

al-Razzaz, Munif. *Ma'alm al-Hayat al-Arabiya al-Jadeeda*. Cairo: Dar Misr Il-Teba'ah, 1953, pp. 21-29, p.37 & 48-54 & 299-302. Translated by *The Palestinian Revolution*.¹

A Divided Country

Today, our Arab world is a divided one, despite having being united for many centuries. For all the distance between its various parts, the weakness of communication and the emergence of divergent local forms of governance, a feeling of collective unity brought the region together. The Arab world, whether part of a dominant central state or partially independent from it, always looked to two cities: Mecca, the abiding destination for Muslim Arabs, and the capital of whatever central state held prominence, be it Damascus, Baghdad, Cairo or Istanbul.

[...]

Over the course of the past and current centuries, Western colonial interference in the Arab world's affairs, colonisation of one after another of its constituents, and colonial penetration to its core, invading it in its entirety after World War I have destroyed the unity that held the Arab world together, divided the region into states and microstates, constructed borders and built barriers between and around them. Some areas were capable, due to the nature of their geography, of existing independently from the rest of the Arab world. Other states were so small that they could not imagine subsisting except under the protection of a Western state.

A Colonised Country

Division is one effect of Western colonisation on the Arab World. It is very hard to enumerate its countless other ramifications.

Where do we find ourselves today? The Arab struggle against colonisation has not faltered these past years. Of course, it always lacked many ingredients required to succeed and fulfil its objective. It was bereft of a universal feeling amongst Arabs that they shared the same predicament. That they should participate in a unified effort instead of struggling against colonisation in

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their separate corners without knowing, or ignoring, what other parts of the Arab world were doing or had the potential to achieve. It was deformed by degeneration, chaotic organisation, improvisation, obscurity of objectives, neglected duties, and ignorance of the true meaning of struggle that we inherited from Turkish rule. Nevertheless, the pure blood that flowed on our land during the many stages of struggle was not shed in vain. In addition to leading the way to a new consciousness, maturity, optimism, strong feelings of pan-Arab nationalism and understanding of high ethics and morals, it reaped clear concrete results, not the least of which is the independence of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Libya. We use the term 'independence' very loosely when we say these countries achieved it. Independence is not true and complete unless the state feels it has absolute freedom and authority within its borders, without any foreign influence on decision-making. Which Arab state can claim to be free from any foreign influence? Some Arab states are under direct, explicit colonialism. Others are independent, but occupied by foreign forces or tied down by military treaties. Other still are independent, unoccupied and unencumbered by treaties, yet foreign interests continue to surround them and attempt to extend their literary/cultural/intellectual, political, economic and even their military influence.

A Helpless Country

If we put all this aside and scrutinise local governance inside these divided independent and semi-independent states, we find a terrible, undeniable reality: there is a huge gap between people and their governments. Governments do not trust their people, and people do not trust their governments. An atmosphere of suspicion, anxiety and fear characterises the relationship between the two. To claim that these governments truly represent their people, that they speak honestly and sincerely in their name, is far from the truth.

Governments have failed to gain the confidence of their citizens, who do not trust their leadership to represent their hopes, aspirations and desires. This lack of faith has meant the loss of true democratic rule. Governments began to resort to overt or covert dictatorship, democratic masquerades devoid of substance.

The causes of this immense gap are firmly entrenched, and permeate all aspects of Arab life. Their roots can be traced to the systems, traditions and

methods we inherited from Turkish rule, as well as those imposed on us by colonialism, which are inimical to regenerating a nation desirous of life.

This predicament comes as no surprise. This nation, which faced colonisation immediately after the end of Turkish rule, defined liberation from colonialism as its ultimate objective to be achieved through struggle. Amidst this struggle, the nation sought leaders and commanders. Having been reduced to non-existence, or virtual non-existence, under Turkish rule, the nation found itself with nothing but feudal leaders or members of prominent families to choose from. Some worked with the people striving for freedom from foreign domination. Others chose not to, preferring to maintain good relations with the new colonial masters. Those who fought alongside the held sway and were revered as saints.

