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On the Intellectual and Revolution

Azmi Bishara | June 2013

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Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies

PO Box 10277

Street No. 826, Zone 66

Doha, Qatar

Tel.: +974 44199777 | Fax: +974 44831651

www.dohainstitute.org

Abstract

This essay is not an attempt to provide a comprehensive historical or sociological treatment of the subject of intellectuals and their role in revolution; rather, it is a conceptual contribution that aims to produce knowledge through critique and the differentiation of key terms—linguistically, conceptually, and historically. In so doing, Bishara examines terms such as “the intellectual,” “the intelligentsia,” “the organic intellectual,” and, finally, “the public intellectual”. For the latter, emphasis is placed on public intellectuals’ ability to go beyond their specializations and engage directly with the public on issues concerning state and society.

This paper distinguishes between intellectuals and those who work in a field that mainly relies on their intellectual ability; between academics, whose sole focus is their field, and social actors who take an interest in several fields but are not specialized in a specific one. A conceptual distinction is then drawn between the intellectual and the rest of society. Through this endeavor, the author clarifies what he considers to be the main attribute of an intellectual—the ability to take stances based on epistemological grounds and value judgments at the same time.

Finally, the paper concludes that two types of intellectuals are scarce in the Arab revolutions: the “revolutionary intellectual,” who maintains a critical distance not only from the regime, but also from the revolution, and the “conservative intellectual,” who argues for the preservation of the regime due to the potential for change that exists within it, and the wisdom embedded in the state and its traditions. For Bishara, the role of the revolutionary intellectual does not end with the outbreak of a revolution, but, in fact, takes on greater complexity and significance once the need to propose post-revolutionary alternatives arises.

Table of Contents

A Historical Note	1
Problematics	7
On Distance	9
The Intellectual and Revolution	14
On the Role of the Intellectual	255

A Historical Note

Contemporary researchers tend to dismiss the historical role of religious scholars during the era of the Islamic Caliphate, Sultanates, or Emirates, a feat that would enable historians to track the transformations of the function of the intellectual and power in our tradition. Most often, religious scholars (*ulama*) are noted in history for their role as advisors to princes (typically urging them to be virtuous and abstain from corruption, or justifying their sins), and are exclusively framed as part of a history of Islamic institutions. Some researchers view these interactions between scholars and Sultans as going back to the root of “political Islam,” while others consider their function as part of a history of protest in Islam. This perspective, however, is reductive— a major part of the role of individuals known as scholars and people of knowledge at the time, a term usually conferred to those specializing in Islamic doctrine and religious studies, was a public role relating to the critique of society and the authority, a task guided by the Islamic notion of “speaking a word of truth in the face of a despotic Sultan”. This role was closest to the task that we associate today with the intellectual.

Few scholars and Islamic jurists have actually undertaken the above function, but critical scholars were indeed more numerous than their peers among poets and *literati* in Islamic history. One should note that the various poets and authorities in the field of language, rhetoric, translation, and biographies did not possess religious or ethical legitimacy to critique their societies. Poets in particular would often limit their dealings with authority to poems of praise or satire in accordance with their interests, personal or tribal pride, or sectarian affiliation. In other words, even the critiques and political attacks formulated by poets and essayists did not stem from the fact that the poet possessed a moral or ethical authority. In the Arabic language, it might be confusing to label these poets and writers as “secular” (or laic) scholars due to the ideological overtones that the concept has acquired in Arabic; however, in Christian culture, the terms “laic” and “secular” were originally used precisely in this sense: describing people who were not clerics.

There are, of course, major exceptions to this rule, such as the great literary figure Ibn al-Muqaffa; the classical poet Abu al-Ala al-Maarri; and the philosopher Ibn Rush (Averroes), who was both a religious scholar and a judge, a fact that is often overlooked; the mystic philosopher and writer Abu Hayyan al-Tawheedi; and the philologist Abd al-Qahir al-Jarjani, author of the classical work *Intimations of Inimitability*, who critiqued the rampant opportunism and the decline of values in his

society.¹ In addition to authors who performed a truly critical role in their society, theologians Ibn Hazm and Ibn Taymyyah must be noted as ones who went beyond their field of specialization,² which was that of religious studies, and who became concerned with the questions of their time, including secular knowledge. Both Ibn Taymyyah and Ibn Hazm were encyclopedists who studied various disciplines, including jurisprudence logic, rhetoric, history, and addressed existential questions. To them, the “religious” was not essentially separate from the “temporal,” which led them to assume public stances on the affairs in their countries.

Arab researchers tend to make a distinction between the Sultan’s scribe (*katib*) or clerk and the religious scholar, and use this distinction as a historical antecedent for the emergence of the secular scholar and the clerical scholar as two distinct categories. I, however, tend to disagree with this institution of a tradition and its classification, which projects present concepts onto history, and does not take into account the cases of Islamic jurists, such as Ibn Hazm, Ibn Taimiya, and Ibn Rushd, whose education went far beyond Islamic law.

The entire categorization needs to be revisited, and confining the history of scholars, and Islamic jurists to that of Islamic institutions would be mistaken. Their history is also, to a large extent, the history of intellectuals in Islamic civilization, and their role in that regard was no less significant than that of the Sultan’s scribes, especially in terms of their cultural influence. This is independent from the fact that the very term “intellectual” in Arabic (*muthaqqaf*) is a modern translation that does not stem from that historical period.³ Nevertheless, the translated term can only be fully understood if one

¹ A descriptive poetic verse from al-Jarjani’s treatise: “This is an age that has no place except for baseness/any climber in our day has used vice as his ladder.”

² It should be noted that the term “specialization” is a modern one, and is used here as a mere metaphor.

³ The Arabic root *thaqafa* exists in Arab dictionaries not only in the sense of “to grab,” but also in the modern sense that is related to culture and knowledge; nevertheless, this did not lead to the use of the term *muthaqqaf* (intellectual) in the past Islamic era. Classical Arab dictionaries carry many meanings and usages for the root *thaqafa*, such as large, imposing, keen, dexterous, witty, and intelligent. Some used it followed by various terms such as *laqf*, which means capable to understand very quickly (al-Lihiani and Ibn al-Suqayt). The verb *thaqafa* can also mean fast learning (Ibn Duraid). Many other meanings were embedded in the word *thaqf* when mentioned in the Quran and other literary texts. However, the most important meanings of the verb *thaqafa* were included in the famous Arabic dictionaries *Taj al-Arous* and *Lissan al-Arab*, where it meant knowledge, perspicacity, and intelligence, while the adjective meant skilled. However, the modern term *muthaqqaf* cannot be found in classical references as a description for a person; as it is cited in the modern dictionary *Muheet al-Muheet* by Boutros al-Bustani, it means

takes into account the social and historical phenomena that surround this concept, though these phenomena do not explain it. As with any other philosophical concept, it is vital to distinguish the phenomena that are directly related to the concept from those that are similar or related.

