on the country-core state's failure to form a local, non-Arab national identity, as Bishara argues, because no such attempt has been made yet, and because it took place within the context of a non-democratic dictatorship.

In this vein, it is critically important to mention that Bishara himself refuses to discuss the following salient question, "Why does democracy fail in Arab World ?"(Ibid: 53), based on the fact that "there has never been an Arab democratic attempt to judge its success or failure. The success of the democratic experience is evaluated after carrying out the experience."(Ibid: 53) Here, and by extension, couldn't we also say the same when talking about the success or failure of the Arab country-core state in forming a local identity or a non-Arab national unity?

Here, I argue that the key, or even the often most decisive, role is played by the despotic regimes in blocking or even preventing the formation of national domestic identity and establishment of a democratic governance system. This fact is absent or deliberately ignored in Bishara's thesis.

Thus, instead of reducing the argument to the proverb 'As you are, so will your rulers be' in order to justify the existing regimes (which is a reasonable explanation as long as the system is democratic), Bishara explicitly invokes the contradictory and the dialectally complementary to the aforementioned common saying part that maintains 'As your rulers are, so you will be'. Bishara's book expresses his legitimate desire that the sentence 'As you are, so will your rulers be' should motivate change and not justify the presence of those who lead us "(Ibid:246). He then affirms the need of moving from the question of 'those chosen to lead us' to the question of 'how do they get access to political power?' since this *how* plays the intrinsic role in defining and determining 'who we are'. This can affirm the proverb 'as your rulers are, so will you be'. All this leads to the discussion of the dialectal relationship between structure and agency.

The concept of structure refers to the characteristics or elements of reality independent of human will and to the contribution of these attributes to orienting reality on the ground and the will of human beings and controlling them.

This structure can be psychological, social, economic, etc. On the other hand, the concept of agency refers to human free will, freedom, awareness and relative ability of the individual to take the lead, to act and seek to achieve what he/she wants.

Bishara's book contains a study of some social structures (tribal), economic (rentier state) and cultural (popular culture and elites' culture), political (the Arab question), and highlighting the overlap of all these structures. In addition to asserting the importance of the Arab question in this respect, Bishara draws, in his study of these structures, on an essential aspect implied in his argument that obstacles represented in these structures neither necessarily prevent the democratic transition in the Arab States nor do they lead to it.

Therefore, this argument shows both the possibility of the political act and its necessity. In other words, a political act is possible, because the structures of reality give way to this act that seeks to achieve the democratic transformation and the political act is necessary because this transformation cannot be achieved without its intervention.

Bishara thus limits the role of the structures, or reduces their importance in obstructing or producing the democratic transition by highlighting the importance of the role of political action. But I find a kind of a dialectical relationship between structure and action in Bishara's thesis. Bishara believes that the theories canonizing the course of human reality have suffocated the social action or can lead to throttling "Social practice, especially the matter of changing the social system" (Marcuse 1955:343)

He thus bets on the role of democratic political elites rather than betting on the role of the masses, in general, and on reform more than on revolution.

In short, the basic political act necessary to transform democracy is reduced to an elite act by some politically educated and active groups. The popular masses generally do not have a particular positive or negative role in this regard. Democratic forces should wait for the opportunity when the ruling authorities lose control for one reason or another. These forces should then be ready to guide a democratic transformation and to correct its paths.

To conclude, Bishara's insistence on reform and on the role of the elites is due to his refusal of a foreign intervention and his lack of belief in the possibility of a revolutionary political act from within.

Based on the structure / agency dualism, I argue that Bishara succeeded - in his study of the obstacles towards the democratic transformation - in asserting the possibility of the political act aiming at such transformation and illustrating the dialectical correlation between this act and the Arab world's economic, social, and cultural structures. These objective structures both hinder and allow this act at the same time. On the other hand, the subjective political act can benefit from such room in partially and gradually surpassing these structures. The political act is thereby subject to these structures and able to surpass them at the same time.

One can observe, however, an absence of the dialectical relationship between the structure and agency, at least partially, when we take into consideration the correlation between politically-active democratic elites, or those who endeavour to achieve this effectiveness, and the ruling authorities.

Nonetheless, despite the aforementioned absence, Bishara succeeds in highlighting the elites' responsibility to organize themselves, to propose a national democratic project and to take advantage of any available opportunity to contribute to this project and, if possible, to lead it.

The current Arab Revolutions have demonstrated the need for an organized democratic political force that can contribute to the leadership of desired democratic transformation when the bells toll for it.