Yet once the situation stabilised, the pressure from colonisation eased up and these new leaders came to rule, they attempted to govern the people with the same mindset with which they had governed their fiefdoms under Turkish dominion. They did not give the people any rights, or alleviate any of the injustices inflicted on them. The leaders did not sense that the past few years had changed the people drastically. They did not understand that people would no longer accept what they had helplessly accepted a few years earlier. They failed to grasp that this struggle, for which many martyrs sacrificed their lives, had awakened the noble Arab spirit that refuses humiliation and undignified life on its own land. They did not comprehend that the people today anticipate a dignified life that is commensurate with their struggle and all the sacrifices they made.

The new rulers ignored all this, underestimating the people and the power of public opinion. They set about buttressing their rule, expanding their influence and power, granting themselves privileges and amassing fortunes. Corruption was rampant and bribery commonplace. If people made their dissatisfaction known, laws and regulations were drawn up to curtail their freedom and suppress their views and spirit. The leaders stifled all possible forms of expressing opinions, from the press to parties, meetings, demonstrations and strikes. Governance degenerated from the hope of true people's rule to autocratic, dictatorial power that dons or doffs its democratic coat at whim.

Naturally, colonialism and reactionary forces have a hand in stoking such a situation. It also goes without saying that people see this as a betrayal of their cause.

This is how the huge gap was created. This is how the ties that had bound the rulers and the ruled together during the struggle, when everyone stood together against colonialism, were broken.

This is why many coups took place in Syria and Egypt: to air the grievances that filled the people's hearts, and the wishes the rulers ignored. Especially when people felt so bereft of the tools of democratic change which were meant to sustain parliamentary life.

Today, the huge gap between the rulers and the ruled in Arab states is a reality, imposed by the prevailing circumstances in the Arab world. We are recording current conditions here with a view to investigating the root causes of the gap at a later stage.

We Are in the Midst of a Struggle

Today, the Arab world is in the throes of trials and tribulations that pit three forces against each other. Firstly, the glittering deluge of a force that springs from past glories, from the first Arab renaissance and the inheritance of a holy message, and their modern connections to sophisticated thought both Western and Eastern, modern and ancient. Secondly, a restrictive force that pulls backwards. This is the force of the modern past under Turkish rule, which stamped out individualism and left nothing but corrupt politics, feeble economies, decayed ethics, and dissolute societies in its wake. Finally, a force that pushes from the front to the back, stymieing the first force and impeding its progress, sowing corruption and debilitating the progressive ranks. This is the force of colonialism and foreign interests. These forces clash, yet the nation still progresses. This progress is slow and tortuous, confused at times and assured at others.

Nonetheless, this advance is irrefutable, and we will undoubtedly reach our goal. The question is whether we reach our goal in a few years, or tens or hundreds of years, whether we pursue a straightforward route or surrender to the reality of confusion, whether we walk in darkness or in light, whether we forge our own path to tread consciously and open-mindedly or let the established competing forces run their course while we stand back and await the outcome, whether we write our own history or whether our history is written for us. This requires work on our part – planned, organised and enlightened work. It requires us truly to understand the circumstances that surround us and study them in depth. It requires us to diagnose the problems and devise solutions. It requires us to avoid improvisation, hesitation or tread

in darkness. It requires us to realise that other nations, past and present, have followed the steps (or “endured the pangs”) we are going through. We must acknowledge that the fates of nations sometimes diverge. A nation’s character, history and environment can play pivotal roles in its fate. Still, similarities can occur. A man may differ greatly from his brother, but be his brother just the same. A family may differ from their neighbours, but still make up the same neighbourhood.

Society’s Aim is to Realise Individual Potential

I fear I may have digressed, in this lengthy discussion, from my core concern with the Arab individual. I believe that the foundations of society should be geared towards individual interests as the individual understands them, and not as society understands them on his behalf. When society meets the individual on a level playing field, or close, the two are in equilibrium. This is what we, and all reformists, seek.