The term intellectual (*muthaqqaf*) is translated from 19th century European languages, and is derived from terms such as “intellectual,” “scholar,” and “literati”. The closest to the modern concept of *muthaqqaf* is the word intellectual, which was widely used in 19th century France to refer to those who worked in the field of thought—literature to be specific—and who adopted public stances. The term was subsequently employed by critics to refer to the role of Emile Zola and other intellectuals who signed a political petition critiquing anti-Semitism during the trial of the Jewish French officer Alfred Dreyfus, whose trial in 1894 on charges of treason was one of the tensest political dramas in modern French history. At the time, the literary elite took a unified position toward an ongoing political issue that captured the attention of all French society.

This term also finds its equivalent in the Russian concept of the “intelligentsia”, as formulated by intellectuals from the Russian popular movement; the term was not linked to academic diplomas, qualifications, or specializations, but to a rejection of the existing reality and a will to change it from the perspective of the marginalized and the disinherited—“the people”. The common element between the Russian and the French terms is the intellectual’s rejection of the existing reality; their critical function; and their refusal to play the role of the watch dog for the regime in place. This tradition was taken up by many critical intellectuals during the 20th century, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, leading to a distinction between the “intellectual” and the “expert” who isolates himself within the confines of his field and displays no interest in public affairs. Metaphorically, one can imagine the contrast between a village doctor who engages in all public matters and problems of the village, counsels on them, and cares for the lives of his patients outside of his practice, and specialized doctors in a modern hospital who limit their relationship to their patients to treating them within the bounds of their medical specialty.

Eventually, the term intelligentsia became employed to describe a group of educated people and experts who work in the domain of thinking as a profession, be they teachers, journalists, experts, architects, or scientists—these are not, however, creative

educated, knowledgeable, or having culture. We find the term *thaqif* defined by Ibn Manzur as “somebody who is well-anchored in the knowledge that he requires”.

“thinkers” who provide a creative product, whether intellectual or literary, nor do they believe it their duty to take a stance toward issues that concern society and the state. This distinction between experts and intellectuals is contemporary; historically, the terms intellectual and intelligentsia were used to describe critical intellectuals belonging to the opposition. This link between the concept of the intellectual and the critical position that such intellectual assumed would remain in existence until our time.⁴ In France, the former term was used, while the latter was employed in Russia from the 1860s onwards to refer to critical activists of the opposition—whether Western-influenced promoters of enlightenment, Russian nationalists, or popular socialists. Intellectuals from the French Revolution were retrospectively labeled “intellectual” even though the term was not used during their time. In fact, originally they were referred to by their contemporaries as philosophers, thinkers, or men of letters.

The objective in this essay is not to trace the history of the term and its usages, but rather to explain that the term, in its current significance is a modern notion that has undergone several shifts, the most important of which relates to the emergence of university graduates. These worked in cultural production, scientific research, state administration, and other domains, though many did not find proper employment. In parallel, this phenomenon of “unemployment of university graduates,” composed mainly of educated graduates who did not work for the state or who were unemployed but remained critically and defiantly engaged in society, arose. In addition, there emerged intellectuals, from different social classes and political parties, who were ideological intellectuals that defended a specific social class or group, and who were knowledgeable about mainstream culture and the intellectual issues of their society, so they would be able to debate, argue, and identify the deficiencies of the existing regime and its mainstream culture. In *The Prison Notebooks*, Antonio Gramsci called this type

⁴ The following excerpts are all selected from generalizations during the first decades after the Second World War, a time that witnessed a broad discussion on the role of the intellectuals and their attraction to the left, Marxism, the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, and anti-colonial and anti-racist movements, particularly after the horrors of World War II, the rise of the Cold War, and the emergence of national liberation movements.

Joseph Schumpeter wrote that “one of the touches that distinguish intellectuals from others is [...] critical attitude,” see: Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, p. 147.

Meanwhile, in his book critiquing French intellectuals’ fascination with Marxism after the Second World War, Raymond Aron wrote that “the tendency to criticize the established order is the occupational disease of the intellectuals,” see: Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, p. 210.

Finally, in an effort to define the concept, Richard Hofstadter wrote: “the modern idea of the intellectual as constituting a class, as a separate social force, even in the term intellectual itself, is identified with the idea of political and moral protest,” see: Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, p. 38.

of intellectual “the organic intellectual,”⁵ in reference to intellectuals who not only affiliate themselves with a specific class and ideology, but also theorize for the class in accordance with the Gramscian conception of ideological hegemony, which seeks to transform society from “what it is” to “what it should be”. This project of change encapsulates the entire concept of the intellectual for Gramsci.

Contrary to popular narrative within some political parties today, Gramsci was not referring to a party intellectual who specializes exclusively in his own ideology, and who perceives everything through its lens. The type of intellectual engaged in party propaganda represents a phenomenon of ideological and doctrinal mobilization, including theorists, party members, orators, and writers. By the term “organic intellectual,” Gramsci was referring to the intellectual (affiliated with a party or not) who argued that the existing social reality was untenable, and that it could be changed through the ability to analyze and criticize its culture, with the objective of achieving cultural hegemony for the oppressed. The Gramscian concept caused a real stir in the circles of the Communist movement, and was celebrated by critical leftist intellectuals and post-modernists at a later stage, despite the fact that Gramsci’s concept did not reflect a comprehensive theory or an intellectual innovation; it was only seen as such for the Communist movement, which was led by intellectuals whose ideology did not grant them the status of a class or, at least, their becoming real historical actors.

Marxism did not draw a clear revolutionary role for intellectuals, which explains the importance of Gramsci, who legitimated this role and enshrined it within Marxist ideology, although he did not discover the role of the intellectual. Gramsci’s notion was an attempt to reconcile the reality of the Communist movement led by intellectuals with its ideological tenets that denied their role.

