

الجمهورية

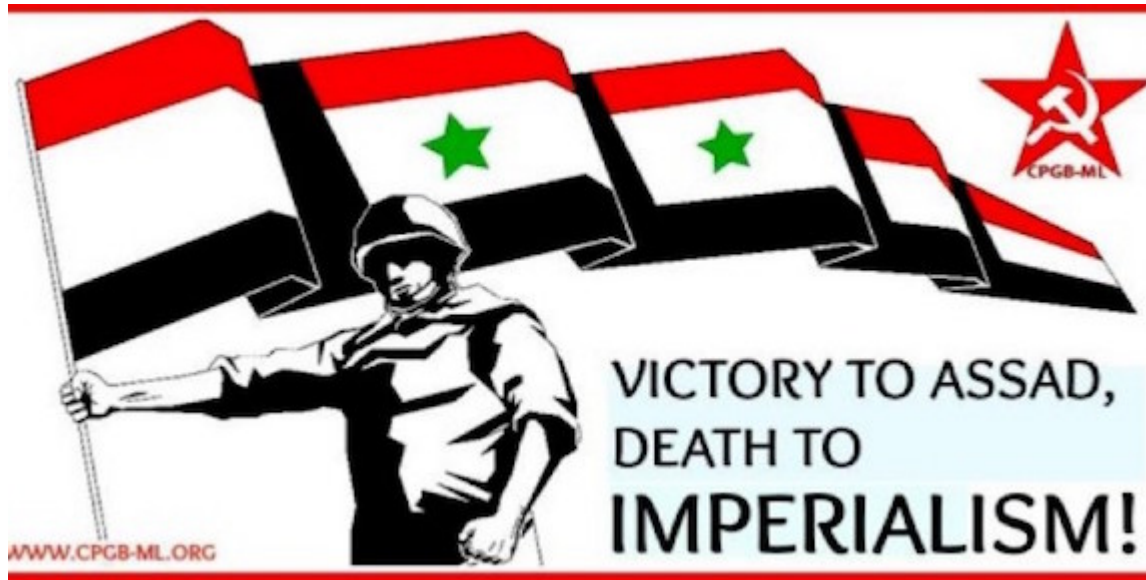
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The Syrian Cause and Anti-Imperialism

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ترجمة: ياسر الزيات



In memory of Michel Seurat, our martyr.

I was in Istanbul for about ten days when I met a Turkish communist who explained to me that what was going on in Syria was nothing but an imperialist conspiracy against a progressive, anti-imperialist regime. The Turkish comrade's talk contained no novel information or analytical spark that could suggest something useful about my country, and everything I tried to say seemed utterly useless. I was the Syrian who left his country for the first time at the age of

fifty-two, only to be lectured about what was really happening there from someone who has probably only visited Syria a few times, if at all.

Incidents like this are repeated over and over in both the real and virtual worlds: a German, a Brit, or an American activist would argue with a Syrian over what is really happening in Syria. It looks like they know more about the cause than Syrians themselves. We are denied “epistemological agency,” that is, our competence in providing the most informed facts and nuanced analysis about our country. Either there is no value to what we say, or we are confined to lesser domains of knowledge, turned into mere sources for quotations that a Western journalist or scholar can add to the knowledge he produces. They may accept us as sources of some basic information, and may refer to something we, natives, said in order to sound authentic, but rarely do they draw on our analysis. This hierarchy of knowledge is very widespread and remains under-criticized in the West.

There are articles, research papers, and books written by Westerner academics and journalists about Syria that do not refer to a single Syrian source—especially one that is opposed to the Assad regime. Syria seems to be an open book of a country; anyone with a passing interest knows the truth about it. They particularly know more than dissidents, whom they often call into question, practically continuing the negation of their existence which is already their fate in their homeland. Consequently, we are denied political agency in such a way that builds on the work of the Assad regime, which has, for two entire generations, stripped us of any political or intellectual merit in our own country. We are no longer relevant for our own cause. This standpoint

applies to the global anti-imperialist left, to mainstream western-centrists, and of course to the right-wing.