This was especially evident in the Syrian revolution, which I shall discuss in some of its problematic theoretical aspects in the following pages.

## **The Syrian Revolution: Background, Initial Course and Prospects**

In order to understand and explain the developments in Syria, on a domestic level, three elements should be mentioned: 1) the historical background of the Syrian revolution, 2) the structure of the regime, its failure to respond to the demands of the demonstrators, its rejection of political reform and the tightening of the security grip, 3) the regime's resort to excessive violence as a primary or sole means of dealing with protesters and demonstrators.

In the following pages, I will discuss the problematic aspects of the Syrian revolution with reference, in particular, to my critical review of Muhammed Gamal Barout's book *The Last Decade in Syria: The Dialectic of Stagnation and Reform*. (2012).

## **The Background of the "Revolution"**

The main distinctive feature of Barout's book is that it allows us to conceive the 'revolution' or the 'protests' based on incidents which took place in Syria throughout the decade that preceded the revolution and is not based on nor referring to what took place after it broke out in 2011, as it is often discussed. Here, taking into account and not ignoring the aforementioned understanding of the revolution helps us avoid falling into the trap of the following common false question, whether raised in good or bad faith: 'In light of the catastrophic consequences of the revolution or protests, wouldn't it have been better to revolt or protest?'. Those who hold this view accept, at the same time, the alternative which was declared and imposed by Asad's regime and his supporters since the outbreak of the revolution: 'Asad or no one', 'Asad or we set the whole country on fire'. They believe that Asad's regime is the best available alternative or, at least, the least harming, and they hence call for being rational and realistic and accept this regime with all its ills. Those people, however, ignore the fact that the lack of alternatives, or reducing them to the bad and the worse, is the outcome of the Asad's despotic regime. This regime was (is) described as the producer of corruption and source of all ills. Moreover, they ignore the reasons and factors that led to the eruption of the revolution and which do not allow for such rational and immoral compromises. It is imperative to highlight these factors and reasons that indicate the implausibility and impossibility of accepting such compromises.

The research, with its shocking tragic figures, shows the extent of the massive and catastrophic damage inflicted on the Syrian economy and a very large segment of the Syrian population because of increasingly liberal economic policies. These policies have started to escalate since 2001 and reached their peak between 2006-2010.

The Syrian economy had been completely liberalized, without a prior or an accompanying process of empowerment for such economy. This economic policy adopted by the Syrian regime, beginning in 2006, had disastrous consequences for the Syrian economy and for large segments of the Syrians population. Under the title of a

transition from the 'centralized economy' to the so-called 'social market economy', a 'naive liberal program' had been implemented without any institutional or developmental reform. The process of liberalizing the economy was harnessed to the benefit of a new segment of businessmen referred to as 'the young wolves' by Barout. These wolves collaborated to form a number of holding companies, the most important of which was 'Sham Holding Company', which took over 60% of Syrian economic activity, according to Rami Makhlouf, the largest shareholder in the companies and leader of the 'Wolves' (Barout 2012: 73).

And there had been an unbalanced partnership between holding companies and the state, in which the government was subjected to "these companies and the interests of their elites rather than to the policies of the state" (Ibid).

These companies almost completely neglected the agricultural and industrial sectors for the sake of focusing on "service projects that could generate fast profit. This service projects were geared towards meeting the demands of richer and more powerful classes of services" (Ibid: 74). And with the emergence of what the researcher calls 'favorites and relative capitalism', (also known as 'crony capitalism'). The level pitch philosophy which is "based on the mechanism of transparency and fairness within the business world, transparency, integrity and access to information" (Ibid: 83), had been abandoned in favour of adopting an oligopoly system. Thus, corruption was characterized by two types: 'small', which is linked to the disproportion between wages and prices, and 'big' associated with semi-visible networks and 'alliances' between businessmen and bureaucrats, allowing for the spread of a multi-arm network in various bureaucratic apparatuses (Ibid: 82).

These economic policies, which were both caused by corruption and at its base at the same time, led to the collapse of the two most important economic sectors (industry and agriculture). In the industry, economic reform had been reduced to commercial liberalization, coupled with the loss of industrialization, the freezing of all industrial public sector projects, and the ideas and reform projects that had led the sector to meet its inevitable fate: "clinical death" (Ibid:59-60). In terms of agriculture, between 2006 and 2009, Syria suffered the worst drought in decades. This was accompanied by the liberalization of the agricultural sector and the lifting of support for production inputs, which manifested itself clearly in lifting subsidies on oil derivatives, in general, and on diesel in particular. (Ibid: 132). This resulted in the migration of a quarter of Hasakah's



population, for example, because of their need to earn a living. The rate of migration in the affected villages ranged between 50% and 75% (Ibid: 133). This led to a decrease in the number of those involved in the agricultural sector, directly or indirectly, from 1.4 million to 800,000 during the period from 2002 to 2008, that is 44%. (Ibid: 298).