Gramsci’s theory can also be seen as reconciliation between traditional Marxist theory and the reality of European societies, where, contrary to the predictions in *Das Kapital*, socialist revolutions took place in non-capitalist societies, leading to the collapse of the Tsarist regime. Meanwhile, advanced capitalist societies started to witness the emergence of a middle class, an intelligentsia, and technocrats that developed new lines of defense using the power of what Gramsci (after Marx, Hegel and social contract theorists) termed “civil society”, which was capable of containing and assimilating intellectuals who became the ideological tools of the dominant class. This is

⁵ Gramsci, “The Intellectuals,” pp. 3-23.

what led Gramsci to distinguish between control and hegemony; hegemony meaning, in short, that society would acquiesce to the legitimacy of a regime after having succumbed to the cultural hegemony of the dominant class. This leads a regime to abandon blatant repression in order to strengthen its rule. Needless to say, this form of cultural hegemony cannot be effectuated without the use of intellectuals.

Finally, there is the more modern (even more American) concept of the “public intellectual,” a specialist endowed with a broad culture, enabling that intellectual to write and produce in a language that is accessible to the public on matters concerning society and state. When rational communicative spaces are available, this type of intellectual is able to intermediate between scholarly research and writing for the public and the general readership. Public intellectuals contribute to creating a communicative space, and their contributions involve taking a stance, for intellectuals are not merely analysts or experts.

In contemporary Arab culture, the term intellectuals is often used to describe the entire intelligentsia class; however, in this essay I do not intend to use the term “intellectual” to mean “creator” in the field of arts in order to distinguish it from the category of intelligentsia, nor will I use it to mean “thinker”, since the media has made this word redundant in Arab culture as it is arbitrarily used to refer to all intellectuals. In my opinion, the designation “thinker” should be limited to those who produce genuinely universal and authentic theoretical works that include new ideas.

Intellectual in this sense refers to what we term in our age the public intellectual—intellectuals who perform a public role by drawing on their broad and cross-disciplinary knowledge. The intellectual here has a general culture that goes beyond their field of specialization, and is simultaneously public. Such a role dictates a direct interaction with the public space, and addresses questions that concern state and society. Thus, the label “intellectual” goes beyond the revolutionary intellectual and the critical intellectual to include those who contribute to the discussion of public affairs using rational tools from an ethical position. Those who merely contribute to rational analysis are specialists and experts, while those who contribute with ethical judgments are not necessarily intellectuals. The public intellectual is the one capable of combining a broad culture and rational thought with an adopted stance.

This type of intellectual emerged in the Arab world toward the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, and was found among secularists and religious alike, before secularism and religion turned into party ideologies in the Arab world.

What were influential thinkers such as al-Kawakibi, Khayr al-Din al-Tunsi, Butrus al-Bustani, Muhammad Kurd Ali, Francis Marrash, Mohammed Abduh, Farah Antoun, Salama Moussa, Ahmad Amin, Taha Hussain, Ahmad Lutfi el-Sayed, Abbas Mahmoud al-Akkad, Sati al-Husri, and many others, if not public intellectuals? Should we approach them from the perspective of their respective specializations or, rather, through a more comprehensive analytic and critical category that characterizes the public intellectual? This is particularly relevant given the fact that much of the writings of these intellectuals represented enlightened thought that entailed various forms of knowledge and fields.

These figures from the Arab Renaissance are the predecessors of the Arab public intellectual. They were not merely experts or advocates, nor were they organic intellectuals in the ideological and class conception of Gramsci. However, in our day and age, with the increased specialization of academic disciplines, the Arab intellectual cannot perform the role of the public intellectual without acquiring expert knowledge in at least one field, which then becomes the foundation for broader general education. The task of public intellectuals has become more difficult with the spread of mass education and the traditional and new media technologies, which have led to a society in which large segments of the populace have sufficient education and culture to debate and write on public affairs, using the availability of media tools that can promote rational thought and political propaganda, though these also risk inciting myths and fabrications. This makes the task of the modern public intellectual more difficult and challenging, and more crucial than ever.

Problematics

At this point, one is faced with numerous questions, including the challenge of distinguishing this intellectual from those who work in the field of knowledge and base their profession on intellectual effort and scholarly credentials. This is the case of the teacher, the laboratory researcher, the journalist, the accountant, the engineer, and the company director. Among those, we find individuals who are intellectuals and those who are not. It is equally difficult to distinguish the intellectual from the academic who focuses solely on his field. Moreover, a distinction needs to be made between the intellectual from the social actor who discusses and writes on many issues, but is a master of none.

Edward Shils provided a general definition of the intellectual that covers some of these distinctions: "intellectuals are the aggregate of persons in any society who employ, in their communication and expression, with relatively higher frequency than most other members of society, symbols of general scope and abstract reference, concerning man, society, nature and the cosmos".⁶ According to this definition, the main difference between intellectuals and other members of society is not qualitative, but is a difference in degree. The distinction rests on the intellectuals' ability to employ their knowledge in the service of public and abstract questions relating to society, man, and nature in general. As such, intellectuals are here presented as philosophers of everyday life and public affairs; these broad definitions, however, make it more difficult to comprehend the specificity of the role of the intellectual as per its meaning in this essay.

Not linked to any historical era is the pressing fundamental question concerning intellectuals: should the intellectual be necessarily critical of the established regime? Can an intellectual engage in public affairs, drawing on his knowledge, without taking critical positions, what we shall call "the conservative intellectual"? The distinctions between the intellectual and the pure academic, between the intellectual and the non-intellectual who persists with writing and publishing, or the distinction between culture and media and journalism (which is important in and of itself), is beyond the scope of this essay. This essay will, instead, make do with the following understanding of what constitutes an intellectual.

The intellectual is neither the academic nor the researcher in a specific field, although this does not mean that the researcher cannot be an intellectual, or that the intellectual's interests should be so general as to not delve deeply into any subject. In fact, I believe that the reverse is true, that the intellectual of our age can no longer do what philosophers of past eras did by departing from the general to the particular; instead, the development of knowledge and the disciplines necessitates that the departure takes place from the particular to the general. In other words, the intellectual should possess an in-depth expertise in one specialization in order to surpass disciplines and gain knowledge in several fields in a rational and scientific manner, which results from the use of the scientific tools acquired through specialization. Furthermore, intellectuals must demonstrate a theoretical and ethical leaning that prompts them to adopt public positions. This can be best explained as a modification of the famous

⁶ Shils, "Intellectuals," p. 179.

saying by Aristotle, “he who knows one thing, knows nothing,” to which I add “he who wants to be knowledgeable in our age, must be specialized in at least one subject”.