The Western mainstream approaches Syria (and the Middle East) through one of three discourses: a geopolitical discourse, which focuses on Israeli security and prioritizes stability; a culturalist or civilizationalist discourse, which basically revolves around Islam, Islamists, Islamic terrorism and minority rights; and a human-rights discourse, which addresses Syrians as mere victims (detainees, torture victims, refugees, food needs, health services, etc.), entirely overlooking the political and social dimensions of our struggles. These three discourses have one thing in common: they are depopulated (Kelly Grotke), devoid of people, individuals, or groups. They are devoid of a sense of social life, of what people live and dream.

The first two discourses, the geopolitical and the culturalist, are shared by the Western right as well.

But what about the left? The central element in the definition of the anti-imperial left is imperialism and, of course, combatting it. Imperialist power is thought of as something that exists in large amounts in America and Europe. Elsewhere it is either nonexistent or present only in small amounts. In internationalist struggles, the most important cause is fighting against western imperialism. Secondary conflicts, negligible cause and vague local struggles should not be a source of distraction. This depopulated discourse, which has nothing to do with people's lived experiences, and which demonstrates no need for knowledge about Syrians, has considered it unimportant to know more about the history of their local struggles.

The Palestinian cause, which was only discovered by most anti-imperialists during the 1990s, has paradoxically played a role in their hostility towards the Syrian cause. From their far-off, transcendent position in the imperialist metropolises, they have the general impression that Syria is against Israel, which occupies Syrian territory. Thus, if Syria is with Palestine and against Israel, it is against imperialism. At the end of the day, these comrades are with the Assadists, because Syria has been under the Assad family rule for nearly half a century. Roughly speaking, this is the core of the political line of thinking which can be called ivory-tower anti-imperialism. That Syrians have been subject to extreme Palestinization by a brutal, internal Israel, and that they are susceptible to political and physical annihilation, just like Palestinians, in fact lies outside the clueless, tasteless geopolitical approach of those detached anti-imperialists, who ignorantly bracket off politics, economics, culture, the social reality of the masses and the actual history of Syria.

This way of linking our conflict to one major global struggle, which is supposedly the only real one in the world, denies the autonomy of any other social and political struggle taking place in the world. Anti-imperialists, especially those living in the allegedly imperialist metropolises, are most qualified to tell the truth about all struggles. Those who are directly involved in this or that struggle hardly know what's really going on - their knowledge is partial, "non-scientific", if not outright reactionary.

During the Cold War, orthodox communists knew the real interests of the masses, as well as the ultimate course of history. This was sufficient reason for a communist worldview to be always in the right, without fail. But this

position, which looks down on history, has placed itself in an overly exalted position with relation to the masses and their actual lives, and in relation to social and political battles on the ground. In fact, this position can be accurately described as imperialist: it expands at the expense of other conflicts, appropriates them for itself and shows little interest in listening to those involved or in learning anything about them. The distinguishing feature of most Western anti-imperialists is that they have nothing but vague impressions about the history of our country; they cannot possibly know anything about its potential adherence to -or noncompliance with- "the course of history." This makes their meddling in our affairs an imperialist intervention in every sense of the word: interference from above; depriving us of the agency and capacity to represent our own cause; enacting a power relation in which we occupy the position of the weak who do not matter; and finally the complete absence of a sense of comradeship, solidarity, and partnership.

This remains true even when the anti-imperialist left stands with the Egyptian or Tunisian revolutions. It stands by their side on the basis of stereotyped and simplistic discourses that are inherited from the Cold War era. The anti-imperialist comrade is with the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt for the same reason that led him to "resist" alongside the Syrian regime: to stand in opposition to the great amounts of imperialist power that are concentrated at the White House and 10 Downing Street. Whether in Tunisia, Egypt, or Syria, people are invisible, and their lives do not matter. We remain marginal to some other issue, the only one that matters: the struggle against imperialism (a struggle that, ironically, is also not being fought by these anti-imperialists, as I will argue below).