The high rate of economic growth during the last decade was accompanied by an increase in the number of the poor and their severely deteriorating conditions. More than 7 million inhabitants - 34.3% of the population of Syria - live below the poverty line (Ibid: 96). The rate of inflation (the bitter enemy of the poor) rose sharply during the last decade, reaching 15.15% in 2008, due to the combination of political and substantive impacts and as a result of measures of lifting subsidies and raising the price of energy, oil products and a large number of goods (Ibid: 98-99). Tax policies strengthened income distribution distortions, reducing direct taxes on real profits affecting rich classes (lowest tax rates in the world), and increasing fees and indirect taxes imposed on large segments of society (Ibid:100-101).

Thus, it is possible to talk about increasing the impoverishment of large segments of the population, in parallel with the process of favouritism of the private sector and its men or its 'wolves' in particular.

Regarding unemployment, the official Syrian figures indicate that the rate of unemployment fell from 12.3% in 2004 to 8.1% in 2009, but the researcher points out that the realistic criteria show the unemployment rate exceeding 16.5%, representing 3.4 million unemployed (Ibid:31-32) .

These results have been expected since 2005 when Barout himself wrote "One can safely, and without any hesitation, say that there are not any paths or myriad alternatives left in front of Syria in its current situation but there are only two paths: a complete reform in its all aspects; political, economic, administrative and human development according to a rational democratic criterion of both society and governance; or a disaster (Arab Renewal 2005). It is clear that the Assad regime took the second route that led Syria to its current disaster.

The main problematic aspect in Barout's vision is represented in its adoption of 'economism' and its explicit or implicit adoption of the belief that socio-economic reform in Syria could be achieved without a parallel or even an established on it\_political reform. This argument manifests itself in his belief that the failure of adopting and carrying out

the socio-economic reforms plan in 2006 represented "a new socio-economic turning point that will explain the incidents that took place and can take place" (Barout 2012:51).

In this context, I argue that there is a crucial correlation and an essential dialectical relationship between the economic and political dimensions for any institutional reform which could have been implemented by the Syrian regime over the past last decades or could be implemented by any new regime in the future. In Syria, any effective socio-economic reform cannot be achieved, as long as the security forces excessively interfere in the state's relationship with society, namely, as long as their interference is in all areas of the society, whether these areas are within their official scope of functions or not.

Without carrying out an effective political reform that changes the nature and structure of the existing security-military system, no effective reform or success can be envisaged, neither in the economic sphere nor in other areas. The suggestion that the socio-economic reform could be separated from the political one coincides with the allegations launched by the Syrian authority, for many years. The Syrian authority has been stressing the priority of economic reform, and postponing fulfilment of all the promises of political reform.

Furthermore, the 'economism' of the research is also reflected in the fact that the research does not include any detailed analysis of the structure of 'actual authority', its composition and its role in general and the 'institution of the presidency' in particular. In the authoritarian system, researches reinforce the popular belief that 'the president is good' while 'the corrupt and the domineering are those around him or his entourage' (Ibid: 177). This is manifested in two ways: firstly, avoiding to mention the role of the president and his responsibility in what has been happening in Syria. Secondly, focusing on the role of other persons, parties, institutions and hold them almost entirely responsible for this or that negative side.

### **Historiography of the First Months of the Syrian Revolution**

There are two main trends in the interpretation of the Syrian revolution; the first tendency connects the revolution to a background of a relatively long period of time. The second trend highlights the role of direct or near-term random factors.

Despite the divergence of these two trends and their possible contradictions, it is possible to conceive or establish a dialectical relationship between them, in which the two parties are combined together to explain a historical incident or act.

This is what Barout generally does in explaining the Syrian revolution and its path trying to dialectally combine random and historical causal factors. Barout's theorization, however, of this historiography sometimes separates the two parties saying that random factors play a stronger or more important role than the long-term historical causality. I don't see a strong plausibility of considering the incidents of Al-Harika's and Daraa's random factors as more important and prominent than the reasons for the 'protest movement' or revolution in Syria. According to Barout, these reasons are represented in the policing of the regime and its adoption of a destructive economic liberalism under a capitalism of 'favorites and relatives', unemployment, poverty ... etc.