But how can this balance be achieved? What does equilibrium between individual and societal levels signify? We began with a theory that states that an individual’s personality, interests and opinions are formed by his own experience, which is distinct from that of any other human being. Is it possible for every individual in society to attain his or her goal? If achieving one’s aims comes only at the expense of others, can we possibly let an individual achieve his objectives? If an individual decides to kill his neighbour and steal his furniture, do we let him do so because these acts result from his preference and personal experience? What is in an individual’s best interest? Is it to live luxuriously or to live a lazy life? Is it to earn money without exertion? Is it to receive an education? Is it to travel widely? Is it to marry and have a family? Is it to work towards effectively reforming the community? Is it to have a certain career? The truth is that any of the above could represent the ideal of individuality in the community. Some individuals define their interest in terms of material gains alone. Others value having a family and living quiet life. Others see it as in their interest to follow a certain career path leading to a desirable end. Others strive to rise to prominence within the community, to be recognised for their name and for their strong personality to become known, to no particular end. Others see the realisation of perverted desires such as murder, theft or lustful indulgence as being in their interest.

What is meant, then, by the assertion that a community’s goal should be in the individual’s interest? Does it imply that everyone should be allowed to pursue their goals unchecked?

Clearly society cannot achieve everything individuals may desire, especially those with vile motives. Society cannot aggregate divergent wishes and contradicting desires in a way that satisfies all the members of the society. Society has a great responsibility, which is to equip every individual with the facilities required to actualise his potential and desires, according to his abilities and without impediments such as poverty, inheritance, environment, class or unjust laws. The purpose of society is to enable every human being's self-fulfilment by transforming his potential into vital action, to help every citizen to reap the benefits of their achievements that correspond to their ability and effort. A good society is one in which every individual feels that he was given the chance to fulfil his potential and all his ambitions.

Some individuals indeed have no potential, while others are by nature unmotivated to fulfil theirs. We want society to provide suitable conditions for every individual who has potential and the will required to fulfil it to do so.

On the other hand, the skills that a myriad or even the majority of citizens enjoy are strangled and suppressed under the regimes that currently govern us. Such skills have not been given the chance to flourish, and society has never nurtured or refined them. The ignorance, poverty, reactionary and narrow perspectives that engulf the vast majority of our people destroy the talents, qualities and capabilities harboured by millions.

A good society should strive to liberate these individuals from all pressure and suffering, and from anything that induces reactionary, idiotic and helpless thoughts and action. It should transform them from walking machines intent on mere survival into thinking, optimistic, serious and hard-working individuals. It should elevate them from objects and animals to humans that contribute and benefit, give and take, produce and consume -- honest citizens that know their rights and duties.

I can almost imagine the heights this nation could have reached if the conscious, dutiful modernists came from all classes instead of just one. I think many of us know several people from the lower classes, such as farmers and workers, who for one reason or another had the chance to continue their higher education. Who, as a result of education alone, managed to do a lot for their country, expedite its progress and achieve a degree of self-realisation unrivaled by many from their class.

If society's purpose was to help individuals realise their potential and bring their capabilities to fruition then we need to think of ways that can help us achieve this goal.

It is futile to leave it up to traditions, existing social norms, a specific individual or group of individuals in the community, even the government itself, to determine the path that each individual should follow. No matter how skillful, thoughtful or farsighted a person is, he will never be able to know what another person is thinking, the principles and opinions that occupy another's mind, or the feelings and desires in their heart. A good society is not one that allows a government or blind social norms to determine the path each individual must walk. A good society is the society that allows every citizen to achieve self-realisation, to carve out their own path, formulate their own hopes and shape these hopes in the form and manner in which they see fit. No government can lay claim to the ability to make artists, scientists, farmers, workers and doctors out of the individuals it presides over. A good government allows every individual to achieve their full accomplishment in the way they think most fitting.