In our age, the intellectual cannot be reduced to the academic specialist, while keeping in mind the fundamental role played by the specialized academic, without whom the accumulation of knowledge and the building of disciplines would not be possible. At the same time, the intellectual is not someone who merely collects general knowledge and unrelated facts, for this—in itself—is not sufficient. The prerequisite for an intellectual is the ability to take a stance on public issues based on the intellectual’s rational knowledge. In this sense, the positions taken are ethical or normative judgments. Thus, for the genuine intellectual, there is a necessary intersection between the theoretical ability to generalize and provide a comprehensive vision and analysis of the society as a whole, on the one hand, and the ability to take ethical positions regarding these public issues, on the other. Some insist that the intellectual must be, by definition, critical and I tend to agree with this statement, depending on what is exactly meant by “critical position”. As I shall explain below, the critical position could be a revolutionary one but also conservative; in both cases, it remains ethical and normative in nature.

On Distance

There are two tendencies that I tend to disagree with, and which have been spreading recently among a number of Arab and non-Arab writers. The first can be summed up in the words of Edward Said arguing that the “real” intellectual should be “an outsider living in self-imposed exile, and on the margins of society”.⁷ In truth, I do not comprehend the meaning of the term “real” in this reference. In my opinion, “real” here is used as an antonym to “disingenuous” or “false”. However, I also believe that authenticity and dissimulation are not dependent on a person’s marginalization or self-imposed exile, but on the definitions that intellectuals set for themselves and the extent of their commitment to these prerogatives—this is the real gauge of authenticity, as well as dishonesty. There is a degree of self-indulgence in this claim, especially when it is formulated by intellectuals who form a major part of academia in developed capitalist societies, a position which now allows for a wide margin for criticism, including the possibility of earning a salary, guaranteeing a secure living, and even garnering privileges in exchange for this criticism.

⁷ Jennings and Kemp-Welch, p. 11.

Being critical is no longer considered daring in Western academic institutions; in fact, it has become part of the academic discourse, whose prominent figures are respected and appreciated, and may even receive position and privilege.⁸ In this situation, the “margin” becomes the mainstream, and the “outsider” becomes the privileged. If the reference is to a self-imposed exile that is mental, this could be the result of a position that rejects injustice in oppressive society, or a rejection of the existing hypocrisy in Western academia. This “critical” posture, however, could also be the result of vanity, or the simulation of modesty, which is the worst form of vanity. Alternatively, this position could also be a justification for an opposite “scholarly” attitude that rises above conflicts and abstains from taking positions under the pretext of the intellectual’s pompousness and alienation from the details of daily life, which can be presented as another form of self-imposed exile, probably not thought of as such.

On the other hand, we all understand the exile that is suffered by intellectuals expelled from their country, or forced to leave under the fear of persecution and marginalization, resulting from a deprivation of the intellectual’s right to speak out and to act. Like any other form of human suffering, these circumstances may tell us a fact or two about the person behind the intellectual, but they do not fully define that intellectual; rather, they inform us more about the nature of the regime under which the intellectual has lived. Persecution, prisons, and exile are not, in and of themselves, qualifications or privileges that can propel someone to adopt the position of the intellectual; however, a person who has the requirements, and who maintains intellectual competence and analytic abilities and ethical consistency despite prison and exile and persecution, is without doubt an intellectual worthy of respect.

The distance that the intellectual must take from the existing social reality is not a separation that is imposed by the force of exile, or self-imposed exile, but is the result of the theoretical tools employed by the intellectual, which are, by nature, universal and keep a certain distance from reality, including social reality. This is the Hegelian conception of the theory as, by definition, a negation of reality only becomes a critique

⁸ The ruling institutions and their theorists understood, early on, the necessity of assimilating intellectuals and providing them with guarantees. This is not because there is no regime able to achieve cultural hegemony in society without allying itself with the intellectuals, as dissident leftist thinkers used to argue, but because the liberal institution believes that it is not possible to deprive the intellectuals from the freedom of opinion and expression without reaching a situation that would threaten the freedom of capitalism itself. From this perspective, numerous liberal theorists, such as Joseph Schumpeter, spoke of the necessity to protect the intellectual’s freedom of opinion, no matter how opposed to the ruling institution. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, p. 150.

of this reality when it interacts with it, an interaction with the rational dimension of reality itself, since history is the history of the rational structures of our reality. All that is real is rational, and all that is rational is real (and, theoretically speaking, critical) because it denotes the latent possibilities that exist in our reality. At the same time, distance is dependent on the ability to make value judgments and the boldness to take such positions regardless of the cost. These are the real elements behind cultural alienation, and not the simulation of exile or the claim of marginality.

An intellectual may be at the margins of society in terms of the social life chosen, but be extremely conservative in the stances adopted. An intellectual's living may also be dependent on the academic institution or other institutions that are located at the core of the existing social system, but he/she remains capable of taking a critical position vis-à-vis these institutions. The price for such actions can be steep in authoritarian and non-democratic regimes; however, even the institutions of democratic regimes are not devoid of methods to impose compliance on their intellectuals and attempt to domesticate them and bend them to their priorities, visions, and methods. Still, the most vexing element in this regard is the display of hypocrisy by the intellectual who selects the situations wherein he places a distance between himself and societal action; a cause of even more frustration is that the entire claim may be no more than a façade for personal arrogance or a tactic in order to abstain from taking a position.

The second tendency that I disagree with is the expectation of critical positions from writers and artists. Is the notion of criticism only applicable to writers and artists? The answer is a definite no. The Nietzschean tradition has promoted the notion that ethics, including the notion of justice, tolerance, equality, is but an expression of the relations of power and the will of power in society, a rule that applies to social theory and philosophy, and that only aesthetic expression, such as music and literature, can represent a genuine critique of reality because it emanates from the depth of human nature and conforms with nature and not with social order. Historical experience has proven that an abandonment of the ethical position has often led to nihilism, which, in turn, has led to the falsification of the concept of power and nature, and the acceptance of power as a reflection of the "natural" survival of the fittest in society. Moreover, the use of aesthetics and art was often used to evoke the needed sense of sacredness that was necessary for popular mobilization for totalitarian political regimes.