The anti-imperialist left remembers from the Cold War era that Syria was close to the Soviet Union, so it sides with this supposedly anti-imperialist regime. Consequently, those who resist this regime are “objectively” pro-imperialists. Framing imperial power as something that only exists in the West ascribes to the anti-imperialists a Western-centric tendency, which is no less severe than that of imperialist hardliners themselves.

The response to this discourse need not be to point out the truth, that the Assadist state is not against imperialism in any way whatsoever. First and foremost, the autonomy of our social and political struggles for democracy and social justice must be highlighted and separated out from this grand, abstract scheme. It should be said that this particular mode of analysis, which belongs to the transcendental anti-imperialism, is a belittling imperialist tendency that should to be resisted. There is no just way, for instance, to deny the right of the North Koreans to resist their fascist regime on the basis of such an abstract scheme. Instead, such a scheme can only serve to silence them, just as their regime does.

It is absolutely necessary to rebuild an intellectual and political foundation for criticism and seeking change in the world, but metropolitan anti-imperialism is totally unfit for this job. It has absorbed subordinating imperialistic tendencies, and it is fraught with eurocentrism and void of any true democratic content. A better starting point for criticism and change would be to look at actual conflicts and actual relationships between conflicting parties. This could involve, for example, thinking about how the structure of a globally dominating Western first world has been re-enacted in our own countries, including Syria. We

have an “internal first world” that is the Assadist political and economic elites, and a vulnerable internal third world, which the state is free to discipline, humiliate, and exterminate. The relationship between the first world of Assad and the third world of “black Syrians” perfectly explains Syria’s Palestinization. Imperialism as such has shifted from an essence that exists in the West to a major aspect of local, domesticated power structures. Ironically, the power elites protecting this neo-imperialism may well draw on classical anti-imperialist rhetoric in order to discredit local dissidence and suppress potential political schisms. This is especially true in the Middle East, the world’s most heavily internationalized region. It is characterized by an extensive and aggressive imperialist presence that is directed mainly at suppressing democracy and political change.

From this perspective, working to overthrow the Assadist state is a grassroots struggle against imperialism. Conversely, the victory of the Assadist state over the revolution is a victory for imperialism and a consolidation of imperialist relations in Syria, the Middle East, and the world. Meanwhile, the transcendental anti-imperialists continue to be mere parasites who barely know anything, practically contributing to the victory of imperialism by opposing the Syrian revolution.

In short, it must be stressed that individual struggles are autonomous, and that their internal structures and histories should be understood, rather than dismissed and subordinated to an abstract struggle that looks down on whole societies and people’s lives. Only then would it be meaningful to state that there is nothing within the Assadist state that is truly anti-imperialist, even if we define

imperialism as an essence nestled in the West. Nor is there anything popular, liberatory, nationalist, or third-worldly in the Syrian regime. There is only a fascist dynastic rule, whose history, which goes back to the 1970s, can be summed up as the formation of an obscenely wealthy and atrociously brutal neo-bourgeoisie, which has proved itself ready to destroy the country in order to remain in power forever. As I have just mentioned, in its relationship with its subjects, this regime reproduces the structure of imperial domination; this is a thousand times more telling than any anti-imperialist rhetoric. Significantly, there exists a strong racist predisposition that is inherent to the structure of this neo-bourgeoisie and its ideology, which celebrates materialist modernity (the modernity of outward appearance and not of relationships, rights, values, etc.). This privileged class regards poor Syrians –Sunni Muslims in particular– just like Ashkenazi Jews regard Arab Muslim Palestinians (and even Sephardic Jews, at an earlier time), and just like whites of South Africa regarded the blacks in the last century. The colonized groups are backward, irrational, and savage, and their extermination is not that big of a deal; it may even be desirable. This attitude does not exclusively characterize the Assadist elite. In fact, the regime and its supporters are emboldened by identification with an international symbolic and political system in which Islamophobia is a rising global trend.