This can mean, as stated by certain political doctrines like that of Herbert Spencer, that the job of a government or state, should be a purely negative one. Accordingly, governments should never interfere in individual affairs. If a person wishes to study or provide education for his children, he should work towards achieving this goal and the government has no duty to assist or pave the way for him. If a person wants to work in trade, industry or agriculture, he should do so in whatever way he finds accommodating or thinks best, without government interference. A perfect state is one that does not meddle in the affairs of its citizens, unless an emergency calls for intervention such as providing security and arresting criminals.

This mode of government might have been appropriate to communities in the past, when life was simple and confined to the village or city, when manual labour prevailed and each individual practiced their trade as they pleased. It is not applicable to today's complicated, connected world, where people's fates are dictated by machines.

The state cannot stand by while a huge proportion of its citizens remain incapable of fulfilling their desires. Or worse, to stand by while a huge segment of citizens strive for nothing but subsistence. Machines turned things upside down, widened the gap between the rich and the poor, and deprived the latter of the manual labour that had constituted past generations' livelihood, turned them into human machines operatin metal ones, and

inescapably sidelined them. It is therefore the government's duty to intervene to protect the poor from this slavery that extinguishes every hope and human thought, along with any desire to realise them.

The leaders of liberal thought during the French Revolution confirmed that freedom ends when the freedom of others begins. This definition is very lucid, but unfortunately rather unspecific. Every community ascribes a different meaning to the 'freedom of others'. The more advanced the community, the more advanced these meanings will be. At the time of the French Revolution, it would seem that the 'freedoms of others' referred to those obvious freedoms acknowledged by modern states, even in theory, including freedom of residence, freedom of expression, freedom of trade and industry, and freedom of movement within a country. However, community progress, and economic progress in particular, has turned these freedoms into theoretical concepts. Prevailing conditions prevent the implementation of these freedoms, despite their being acknowledged and upheld by the constitution and the law. A child who grows up in a farming village where his parents' financial circumstances prevent him from accessing education is not free to choose his profession. A child's ignorance compels him to become either a farmer or a factory worker.

A man without money or power cannot express his political opinions, as he is deprived of the means of expression. Should he find a way to express such opinions, he risks being prosecuted without defence by his employer or those in power?. Freedom, in this case, means the poor individual's liberty to express his opinions. But it also implies the employer's freedom to dismiss his employee whenever he pleases.

While I agree with the way in which the leaders of the French Revolution defined freedom, I must take issue with the meaning of freedom itself, the typology of freedom and what it safeguards. We must specify the implication of these freedoms and rights, as they are understood in our modern world.

My conclusions can be summarised as follows:

1. An individual lives in a community, and the purpose of this community, together with the connections and relations it encompasses, is to equip the individual to realise his potential and capabilities in the best possible way.
2. This goal is not achieved by forcing individuals to follow certain life trajectories. It is achieved when the state guarantees the removal of all obstacles to individual self-realisation.

3. The state, which is a tool at the people's disposal to expedite self-fulfillment, must derive its authority and legitimacy from the people, the sum of all individuals. People's disobedience of the state that regulates their affairs can lead to confrontation that could destroy the state.

These principles should underpin interpersonal relationships, and the relationship between individuals and the state.

I was impelled to write the above by my feeling. I feel that the anxiety and discontent that has engulfed Arab youth throughout the region, particularly following the Palestinian catastrophe, has reached its climax and will explode in some form or another, expressing itself and its proclivities come what may. This anxiety and discontent, which overwhelm our people from all directions and result from the terrible conditions deluging the Arab world as a whole despite its diversity, targeted specific individuals as if these they held sole responsibility for the state in which we find ourselves. At other times, these emotions were directed at the distant past, the recent past, the West or Western civilisation, or the East and Eastern traditions. They were also directed at certain occurrences, temporary situations or fleeting events. Initially, one may feel that if it were not for this person, that incident, or that crisis, our Arab nation would not be in the state it is now, Palestine would never have been lost and half the Arab world would not be colonised.