Within this chain of thought, let me propose a simple idea that is not related to the nature of art and literature, but to the role of the artist and the author. In the same way that one may respect the production of a scientist in their field of specialization,

without conditioning this appreciation on one's positions on public affairs, there is also no contradiction in admiring an artist, painter, or author whose work has aesthetic and creative value even if the artist did not take public positions or promote specific ethical values in his dealing with the political and social system. However, respect for a profession is different from fetishizing stardom which marginalizes ethics. In and of itself, art is not a form of critique, or an alternative to ethics. It is not easy, for many, to accept the last phrase since general expectation dictates that those active in the field of literature and the arts promote positions in the defense of humanity, at least, if not of people and society. There is no doubt that this form of expectation would prompt any Nietzschean to smirk in response to this "naiveté".

Previous public positions taken by authors and artists consisted of flattery for the ruler typically in search for money and privilege, or flattery for the popular street, in the hope of garnering popularity and stardom. It is at this point fitting to ask ourselves: is it a coincidence that we still enjoy the poetry and the literature of the Abbasid and Umayyad eras, despite the fact that much of this poetry was written in order to flatter rulers and elevate them in exchange for money, or to attack others without valid grounds? Also, we still enjoy the portraits drawn of princes, kings, and cardinals during the Renaissance in Europe. Nevertheless, it would be difficult, in this day and age, for the person who enjoys al-Mutanabbi's classical poetry and his verses that flatter, disparage, and express pride and extol Bedouin freedom, to enjoy a poem flattering a current ruler or a poem exalting the personal qualities of the poet.

A shift has taken place in our understanding of the function of literature and art, as well as our expectations of them, and it is proving difficult to liberate ourselves from the modern connotations attached to words such as literature, art, humanities, and social sciences. The modern individual does not expect these disciplines to be merely "scientific" in the same way that literary and artistic production are not expected to be merely aesthetic. We often expect a "conscientious" and "humanist" position from those who are active in the fields of literature, art, and human sciences, which is a misplaced expectation that, nevertheless, says something about "us" though not necessarily about "them".

Michel Foucault may have surprised his readers with his ideas on the intellectual when he insisted that the intellectual's mission is to pose questions, not provide answers, a quote that was overused because it can easily be interpreted as an anti-philosophical notion painted by some as "philosophy" in itself. Foucault sums up the task of the intellectual as someone who poses questions, and he takes away from the intellectual

the right to frame criticism within a positivist notion of “what should be”. Foucault further warns against the tendency to go beyond the analysis of the emergence of a specific social reality, the functioning of a political regime, and the role that the regime performs in establishing political hegemony:

The role of an intellectual is not tell others what they have to do. By what right would he do so? [...] [T]he work of an intellectual is not to shape others’ political will; it is, through the analyses that he carries out in his own field, to question over and over again what is postulated as self-evident, to disturb people’s mental habits, the way they do and think things, to dissipate what is familiar and accepted, to reexamine rules and institutions and on the basis of this re-problematization (in which he carries his specific task as an intellectual) to participate in the formation of a political will (in which he has his role as citizen to play).⁹

Then, for Foucault, nothing distinguishes the intellectual in terms of the political role that such a person performs; if the intellectual undertakes this political role, it would be in the faculty of a citizen. Foucault has personally applied this principle to his own demarche. Anyone who reads his quasi-journalistic articles that were published in the *Courier de la Sierra* between 1978 and 1979 regarding the Iranian revolutions would find ordinary political articles that are devoid of depth and insight, which he apparently wrote in his faculty as a citizen. There is no reason for the popularity of these articles except for the rituals of star-adulation within the field of humanities and the shock of French secular intellectuals regarding Foucault’s tolerant and sympathetic position to the role of political religiosity, which can at times be liberating. Though this is not an in-depth coverage of this topic, the central idea here is that one can respect literary or artistic creators for their techniques and aesthetics in the same way that they can admire the work of a scholar, with two important distinctions.

Firstly, one no longer sees aesthetics, in and of themselves, as an idealized image that alone represents a critique of reality. Secondly, one can still respect this position if it does not turn into a form of nihilism that views value in non-value, advocates the absence of values and positions, and considers that the only form of politics is the critique of politics. The Nietzschean tradition has drawn many intellectuals who often write with a non-traditional, non-conformist language, which is simultaneously devoid of

⁹ Foucault, “The Concern for Truth,” p. 265.

criticism. This approach may actually lead us to comply with the existing system despite its faults, under the pretext that alternatives may be worse, or that the struggle is not one pitting “good” against “evil,” the ugly against the aesthetic, or justice against injustice; rather, it is a struggle between “different representations of power” or “between different narratives,” not between the oppressed and the oppressor, or the occupied and the occupier, and so forth.

Thus, some “post-modern” currents have often engaged in substituting the struggles and relations of social reality with narratives, often justifying—through this method—policies that were ultimately conservative and non-critical.

The Intellectual and Revolution

For the purpose of this essay, revolution is a term that refers to a political revolution that seeks to change a regime through popular mobilization outside the confines of the constitution. Since this alludes to the difference between a revolution and gradual reform, one needs to make additional distinctions among intellectuals. For instance, the public intellectual who formulates broad ideas for the building of a better system is the type of intellectual who is closer to the idea of revolution than to reform. This does not mean to say that this type of intellectual has a personal bent toward revolution, but that such intellectual’s thought is more fit for use in order to justify revolution than to argue in favor of reform because this intellectual proposes a comprehensive vision that is contrary to the existing reality. This was not only the source of strength of French philosophers in the 18th century, but also of the many critiques that were later faced by these philosophers from conservative intellectuals such as Alexis de Tocqueville in France and Edmund Burke in Britain.

