

الجزيرة

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The Morals of Pessimism

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A state of depression spreads among Syrians today. It seems that the control of 'Daesh' (or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) over vast lands, the violence of the regime who is supported by the contentment of large

sections of the population, and the American intervention and what will follow from **annexation of the Syrian war** to the war on terrorism, opened a new era in the Syrian war that will last for decades along the lines of the wars in Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq. With millions of displaced and refugees, and hundreds of thousands of martyrs and likewise of detainees and missing, Syria has turned to a black hole that swallows Syrians and whomever gets near them. In such circumstances, it is natural that pessimism and desperation disseminate.

I distinguish here, in our attempt to define the morals of pessimism, between the lazy negative pessimist and the active positive pessimist. The negative pessimists are the normal people who feel daily toil and the burdens of war weighing on their shoulders. The massive volume of destruction and chaos, the kidnapping of friends and relatives, and the open Syrian slaughter affect the lazy pessimist. Most human beings experience states of depression and periodic pessimism, which strengthens or weakens according to the different circumstances; however, after the termination of a necessary therapeutic period, they go back to productive work. Periodic pessimism is natural in the life of human beings.

As for the active positive pessimists, these are a different kind of people. Those advocate for surrender publicly. These people spread their pessimism and misery in an effective, lively, and intentional manner. They want Syrians, and others, to fall in the eternal labyrinth of questioning. These pessimists live among us as false prophets, advocating for quietism and the acceptance of calamity in submissiveness and content. These are the ones who bear, what I call, the morals of pessimism.

The most dangerous phenomena that Syria is facing at the moment is the prevalence of these morals. In our open war against religious, national and secular fascisms, we need broad-minded tolerant morals which allow us to maintain our hope of a better future for our kids and the ability to think rationally and calmly. The battle with the morals of pessimism parallels in its significance the battle with fascisms, for if the spirit of pessimism prevails fascisms triumph.

What are the morals of pessimism? Who advocate for them in Syria today? And what is the relation between these morals and the increasing proliferation of fascisms?

The Morals of Pessimism

We can distinguish between two types of positive pessimists who bear the morals of pessimism. The first type are those who had participated in the revolution from the beginning and later despaired with the escalation of destruction. As for the second type, it is more dangerous and has a wider range; it is represented by Syrian intellectuals who were skeptics about the revolutionary mobilization from its day one and who did not take part, from near or far, in any activity.

The first type of positive pessimists is represented by a group of civil activists and pacifists who constantly complain about the extent to which things have gone in Syria. They repeat sayings of the sort: «this revolution is not my revolution», «the revolution has come to the hands of Daesh, al-Nusra and AlloushZahran Alloush is the leader of the 'Army of Islam', one of the main Islamist rebel groups fighting in the Damascus area and its surroundings.», «I

shall care for my own business», «there is nothing we can do», «you have allied with the Islamists and made us reach this point», «the revolution has been kidnapped, oh brother» and «Listen Odai, this is between us, but the country is gone, there is no longer a place for people like us». In addition to this, one could add resentful and fiery proclamations concerning other regime opponents that are characterized by a frightening degree of verbal violence, personal assault and accusations of treachery and betrayal against whoever does not share the same opinion.

The second type of positive pessimists is more important and has further effects. Those were skeptical about the utility of an insurrection from its day one. The most famous examples are: Adonis Ali Said Mouhamad Isber, born in Jableh in 1930, a Syrian poet, critic and writer living in France., George Tarabishi Born in Aleppo 1939, a Syrian writer, critic and translator living in France., Nazih Abu Afesh Born in Marmarita in 1946, a Syrian poet living in Damascus. and others of course who are supposed to be the intellectuals of Enlightenment and rationalism. What the positive intellectual pessimist advocates for, from the point of view of morals, is the path leading to the submission to tyranny.

To understand the morals of pessimists, we must conspicuously distinguish between them and the advocates of despotism. The identification of Adonis and Tarabishi with militias From colloquial Syrian, shabiha which is mostly used to refer to regime militias and zealous regime supporters. of the level of Ibrahim al-Amin Lebanese writer and editor in chief of al-Akhbar newspaper based in Beirut. and Nabil Fayyad Syrian writer and critic and self-proclaimed secular thinker. indicates an intellectual weakness and an

unacceptable accusation, and is similar to the identification of al-Qaeda with the Muslim Brotherhood, Jamal al-BannaAn Egyptian Islamic liberal thinker and the brother of Hassan al-Banna who is the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. or Jawdat SaidA Syrian Islamic non-violence thinker.. The positive pessimists did not support the Assad regime, they rather stood in the zone of neutrality. We notice that these intellectuals have a role of leadership and their voice is heard in Arab culture on different intellectual, critical and literary levels. It is mistaken to evaluate their various contributions today based on their stance vis-à-vis the revolution, nevertheless, the position in the revolution is the criterion to evaluate their moral philosophy.