These simple facts or incidents, which are considered to be the spark of the outbreak the Syrian revolution (the incidents of Harika and Daraa), are inextricably intertwined with historical causality. In this vein, emphasizing the importance of long-term causal factors makes us hesitate in agreeing with Barout's thesis that the severity of the repression is one of the most important factors that led to the intensification and intensity of the demonstrations (Hama is a model) and that the relatively minor repression led to a lack of intensity of demonstration and expansion (Aleppo as a model). This thesis turns successive or parallel events into specific causal relationships. I argue that attention must be paid to different causal relationships also indicating that the intensity of repression can increase steadily, as the protest movement grows stronger. The high intensity of repression can lead to different results, sometimes succeeding, sometimes failing, in weakening the protest movement. We cannot establish a simple causal relationship between the intensity of repression and the spread and persistence of demonstrations. The severe repression, such as murder, detention and torture, may lead to fear among some dissidents who want to demonstrate, but are reluctant to demonstrate; but it may lead to growing anger and discontent among others. Despite the 'stimulus or security repression' and not just because of it, and perhaps not because of it at all. Observing the development of the protest movement and demonstration in Hama during the first months of the Syrian revolution, one can say that the scale of the demonstrations in Hama had escalated even before the intensity of the 'security stimulus'. Even the intensity of repression was an outcome of the expansion and intensity of the protest movement in the beginning. Therefore, one can consider it a

result - not a cause - of them. And after the massacre of the 'Freedom's children Friday' demonstrations had increased, intensified and expanded. It should be noted, however, that this happened shortly after the security forces left the city or avoided the clash with the demonstrators. Also, it should be highlighted here that the entry of the army and the security forces into Hama at the beginning of the month of Ramadan was accompanied by severe repression, leading to the curbing and weakening of the demonstrations, both in quantity and quality, so that the demonstration no longer included more than hundreds or thousands of people at 'best'. We can conclude that the suppression of the protest movement in Hama has generally led to a reduction in the pace of protest, not to an increase, as argued in Barout's thesis in his researches. Remembering the course of the Syrian revolution during its first months highlights its peaceful character and refrains from considering it as a civil war or a proxy war, instead showing its civilian, non-religious nature, disputing that it is a religious, sectarian or nationalist movement. In their demonstrations, most of the demonstrators were Arabs without being Arab-nationalists, Muslims without being Islamists, and Sunnis without being 'Sunnists'.

### **The Historic Settlement**

Ever since the beginning of the Syrian revolution, there have been calls for a 'historic settlement' between the social-political actors based on burying the old 'paradigm' and agreeing on a genuine, serious and democratic new paradigm, as adopted by Barout himself in his research.

This 'historic settlement' is based on two fundamental postulates: the regime cannot be overthrown, and the regime cannot continue in its old form and content. Although the two postulates are based on what is possible or not, those who hold them do not address the (im)possibility of such a settlement. Therefore, this call seems closer to a wishful thinking of the world than to a belief grounded on knowledge.

This 'historical settlement' is the dream of most Syrians, who at the same time believe that it is impossible because of the permanent obstinacy of the regime, its previous history and its current structure. This belief was enhanced by the regime's insistence on suppressing the protest movement with almost all available violent techniques. In addition, the regime limits its offers to making nominal concessions that do not change the essence of the system or even its appearance.

(Nominal) political concessions introduced by the regime initially consisted of the change of some governors and heads of security branches (all new governors were military or security officers), some were referred to trial (the referral was mock referral, no official was actually punished), the establishment of committees to investigate the events (which did not lead to anything concrete), the repeal of the emergency law (nothing changed on the ground, emergency law was replaced by the law of the judicial police, which gave extensive powers to the security forces, issuing the law of the right to organize peaceful demonstrations. (According to its practical application, it should have been called the 'Organization for the Prevention of Peaceful Demonstration Act'). The same can be said for all the work done by the authority under the title of 'reform'. It is therefore necessary to emphasize the insignificance of these concessions or 'reforms' and their nominality, because they do not affect the structure and the authority of the military-security forces that have actual authority in Syria.

The 'historic settlement'-proposal is based on two postulates. The first one seems more obvious to all observers of the situation in Syria: it is no longer possible, now or in the near future, to return or restore Syria to the dominant political situation before the revolution or the protest movement.