It is well known that the Assadist state has succumbed throughout its history to what can be assumed as imperialist preferences: guarding the borders with Israel since 1974, ensuring stability in the Middle East, weakening the Palestinian resistance independency, treating Syrians as slaves, and destroying all independent political, social, and trade organizations. Indeed, the Assadist state is an

integral part of what I call the “Middle Eastern system,” which was founded upon Israeli security, regional stability, and the political disenfranchisement and dispossession of our countries’ subjects. Herein lies the secret of Arab/Islamic exceptionalism with regards to democracy – in contrast to the popular interpretations of cultural critics in the West. Imperialist self-fashioning in such a regime, or the reproduction of imperialism therein, invalidates the conventional notion that imperialist power only exists in America, or in both Europe and America. This suggests that the anti-imperialist left has deep anti-democratic and patriarchal tendencies and suffers from intellectual primitiveness.

We have our own local anti-imperialist communists who adhere to the Assadist state, the Bakdashists. They are named after Khalid Bakdash, who was the Secretary-General of the official, Moscow-aligned Syrian Communist Party since early 1940s up to his death in early 1990s (his wife WissalFarha inherited his post after him, and their son Ammar subsequently inherited it after she passed away). These communists are exactly those who were faithful followers of the Soviet Union within Syrian communism during the Cold War. Today, Bakdashists are middle-class apparatchiks, enjoying a globalized lifestyle and living in city centers, completely separate from the social suffering of the masses and utterly lacking in any creativity. While a diverse array of Syrians had been subject to arrest, humiliation, torture and murder throughout two generations between the 1970s and the 2010s, Bakdashists have persisted in recycling the same vapid anti-imperialist rhetoric, and have paid nothing in return for their blindness to the prolonged plight of their country. This plight has included a sultanic, patriarchal transformation of the

regime, the outcome of which was turning Syria into what I am calling the Assadist state, a country privately owned by the Assad dynasty and its intimates. This demonstrates a clear example of the collusion of transcendental anti-imperialism with domesticated imperialism.

In the third place, i.e. after stressing the autonomy and specificity of each conflict, and then emphasizing that nothing about the Assadist state is anti-imperialist, the anti-imperialists should be questioned about their own struggle against imperialism. I do not know of a single example of someone from Western anti-imperialist circles who has been subjected to arrest, torture, legal and political discrimination, travel ban, dismissal from work, or deprivation from writing in his "imperialist" country. I believe that these deprivations do not belong to their world at all, and that perhaps they do not know what a travel ban, deprivation from writing, or torture could possibly mean. They are just like the African who does not know what milk is, the Arab who does not know what an opinion is, the European who does not know what shortage is, and the American who does not know the meaning of "the rest of the world," as in/goes the famous joke in which four people were asked their opinion about food shortage in the rest of the world. I have never heard of an anti-imperialist comrade who is resented, persecuted, personally targeted or subjected to smear campaigns by imperialism. Actual and moral assassination had actually been common imperialist practices until 1970s. This was especially true in the third world, but also true to a certain extent in the West. Names like Guevara, Patrice Lumumba, Mehdi Ben Barka, and Angela Davis, among others, come to mind.

Neither does it seem that these comrades are aware of how

privileged they are compared to us Syrians. I do not wish to evoke the guilt of traditional Western leftists. I am merely asking them for humility, to direct their eyes downwards to the laymen in Syria and elsewhere, not towards murderers like Bashar al-Assad and his ilk, and not to a bunch of hypocritical Western journalists who grew bored with London, Paris, Berlin, Rome and New York and now find amusement and a change of scenery in Damascus, Cairo and Beirut- knowing that their monthly multi-thousand dollar salary allows them to live wherever they wish.

As democratic Syrians, we do not wish upon them that they lose the rights to travel and freedom of speech that they enjoy. But how can they not be required to stand in solidarity with us, we who are deprived of such rights, and to denounce the junta that persists in subjugating us?