What is then their position in the revolution?

The political and moral stance of the positive pessimist is self-proclaimed in a collection of sad articles mourning the homeland and what left from it. For example, Tarabishi concludes **one of his articles** with «the pain parallels the pen» and that there is nothing left for him to say expect for «Farwell, oh Syria I knew». The man of supposed enlightenment hence resorts to silence in the most revealing moments! In a similar style, Adonis warns us from the beginning of the Arab Spring of a final destruction and distributes his quasi-religious prophecies in a generous fashion. No one matches Adonis in the latter except for the noble sorrow of Nazih Abu Afesh and his desperation from human existence.

We have not heard a voice from these people in relief campaigns, in the different institutions of political work, in the active cultural or artistic production in revolutions; no solidarity campaigns and no attempts to communicate with

people inside Syria, with the injured, the missing, the families of martyrs and the refugees in camps. Nothing from that whatsoever; all we have from them is utter silence which is interrupted by a pessimist lamentation every now and then. The hallmark of the morals of pessimism resides in the absence of any practical project that concerns the life of ordinary people.

The silence and the promulgation of the spirit of pessimism and despair express enslaved morals, which lives in the presence of tyranny and fascisms and feeds off the absence of activity and the existence of sadness and negativity. Fascisms triumph when we surrender, not when they exhibit their most violent appearances. This surrender reflects a soul already enslaved to all kinds of violence and despotism.

The positive pessimist lives off knowledge and art; however, he does not have a giving soul to inspire the Syrians in their hardship.

The morals of the positive pessimist do not inspire anything but servitude.

The morals of optimism

In opposition to this painful frustration, it seems to me that what we need today is the spirit of optimism and the morals of work.

It is true that we do not have an ideal vision to exit the catastrophe which had befallen on us, Syria has entered an advanced period of complicated struggles on all levels and the ability to present solutions and conceptions of what the situation will look like, in this state, is absent. We also do

not agree over answers to fateful questions, like the problematic alliance with the Gulf countries or the Western countries, the way in which we handle the relation with the Islamic fighters, the dealing with the propositions of dialogue with the regime and other such urgent questions. Still, despite the absence of certainty, we have the desire and the determination to help Syrians in overcoming their ordeal.

The advocate for pessimism is issued while millions of Syrians are suffering asylum and detention, in addition to the urgent needs for education, medical treatment, transportation, and the assurance of the people's basic necessities. In the shadow of such circumstances, the positive pessimist informs us that silence and retirement from sedition is the solution. I think the contrary is true, and that what is needed today is precisely the opposite of resignation. In these difficult conditions, we need to double the work. Ghayath Matar An activist who was arrested and tortured to death by the regime in 2011. and Father Francis Father Francis was a **Jesuit priest** from the Netherlands, who established a community centre and farm near the city of **Homs, Syria**. He was shot dead in the garden of the community centre in 2014., the fighters in Mleiha, Jobar and Zamalaka These are three towns in the countryside of Damascus., the relief workers in Aarsal A Lebanese town., the weapons smugglers in Antakya, the schoolteachers in Aleppo, Daraa and Talbiseh, journalists and translators and thousands others who did not despair... these are the ones who bear today the moral of optimism. These morals deem that work is the essence of human existence and that the nature of the human being manifests in doing.

The Battle with Fascism

The two systems of pessimism and optimism differ in the ways they view the human and the nature of its short existence on the surface of the planet. The pessimist despises the human and its pursuit of change, he moreover advocates for submissiveness to conditions and the ceasing of work. The optimist elevates from the value of the human and always believes in the possibility of change.

Our battle with the positive pessimist is equal in its importance to our battle with religious, political and social despotism. The different kinds of despotism subsists off of the morals of positive pessimists. Syrians today have to place the moral project of Adonis, Tarabishi, Abu Afesh and the likes behind their backs once and for all. Syrians also have to confront the state of depression which prevails among the Syrian youth, previous activists and the advocates of solitude and the individual solution, some of whom, from the beginning of the revolution, had contributed in an exuberant manner to the mobilization but have turned today to the leaders of a campaign of desperation spurting with morals of pessimism.

These conformist morals are the path leading to the defeat of the soul in our battle against fascisms.

In contrast, we find 'on the ground' the Syrians who work whole-heartedly to exit this ordeal. These have what I call the morals of work and optimism. The belief in the freedom of the human and in its right to a dignified life which manifest in saying, doing, and the strenuous and daily pursuit to save the dignity of Syrians and help them in all possible means no matter how small and marginal.

With these morals we will win against fascisms.

Each of us has to choose the moral system that suits hem.

From here freedom is born, from this principal moral choice.