The second postulate which argues that "the regime cannot be overthrown" is problematic. Regardless of the fact that the regime was about to fall more than once without the intervention of the Russians, the Iranians and others, the departure from this postulate forgets or often ignores the conviction that this system cannot be reformed, reform or contribute to any radical reform leading to the transformation of Syria to a democracy. This is the conviction that the protesters and their supporters have drawn from the first weeks of the revolution, while not ignoring the regime's structure and history before the revolution. This is what prompted the protesters to raise the banner of 'Down with the Regime' and insisting on it, despite the many sacrifices they made, and the violent repression they suffered, and because of them.

Therefore, it is true to stress that there is a revolution in Syria based on such conviction and a desire for radical change, and working towards achieving it. Although the chances of being able to overthrow the regime in the near future appear to be weak and almost non-existent, the likelihood that the regime will be able to achieve the final victory over its rebels is also nil, at least in the short term. It is between these two impossibilities that possibilities of the current Syrian situation are located.

## The Issues of Asylum

The dictatorship led to the Syrians becoming subjects and not citizens in their country for decades, and then the regime's repression of the revolution forced millions of them to be displaced or refugees. Therefore, the question of asylum has imposed itself on Arab and Western political and moral thought in recent years.

In dealing with the question of asylum, there is consensus or near unanimity on two fundamental issues: first, that there is, in principle, a moral duty towards refugees; and second, that ethics can never be without cost or without risk.

In this respect, the most important and problematic question is: What type or level of risk, to which we accept to be exposed, in order to fulfil our moral duties? Of course, there is no single answer to this question, for many reasons, the most important of which is that the issue is linked to ethical preferences and priorities problematic and difficult to decide. We find that some people cannot accept their moral duties towards others (refugees) unless the need of those is huge, the risk to which they are exposed themselves, or the price they should pay themselves, is minimal. On the other hand, other people are more willing to take risks, because they see that refugees' desperate and urgent need justifies such a high risk. Between these two poles, there are many alternatives and other choices.

In any case, it is difficult to deny that a large number of refugees who have been coming to Europe over the past several years are in desperate need of assistance. The basic question was whether the 'Refugee Welcoming Policy' should continue, because of their urgent need for assistance and the limited risks of such assistance, or if this policy should be abandoned and the number of refugees admitted annually should be reduced, on accounts of the continuation of this policy posing a serious risk for both Germany's and Europe's social stability.

Tackling the issue of refugees often deals with them as a problem or even the basic problem that some countries and societies face. Refugees are certainly a real problem, to the extent that the problem was rightly called the 'crisis': the 'refugee crisis', but two main points must be emphasized here. First, refugees are not 'the problem', and not just a problem. On the one hand, refugees are not the problem, because the main or bigger problem, at least from their point of view, is not their fleeing to Europe or the respective country to seek refuge in, but rather the brutal conditions they faced, the causes that

forced them to leave their homes and country . Refugees, on the other hand, cannot be considered only a problem on the grounds that they can positively affect the host countries. Refugees can positively contribute to the economy of the host countries and in the enrichment of their social and cultural life.

Moreover, focusing solely or exclusively on the negative consequences of receiving or accepting refugees can limit our moral duties towards them to such an extent that our ethics may shift from an 'ethics of duty' to an 'ethics of fear'. In this latter type of ethics, the priority is not to achieve justice by 'saving', assisting or supporting refugees, but rather to protect the societies and countries in which refugees seek refuge, from the claimed danger these refugees pose and from the actual or potential negative consequences arising from their attempt to seek asylum in that state. In these 'ethics of fear', it is not important to have moral obligations towards others (refugees), since these duties should be neglected and not implemented at all.

In this respect, it is necessary to emphasize that neither 'ethics of duty' nor 'ethics of fear' can exclude the possibility of another kind of morality, which can be called the 'ethics of sympathy and love'. In this latter kind of morality, we try to actually or practically express our love towards the other (the refugee) and sympathize with them even if we believe that there are no moral duties towards them, regardless of our fear or despite it.

In this context, 'ethics of duty' can be grounded on 'ethics of sympathy and love', but both of these ethics could be completely separated from each other. On the one hand, we do not always perform our moral duties willingly and wholeheartedly. On the other hand, many of our moral actions can take place without our belief or feeling that there is a moral obligation to perform these acts. 'Ethics of duty' and even 'ethics of sympathy and love' can always be contaminated by the 'ethics of fear'. In this sense, one can argue with Derrida that "Hospitality always contains the possibility of turning into hostility." And when our behaviours or actions are governed by fear, for justified or unjustified reasons, our initial hospitality turns into hostility towards our actual or potential guests. This shift, which is precisely what most refugees fear in the host country, appears to have gradually taken place to some degree in most and perhaps all of the countries hosting Syrian refugees.