What I am arguing based on the three points discussed above is that, our comrades are making three major mistakes, all of which are unforgivable: they appropriate our struggle against a regime with which imperial sovereignty in the Middle East is perfectly in peace, for an alleged struggle against imperialism to which they are not even remotely close, supporting an extremely brutal and reactionary bloc about which they are utterly clueless. I will conclude that their anti-imperialist tendencies signify a desirable identity-form for these groups, not an actual mode-of-action in which they are engaged. The transcendental anti-imperialist left today is but a small, bigoted sect, which is not only incapable of taking power, but is also arrogant, reactionary, and ignorant. Gramsci deserves better heirs.

The root of these three mistakes lies, in my view, in the

worn-out nature of the essentialist theory of imperialism, which reduces imperialism to Western hegemony. This theory fails to recognize imperialism as a system of international relations that manifests in different ways throughout the various spheres of political and social conflict that span all countries and regions. Syrians live in one of the cruelest forms of this relational system, deprived of political liberties and exposed to a corrupt and criminal junta, which has turned Syria into a hereditary monarchy owned by a dynasty of murderers.

I mentioned above that there is something imperialistic inherent in leftist anti-imperialism. The Syrian struggle is a good example of this.

The US administration, along with Russia's autocratic regime, denies the Syrian struggle an independence from the war on terror. The Obama administration has done everything to avoid doing anything that the Syrians could benefit from in their struggle, even after Bashar al-Assad broke Obama's red line. Why? Because this administration preferred the survival of Bashar al-Assad -Israel's favorite candidate for the rule of Syria- to a transfer of power that would not be fully controlled by them. It was not in favor of Syrian citizens steering political change in their country. The United States has been involved militarily in Syria since September 2014, targeting Daesh and al-Qaeda. The anti-imperialists do not seem to object to this war, however, as much as they did when the Obama administration considered punishing Bashar al-Assad for violating the red line (not for killing Syrians, by the way) in August, 2013. This is despite the fact that US officials rushed to say that

the strike would be limited; John Kerry **stated** in London in the beginning of September, 2013 that the potential strike would be an “unbelievably small, limited kind of effort!”

The root of all of this is that the US administration has annexed the Syrian conflict to its own war on terror. It has tried to impose its battle on Syrians so that they will abandon their own battle against the tyrannical discriminatory Assadist junta: This is what imperialism has done.

In this regard, the anti-imperialist promulgators of the concept of terrorism fail to realize that the war on terror is centered around the state; it is a statist conception of the world order which strengthens states and weakens communities, political organizations, social movements, and individuals. It is furthermore a war in which Bashar al-Assad, who has been in direct conflict with his people for two years, is made partner in a cause that favors the continued domination of the world’s powerful. But perhaps it is not just a matter of realizing or not realizing. There is an inherent statist component in the structure of the anti-imperialist left, which has originated since the Cold War era. This statist quality confirms the observation that the typical anti-imperialist leftist has a geopolitical mindset. Perhaps this is why Trotskyists and anarchists, who are less state-centered and more society-oriented, have stood by Syrians in their struggle.

In the record of this endless fight against terrorism there has not been a single success, and thus far three countries have been devastated over its course (Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria). Yet this record is not surprising, considering that these imperialist forces are characterized by arrogance,

racism, and immunity vis-a-vis the crimes they commit and the destruction they leave behind in foreign societies.

The anti-imperialist left, just like imperialism itself, has supplemented the Syrian-struggle to something else, “regime change.” From the point of view of anti-imperialist comrades, regime change in Syria appears to be an imperialist plot. This is a hundred times worse than any mistake. This is an insult to Syrians, to our struggle over two generations, and to hundreds of thousands of victims. This is an insult to a struggle that most of these comrades know nothing about.

I repeat: imperialism, and the Americans in particular, have not wanted to change the regime at any time. Following the chemical massacre in August 2013, they strived to invent reasons not to hurt it, despite the fact that, at the time, they had a very strong justification had they wanted to change -or simply hurt- the Assad regime. The change in Syria is our initiative, and it is our project. Anti-imperialists must consider us agents of imperialism, then. Some are not far from saying so outright - a few months ago, a number of Italian “comrades” attacked an exhibition displaying photographs of the victims of **Assad’s killing industry**. Otherwise, any change to any regime is a bad thing and serves imperialism. But isn’t that a rather wonderful definition for reactionism?