At this stage, it would prove useful to explore the role of the French Revolution’s intellectuals, who were imbued with philosophical ideas that preceded the revolution and had a general tendency to seize the revolution and push it toward radical paths, such as extreme solutions and policies that were, in fact, a prelude and a warning of what we later came to term “social engineering”. Alongside French intellectuals, came reformist intellectuals, who were only able to lead the Republic gradually, and not without a lengthy and tumultuous process, toward democracy. Drawing on the example of the French revolution, it becomes clear that one cannot limit the term “intellectual” to the revolutionary or the critical intellectual. A new type of intellectual emerged critiquing the revolution and basing these arguments on an ethical premise, albeit a

conservative one. This trend was expressed in two forms. The first trend came through those arguing in favor of the maintenance of the existing regime, on the assumption that it remains better than the threats of chaos embedded in revolution. To an extent, some may liken this position to the classical doctrinal position in Islamic history (and in a completely different context), which used theological arguments to exclaim that an oppressive prince is better than perpetual sedition. A second conservative camp emerged that saw freedom as a value, but also as a potential evil, and as a greater evil if it came devoid of wisdom and virtue; the sources of wisdom and virtue, from this conservative perspective, are the accumulation of historic experience, traditions, and the state. This, then, represents a conservative *and* critical position.¹⁰

There is no doubt that historians and intellectuals, such as Edmund Burke and Alexis de Tocqueville, who were profoundly aware of their countries' conditions, should not only be considered as intellectuals, but also thinkers. Burke was a conservative intellectual, but also a critical one who defended the rights and freedoms of citizens while simultaneously opposing revolution, arguing that a regime must be critiqued and perpetually reinvent itself through the accumulation of traditions and experience, which are usually expressed through the wisdom of the state. It could be argued that a philosopher such as Hegel, who was captivated in his early years by the ideas of the French Revolution, ended up adopting a position similar to Burke's, though contrary to Burke this was not as a matter of principle, but the outcome of a long historical path. Hegel did not rebuke French philosophers as did Burke and De Tocqueville, painting them instead as part of an important stage in a revolution that was a necessary component of the path of reason and its maturity.

One can then establish a historical distinction between two intellectuals who were trained at the same university and taught together at the University of Berlin, Arthur Schopenhauer and Hegel. Schopenhauer held an extremely negative stance toward the French Revolution, predicting that it would produce similarly negative effects among German intellectuals. He was generally pessimistic about human nature, believing that a better system for society was not really possible, and that all political and intellectual regimes were expressions of the "will to power". Hegel, in contrast, saw the French

¹⁰ Penguin Press entitled the collection of Burke's essays on the French Revolution *The Evils of Revolution*, with a secondary title: *What is freedom without wisdom or virtue? It is the greatest of evils*. See: Burke, *The Evils of Revolution*, p. 45; this book contains selections from Burke's 1790 book *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.

Revolution as a major step toward the achievement of freedom in its negative, or abstract, sense, arguing that the state was the embodiment of the principle of freedom, and that the test of the revolution vis-à-vis freedom lied in its ability to represent freedom through the state—and enlightened states, such as the Prussia of his time—was capable of achieving this purpose.

Schopenhauer was ultimately a pessimistic intellectual whose ideas on the will to power—rather than the will to reason—as a basis for existence led him to a nihilism which preceded that of Nietzsche. One cannot simply assume that an intellectual is one who must stand on the side of the revolution, or whose critique must take revolutionary forms, even if some intellectuals tend to hold values such as freedom and social justice above the values of order and the legacy of the forefathers.

It would be easy to formulate a classification for reformist intellectuals in their pursuit to influence the direction of change through reasonable compromises and advocate regime change from within, and not by ousting the regime through revolution. At one point, this stance also spread in the Arab world with the idea of “bridging the relationship between the intellectual and authority”. This type of intellectual is usually successful in the case of regimes that reach a conviction not only regarding the necessity of reform, but also in adapting to the movement of history in order to survive without attempting to block progress. However, the same reformist intellectual faces a dead-end when encountered with absolutism and despotism, which forces an intellectual to choose between the conservative and the revolutionary positions, which brings us back to the same dichotomy. Some may even choose nihilism and turn it into a value in order to avoid making the difficult choice above.

The Arab revolutions, bar some exceptions, lacked two types of intellectuals: the revolutionary intellectual and the conservative intellectual. The revolutionary intellectual advocates revolution before it takes place and joins it once it erupts (in a moral sense at least, if such person did not have the ability to participate directly in the revolution). The revolutionary intellectual takes this path based on two premises. The first is based on the analysis indicating that the political regime will not allow gradual reformist change without a revolution. Critical intellectuals are not a fan of revolutions as they realize the inherent dangers in them; the purpose of their critique is not to stir revolt, but to effect change toward a better, more just, regime. The second premise is that revolution against a despotic regime is a virtue and an action that combats injustice.

When an intellectual joins a revolution, that same intellectual can take a critical distance from it, and this is, for sure, the case of the intellectual who does not see revolution in and of itself as a value. I do not attempt to question the enthusiasm and the drive of the intellectual who views the very act of revolution as a value, but I do question the individual's intellectual capacities and ethical stances. A position that idolizes revolution, as an act of destruction, is a stance that can lead to advocating disorder and atrocities.

The revolutionary intellectual should maintain a critical distance not only from the regime, but also from the revolution itself, and must have the necessary courage to confront the regime and critique the masses, despite the fact that performing the latter form of critique—in a revolutionary situation—is far more morally difficult than critiquing the regime in place. The revolutionary intellectual may also become an “expert” in the service of the revolution, or an activist among intellectuals, or a “journalist” for the revolution. It is true that these forms of activism, prompted by ethical considerations, are different from the specialized work that intellectuals perform in their daily life; nevertheless, they still contain an instrumentalist and specialist dimension. The intellectual must rise above (and not evade) his usual role in order to be capable of performing the role of a critical intellectual at the right moment. Intellectuals in the service of the revolution perform a noble task in that they are “experts” who employ their expertise in supporting what they believe in. However, in order to perform the full role of the intellectual, they must also be able to rise above this noble role, and take a distance from the revolution in order to critically assess it through a universal lens.

In other words, an intellectual must not forget the values held in the heat of activism or debate on the appropriate methods to reach toward the desired future. It is not appropriate for an intellectual's task to be limited to say “what serves the revolution” and to abstain from making pronouncements that “do not serve the revolution” once its initial objectives begin to falter, or when the intellectual perceives, according to their values and ethics, that the revolution is veering away from the purposes and principles that prompted them to support it in the first place.

Just as the revolutionary intellectual was a rare phenomenon in the Arab revolutionary scene, the debates surrounding the revolution also lacked the conservative intellectual, whose role is to argue the necessity of maintaining order and who explains the possibilities of change that are contained within the existing regime, as well as the wisdom that is encased in the state and the traditions upon which it stands.

In the Arab case, this absence does not appear to be coincidental since as there is no state, in the classical meaning, that embodies the national traditions of a people of the kind that made Edmund Burke attack the French intellectuals for neglecting the French history embodied in monarchy and ignoring the potentials for reform within the system. In the Arab context, we are even deprived of the type of “enlightened despotism,” (praised by the French *philosophes*) in which Hegel saw the first crystallizations of the absolute reason, which comes before religion and philosophy. The Arab world is even deprived of the kind of regimes that allow a conservative liberal to exist under the shadow of this despotism and to defend it, let alone the regimes that serve as incubators for the emergence of this being that we term “the conservative liberal”.