Contrary to what is often believed, the harshest and worst forms of provocative, criticizing, abusive, racist or unethical rhetoric about (Syrian) refugees often come from other (Syrian) refugees or emigrants. There are multiple reasons for this unfortunate

paradoxon, which takes various forms and contents. I will confine my discussion to dealing with one of the most prominent examples of hate speech about refugees found in a talk by Bassam Al-Tibi, a Syrian holding German citizenship. In his interviews with many German newspapers, Al-Tibi strongly criticized the so-called 'Open Door Policy' or 'Refugee Welcome Policy' announced by Merkel and her government, even after the closure of these doors and the official and actual suspension of this policy.

Al-Tibi believes that this policy lacks rationality to the extent that one can assume that there being more rationality in Syria than in Germany. Al-Tibi demands a complete separation between politics and morality, and he personally applies his desired separation when he rejects any moral approach to the refugee issue. Although Al-Tibi justifies his refusal to accept more refugees claiming that many of those refugees, or most of them, do not respect the contents of the German basic law (constitution), he himself neglected this constitution when he asked for determining the number of refugees allowed access to Germany, or who remain in it, despite the fact that "there is nothing in the Basic Constitution that allows determining the number of those who are welcomed among refugees. Since there are no laws based on numbers and percentages." (DW: 2016) It seems, however, that this does not convince Al-Tibi, who appears to be keen on following the Basic Constitution only when that constitution is in line with what he personally wants.

Separating politics from morality in dealing with the issue of refugees will not lead to an unethical policy (ie, a policy that is not based on ethics and does not necessarily conflict with it), but rather to an immoral policy, namely, a policy that contradicts the most basic ethical codes. It does not seem reasonable or even rational to call for this.

Al-Tibi seems to adopt 'the worst' forms of rationality, which appears, for example, in the theory of rational choice, which is not based on any morality in determining the rational act, rather it is based only on calculating reason and personal interest. Apart from his fake commitment to the German basic law, and his endeavour to refer to this basic law, Islam, philosophy and some of the sayings of scholars, it seems that his attitude results, primarily, from his fear, as a foreigner, of harm that could be caused to him personally by this wave of refugees. He explicitly says, "We foreigners, who have been living here for many years, now have a sense of anxiety and fear that one day they who currently welcomed the refugees could become the neo-Nazis, turning their evil upon us". He is afraid of the permanent possibility of "the fall of the Germans in the charm of



extremism", and thus fears that the policy of welcoming refugees could lead the Germans to fall in the pit of such charm. This would lead to negative consequences on him, as a "foreigner", as Al-Tibi himself describes himself.

It always seemed difficult to me that a refugee is able to be a 'normal' person. For example, when an assault or a terrorist attack occurs, the exceptional situation of the refugees push them to a defensive and selfish position. They resort to a defensive attitude through stressing that terrorists do not represent them or represent their beliefs, nor express their attitudes, ideas or affiliations. Also, their position is characterized by selfishness, as much as it is centred on their interests and negative consequences that may affect them, as a result of the attack, instead of being based primarily on the grief for the victims and the anger of 'terrorists', as expected from a 'normal' person. The difficulty of being a 'normal' person can be explained by referring to two points: the fragility of their status in various ways (legal, economic, social, and psychological, etc.) and the negative stereotypical image about them.

All in all, this leads us to say that it is clear that we, as refugees, need to seek to adopt reactions which are more ethical and humane, and to be, in our reaction as well as our actions 'ordinary' and 'normal' individuals since this is considered a necessary condition for the restoration of our usurped humanity. Here, it seems, however, that the restoration of this humanity is not an easy task at all, as Al-Tibi's stance shows.

We could stay in Germany for decades acting as foreigners fearing a potential extremism which the Germans could slide into, without caring to ask ourselves whether our stance is moral or not, or caring about the negative consequences of possible or potential outcomes that could result from our position or the adopting of such position by the others. This egoism (self-centred attitude) and moral selfishness (favouring the little good for us over the greater common good) is a distortion of our humanity, and / or the product of our distorted humanity, even if it takes a (fake) rational and an (alleged) scientific form.

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