Annexation is a fundamental aspect of imperialism, and the anti-imperialist activists who deny the autonomy of our struggle and supplement it to their pseudo-struggle are no different from imperialist powers. The two parties find common cause in the denial of our struggle, our political agency, and our right to self-representation. Practically,

they are telling us that they are the ones who can define which struggles are in the right; and that we are not worthy of either revolutions or the production of knowledge. But isn't that a wonderful definition of imperialism?

It is worth mentioning that subordinating our struggle for another one is the defining characteristic of the Assadist rule. For almost half a century, and in the name of yet another pseudo-struggle against Israel, the Assad regime has not ceased to suppress the rights and freedoms of its subjects and to crack down on their attempts to assume political agency in their country. Meanwhile, it has showed a great willingness to wage two hot wars inside Syria, the first of which resulted in tens of thousands of deaths, and the second in hundreds of thousands of deaths, up to now. Additionally, subordinating our struggle to something else is also a feature of Islamisms that have worked to appropriate the Syrian struggle for political agency (freedom) in the name of something external to this cause (sharia law, Islamic statehood, and a really imperial caliphate).

Here we have four specific cases of our cause's subordination; the American government and its followers, Russia and its followers, and Iran and its followers all making our revolution secondary to endless war against terrorism; the Western anti-imperialist left making our opposition secondary to its struggle against imperialism, understood as something practiced only by Western powers; the Assadist rule making our emancipatory aspirations secondary to a struggle with Israel that it has never been engaged in; and Islamists making our common struggle secondary to their own sectarian leanings. The four cases have one thing in common; a patriarchal view. Each of these powers acts like a archetypal father who knows

everything, and decides alone what is proper for us, the little boys. Those who reject being infantilized in this manner are considered ignorant, agents of the enemy, or infidels, deprived of speech and of political action. They may even be deprived of life itself, annihilated by chemical weapons, barrel bombs, starvation, or an organized death industry in prisons and hospitals.

The basis of these reactionary patriarchal attitudes by our fellow anti-imperialists contains two important issues. The first is the transformation of the communist left and its heirs into the educated middle classes, which is separate from human suffering and incapable of creativity, just like our local Bakdashists. This is in part due to economic transformations in the central capitalist countries, deindustrialization, the decay of the industrial working class, and the emergence of the “campus left,” which does nothing and knows very little despite its position within academia. There is no longer anything revolutionary or emancipatory in the formation of the contemporary left, and it is not engaged in any real conflicts. The second important issue that underpins these patriarchal attitudes is the intellectual maps that have been inherited from the Cold War (knowledge by recollection, following the Platonic method), added to intellectual sterility and a severe lack of creativity.

Among the main sources of knowledge about Syria for this left are the likes of Robert Fisk, the embedded journalist who **accompanied the regime tanks** as they stormed Darayya and killed hundreds of its inhabitants. His work later evolved into **interviewing notorious murderers** such as General Jamil Hassan, of Air Force Intelligence. He publishes his pieces in what are supposedly pro-democratic

independent platforms such as The Independent. Another main source of information is Patrick Cockburn, who is Fisk's partner in friendship with the Assadist junta, and who I doubt knows a single Syrian leftist dissident, just like Fisk. Also in their ranks is Seymour Hersh, who was spoiled by the Pulitzer Prize he had received, becoming fixated on thinking exclusively about "high politics" and seeing nothing down below. In fact, Bashar al-Assad himself is a source of knowledge for this left, as he is frequently interviewed by Western media and visited by delegations from the Western left (and fascists and Western Christian rightists as well), enjoying a status that he had not dreamed of before killing hundreds of thousands of his subjects.