Many have forgotten that historical events cannot be determined by individuals or induced by specific circumstances unless the entire community and environment are primed for this event or that incident. A person or event is a mere reflection of the community environment that spawn it, hence the failure of every political assassination in the Arab world over these past ten years. Assassination attempts intended to solve problems merely exhausted the perpetrators and troubled their souls. They thought that swapping one person for another and the salvation from a dictator would change the face of history. History, however, has taught us that it is impervious to individual undertakings, save for those cut from the same cloth as history itself.

The true sources of our current conditions cannot be located in one person, one action or one event. Rather, they can be found in the political, economic, social and ethical factors that shaped our modern history. They can be found in the various currents that influenced these factors' evolution, currents emanating from the recent and distant past, from East and West, from reactionary, conservative forces and progressive, liberal forces.

For these reasons, I have undertaken an in-depth research to clarify the lay of the land, highlight other important aspects of our lives and elucidate the circumstances that can determine our destiny and history. This was to enable us to head in the right direction, build strong foundations and know where our feet would land before taking the next step. So that all these sacrifices and efforts to bring about a better Arab world, a better Arab nation and a better Arab life are not wasted. This is why I neglected individuals and events, no matter how great, in my research. I even ignored the Palestinian Catastrophe, one of the greatest calamities endured not just by the Arab nation but by any nation on earth, because it is a temporary event. This catastrophe has specific origins, factors and roots that stem not only from the people who led its battles, but also from the depths of all aspects of our lives.

In view of this, I dedicated my study to the broader factors. However, these factors cannot be identified, evaluated or weighed up without a scale with which to measure, assess and judge them. Thus, in the beginning, I addressed the goals that we must aim to achieve if we want to be true to our nation. Then I tried to point out where we currently stand in relation to these goals, and to trace a roadmap leading to their attainment.

It is futile to direct our anger at, or revolt against, the past or present, unless we have systems and goals with which to replace our past and present as it stands. It pains me to record so many efforts at reform. So many sacrificed lives were wasted because they relied on anger alone, with no clear aim at which to direct it, with no clear vision of a new structure to replace the existing system that the anger strove to demolish. If we do not know why we are revolting, what are we revolting against, and to what end we are revolting, then why revolt and waste our efforts?

It is not enough for the young to be angry, and it is not enough to identify what they hate. They need to clarify what they want, where they are going and what path will lead them there.

I don't claim to have come up with something new. Everything my research demonstrates has been said before. Nonetheless, I wanted to produce a reminder and a statement. Perhaps my work will heighten people's awareness, and help those still sleeping to awaken. Perhaps it will shine a light before those still walking in the dark. If this wish comes true, then I will have fulfilled part of my duty.

Before concluding my study, I need to explain our division of the Arab nation's problems into political, economic, social and ethical categories. I wish

this research had been possible without this division, as I fear it will lead people to consider each of these problems in isolation. We should not forget that they are all facets of the same problem, that is to say the current order and its philosophy.

I would like further to underline this interconnectedness by emphasising the unity of the solutions. If the problem is one, then its solution should be one. I would also like to insist on the futility of any effort to correct the old system's problems while maintaining this system's philosophy and structure. The problems of the old system stem from its very nature; they are not transient.

Reform should begin with a coup that demolishes the very foundations of the current corrupt structures. Then, a new society must be built on new foundations radically different from those on which the old society was built. Foundations that safeguard the individual's dignity, nurture his talents, and affirm his individuality, while protecting the nation's dignity, affirming its identity and delivering its message.

Any patchwork renovation that overhauls parts of the old system while neglecting others, taking up one solution while leaving others aside, will prove futile. This kind of effort would lack the intellectual and philosophical foundations required to underpin a new system.

The system to which we have devoted the previous pages is a complete system, with interconnected parts. The Arab nation will not rest on strong foundations unless freedom in all its forms, socialism, and unity, are achieved.