In this sense, the Arab state is not a “state” since it does not base itself upon tradition in managing the political life of societies, nor is it the embodiment of a cultural legacy or ancient traditions embodied in the state. These states could have been established upon a mix between the concept of the nation of citizens and the Arab-Islamic cultural traditions; instead, the state fell into the throes of the regimes, and became reflections of the regime’s discourse, rather than having the regime follow the traditions of the state (regardless of its form: republican or monarchical). This is in addition to questions of legitimacy of the state and the struggle between the state and the nation, a debate that has polarized many of the nation’s theorists (Arab and Islamic), while few theorists elected to theorize for the Arab state. As such, we did not see the emergence of conservative theorists for the state, but theorists advocating the nation in contrast with theorists defending the regimes. Within such fickle regimes, the theorists for the political system tend to quickly discover that they are employees in the service of a security organ, a politician and a ruling party, or even the relatives of the politicians and the leaders of the security organs.¹¹

¹¹ Within this category, we should be careful not to include the large numbers of non-intellectual writers who defend the regimes and the security organs, and who spread rumors in order to defame the enemies of the regime. Despite the surprisingly large number of such writers, who are an anthropological phenomenon worthy of discussion and study, they do not conform to the definition of the intellectual adopted in this paper. In fact, they are closer to the model of the “thuggish journalist” who was bred by these regimes in order to confront their enemies. To use the harsh terms of Syrian politics and revolution, these are “media *shabbeeha* (thugs)”; unfortunately, the term *shabbeeh* has lost its original Lebanese connotation, which referred to the showy man who loudly displays his East Mediterranean masculinity, and who finds no embarrassment in boasting of his physical qualities and street smarts. More recently in Syria, the term began to be used in order to describe the louts who are members of the pro-regime paramilitary militias who commit acts of murder, rape, and torture, either for the purpose of dissuasion and terrorization, or out of pure sadism and lust for violence. A relatively large number of those working in

The revolutionary intellectual was found in abundance in the Arab world during the phase of the rise of ideologies in the region, especially leftist ideologies that glorified the terms "revolution" and "revolutionary," along with nationalist ideologies of various strands, and the military cliques that effectuated coups, which were termed revolutions, and founded revolutionary command councils. Revolutionary theorization went along with leftist thought and the mood of the national liberation movements in the world after World War II. During this era, Arabs translated revolutionary works far more than they produced a leftist or third-world "revolutionary thought". The time was not devoid of Arab revolutionary theorists; Arab prisons were full of critical intellectuals accused of theorizing for revolution and the reversal of the political system, regardless of whether their theorization was critical, leftist, or nationalist, and regardless of whether their stances were revolutionary or merely reformist.

The state has transformed a large number of academics into experts, allowing them to be assimilated with the state minus the critical faculties that were present in their culture and stances. In addition, whenever the state would gain in strength, while the popular movement would weaken, the regime recruited critical intellectuals who sold out in order to work for the state and its organs. Those who could not be domesticated by the state, were turned into experts by the UN, as well as the multiplying NGOs over the last four decades. This type of assimilation has permitted these individuals to maintain the illusion of the public intellectual who is independent from the state, while, in fact, they had turned into mere experts, but in the service of international organizations.

What is of concern here is that revolutionary theorization, regardless of our opinion toward its content, has continued for a long time without inciting revolutions, and that this type of thought has lost its stature among the public for many reasons, one of them being the usage of the term in the self-presentation of military coupes and the ruling so-called councils of the revolution. In fact, the mere mention of the term "revolution" began to elicit mockery. The failure of Communism in Europe and the overuse of the term in reference to military coupes and liberation movements that turned into dictatorships led the term to not only lose its appeal, but also its value, turning into a dead vocabulary employed by atrophied political parties.

the media and broadcasting sector have acquired these traits in their work, as they specialize in character assassination (as opposed to physical assassination), the spreading of rumors and lies in order to destroy reputations (which corresponds to the *shabbeeha's* acts of rape and torture). These are not intellectuals, nor are they revolutionary or conservative; they are thugs, no more and no less.

Meanwhile, the only revolution that did take place in the Islamic World was the Iranian Revolution, which captured the imagination of Islamists. The failure of the leftist and nationalist project after 1967 has pushed a number of secular intellectuals toward Islam, leading to the emergence of the new revolutionary Islamist intellectual; the Iranian Revolution had undoubtedly a major role in deepening this transformation. Until that time, the term intellectual was applied exclusively to secular intellectuals. This was, however, no longer the case after the emergence of movements and writers such as Muhammad Amara, Tariq al-Bishri, Abd al-Wahhab al-Misiri, Hasan Hanafi, and many other Islamist intellectuals who could be described as mere Islamist activists, since they are intellectuals in the modern (secular) sense.

Once the recent Arab revolutions erupted, the revolutionary intellectual could not find a place in those popular movements, which did not emerge upon the order of a political party led by party intellectuals, nor were the revolts guided by a revolutionary manual, such as "The Communist Manifesto". This disappointment on the part of the intellectual was premature and exaggerated, as the influence of the intellectuals was not absent in Arab revolutions, which were preceded by a long cultural process that was led by the democratic intellectuals and contributed to the crystallization of these revolutions and their unique discourse. There were also many cultured and well-read individuals at the heart of the revolutionary movement, particularly among the educated youth influenced by past experiences, as well as by reading and listening to local and Arab critical intellectuals with the appearance of book fairs, online publications, and the breaking of the monopolies over knowledge and culture, along with all the forms of traditional censorship, thanks to the communications and media revolution along with satellite news channels.

It is not true, then, that the Arab revolutions took place without intellectuals; the problem of revolutionary intellectuals, however, is that they had a prior notion on how the revolution should have looked and hence became instantly frustrated .