This left no longer has a living cause of any kind. It merely intrudes upon causes like our own, about which it hardly knows and to which it ultimately does a great deal of harm. This left feels guilty because it lacks nothing, so it directs its disordered anxiety at Merkel, Teresa May, Obama, and Trump. It stands with Bashar al-Assad after it has convinced itself that this vile person is against those Western politicians. It is far less knowledgeable or curious about the fate of Bashar al-Assad's subjects, about whom it knows nothing other than confused impressions it draws from watching TV or reading newspapers.

None of the above is to suggest that Western leftists should not interfere in our affairs or should not comment on what we say about our conflicts. We want them to interfere. In turn, we do and we will interfere in their affairs. We live in one world, and universality must always be defended in

both analysis and action. What we expect is that they become a bit more humble and willing to listen, less eager to give lessons, and that they develop knowledge that is not based on recollection. We expect them to be democratic, not to make our conflict secondary to others, to take our opinion into account on the subject of our affairs, and to accept that we are their equals and peers.

Neither am I suggesting that we, the Syrian democrats opposed to the Assadist state, are correct in everything that we say simply because our cause is just, or that we do not accept criticism from others. We want to be criticized and advised, but our critics do not seem to know anything about us or to even be offering criticism or advice. They do not see us at all. Their lofty perspectives render us invisible. Had they been more open over the years to the realities of the Syrian conflict, its dynamics and transformations, they would have been in a better position to synthesize more informed perceptions and to offer more nuanced criticism. Our leftist partners in the West, a multitude of radical democrats, socialists, anarchists, and Trotskyists, have come closer to the grassroots Syrian world and have listened to Syrian narratives. None of them has shaken the blood-stained and pillaging hands of the likes of Bashar al-Assad and the murderers and thieves that constitute his circle.

We are not simplistic, and we do not reduce our struggle to the single dimension of bringing down the Assadist junta. There is another dimension, the struggle against nihilist Islamic organizations. But only among us, the people who are involved in the Syrian struggle on a democratic and emancipatory basis, can radical democratic politics be formed regarding Islamists. We do not approve of

essentialist hatred of Islamists, which may be driven by class or sect, and which is definitely reactionary and most probably racist. The most optimal position for a struggle against Islamism is undoubtedly the revolutionary democratic position that also resists Assadist fascism.

Having said that, we are not unaware of a third dimension to our struggle, which pertains to various interventions by conventional or emerging imperialist centers; interventions which are carried out either directly or through regional proxies, in the form of states or sub-state organizations. Here, too, we find that the most coherent and radical position against imperialism is that which takes internal, Assadist colonization into account, and takes sides with the weak and disadvantaged, in Syria and the region at-large. Those who think that Bashar al-Assad and his junta are supportive of the struggle against imperialism are insensible fools at best, and anti-democratic racists at worst.

This three-dimensional struggle defines universality for us, and perhaps for the world as a whole.

Moreover, I am not suggesting that we have no shortcomings, or that what we say about these causes and others should be the final word. We work and we learn. Our greatest shortcoming is that we are dispersed and our forces are unorganized. This has been exacerbated by the conditions of detention and killing under torture, which have mainly targeted the social base of the revolution; by the condition of displacement and the extensive destruction of Syrian society by the tyrannical and sectarian Assadist junta and its imperialist partners; and finally by nihilist Islamist organizations. Our efforts are constantly at odds

with the shocking and unprecedented extremes that the Syrian tragedy has reached. But we continue to work.

In short, for us, Syrian democrats and leftists, the struggle is a fight for independence. First, we seek the independence of our country from colonial powers, which have donned false masks that boast about sovereignty, territorial unity, pluralism, or the war on terror, much like all colonial powers have throughout history. Second, we seek the independence of our struggle from other colonists, who don equally false masks, such as anti-imperialism and also the war on terror, demanding that we stay silent or act as local copies of them.

This criticism of Western and non-Western anti-imperialist left is both a contribution to the struggle for independence, that is, for freedom, and an effort to own authority over our own discourse. It remains open to partnerships that are based on comradeship and equality.