Revolution is an extremely complex, historical phenomenon in that it is a tangible material fact that takes place in front of our eyes thanks to a modern media that aligns our experiences and "compresses" time, permitting us the ability to share such events live. At the same time, revolution is an act that takes place outside of history because it ruptures the causal chain of ordinary history and interrupts its natural demarche. It is one of those rare moments when a group of citizens acts upon the call of the freedom of will, turning negation into an act of challenge against the existing regime, even at the cost of death. Thus, revolution is not only a historical moment, but also a collective

act that remains puzzling to some intellectuals and analysts, who blame the revolution for their own inability to predict it, or even deny it its revolutionary character and paint it as an arbitrary action that cannot, by definition, be predicted. In truth, it is impossible, by its very definition, to predict spontaneous popular revolts; however, numerous Arab intellectuals had diagnosed the state of stasis in their countries, noting that the upcoming fundamental question defining the next phase will be that of the nature of the system of rule, a question that must be posed and discussed, stressing that reform is the preferable path, and that, if reform turns out to be impossible, then revolution becomes the only option. The tendency to minimize the role of the intellectual is suspect with populist political aims that serve political movements, who were surprised by the outbreak of the revolutions, but who rushed to join them and reap their rewards, all the while understating the role of the intellectuals who criticized the former conditions in the country, and who may also criticize the new rulers.

On an ethical level, revolution is an act in rejection of injustice toward which there should be no neutrality; siding with the revolution, then, is in itself a form of virtue. Thus, all those who have long awaited this moment sided immediately with the revolution. However, the intellectual's stance toward the revolution is different. The critical intellectual, for instance, often hesitates before joining a revolution, and may show signs of resentment, perhaps because the individual was not consulted before others rose up or because the youth movement that exhibited a readiness to face death stripped such intellectuals from their unique critical position, which used to be seen as a form of courage and heroism in the shadow of the authoritarian regime. This is the example of intellectuals who are "jealous" of the masses because they headed toward revolution without passing through the familiar stages of criticism. This is a new situation that is not without risks, and it is often these risks that prompt some intellectuals to fear the public. Moreover, some revolutionary intellectuals view the people as a metaphysical creature, but once the "actual" people takes to the streets, these same intellectuals begin to fear it.

On the other side of the spectrum emerges the "intellectual" who opposes the revolution, yet denies support for the regime (who would ever admit to support injustice?) and refuses to support the revolution because it is a "conspiracy"; like any other conspiracy, its hidden threads will only be revealed later. Such "intellectuals", speculate on the alleged conspiracy and spread irrationality and ignorance and rumors. They betray their role, for even the conservative intellectual defends, as explained

earlier, specific conservative values such as order and tradition, and does not make do with fabricating conspiracies and spreading rumors.

The regime's intellectuals during times of revolution, cannot even be deemed conservative intellectuals since they exclusively express the base culture of the security organs. The notion of the intellectual employed in this text does not apply to such individuals since their engagement in the service of the regimes delegitimizes their function as intellectuals.

The real test of critical intellectuals lies in their ability to avoid slipping into a rejection of, and dealing with, the revolution as a revolution because it took them by surprise, or because it was not tailored according to their preferences and expectations, on the one hand; on the other hand, it also lies in abstaining from painting the revolutionaries in a romantic light. Revolutions cannot be simplistically narrated as a struggle between the good and the evil; the oppressed are not necessarily virtuous, and an oppressive political regime is not necessarily made up of evil people.

Revolution is that historical moment when the free will of the people challenges the regime of domination and authoritarianism, as well as the tools of control and repression that prop the regime up, outside the constitution and the rules of the political game. It is the moment when the people cease to be a metaphor spoken by intellectuals or a symbol in the minds of the regime's critics; instead, the "people" becomes an actual tangible reality. The people exhibit, through the revolution, its best elements, though they may also exhibit its worst qualities if the revolution turns into a state of negation—a situation where the state no longer exists. The challenge consists of comprehending the inherent justice in the act of revolution, as well as the function of the revolution in terms of political and social change. At the same time, the intellectual must be aware of the threats surrounding the denial of the state, which could lead to a state of disorder and chaos if the revolutionary movement is not led by a well-organized social force, and if the political (as well as the civil) society is not rigid enough to agree on an alternative to the existing regime.

Within this context, the value-judgment that an intellectual makes on the revolution should be a tangible practical decision that must be clear and comprehensible; either the intellectual sides with the revolution as an act of freedom against the corruption that is bred through injustice, or sides against it in a conservative stance that views the preservation of the regime as a higher value than freedom. While one can see virtue in siding with the revolution, there is a fine line between viewing the uprising of the

disinherited against an unjust regime as a confrontation between good and evil, and between the simplistic perception that sees all those who were subjected to injustice as representing the “good”. Revolution is not a confrontation between the good guys and the bad guys, and those who paint it in this way could be proven gravely mistaken during the demarche of the revolution. Such a view romanticizes those who endure injustice to the point of not being capable of comprehending the trespasses, exactions, and even crimes that are often committed during revolutions. Moreover, this makes the intellectual incapable of critiquing or condemning the revolutionary movement when necessary, which also presents a serious deficiency for a public intellectual. Even worse, this tendency can prompt the intellectual to generalize the intellectual’s radical view of the regime while neglecting the nature and the structure of regimes and the paths to changing them while maintaining the continuity of the state. Such a perspective could also lead to a dangerous path—the purging of those who worked in the state institutions, as if it were an attempt to liquidate the “evil” contained within the state, though this process can take place without necessarily changing the nature of the regime.

At this stage, we are confronted by several contentious questions; revolution against injustice implies the disassembling of the unjust regime, and not the exclusion of individuals or even the purging of the entire state apparatus. The attitude toward this matter is usually determined by our definition of the regime, and how expansive, or limited, this definition is. There is a difference between performing a public service within the framework of an unjust regime, and between committing crimes while occupying a public position. There is also a distinction between the justification of a certain regime decision after it was taken, and between participating in the formulation of such decisions. Decision-makers, who are, in some cases, hostages of their own regime regardless of their intentions are not usually forgiven for the role that they played in the regime, and the crimes committed during their rule, and this is their personal tragedy. It is the intellectual’s duty to formulate these distinctions and stress that being a prisoner for a long period qualifies someone to be honored and recognized, but it does not necessarily qualify him to lead a state. Similarly, if some were performing a public service to their country, even in times of despotism, it would clearly signify that they were not freedom fighters or opposition activists; it may reflect the fact that they were opportunists, but this does not automatically make them criminal or evil people, unless their deeds made them so.

In moments of euphoria upon witnessing the populace taking to the streets in defiance, demanding their rights after years of silence and submission, one risks falling into the trap of a romanticism that paints the revolutionaries as saintly and holy individuals, something they are not. Revolutionaries join the revolution in that moment of free will, and are the product of the culture, society, and economy that reigned under the existing regime. They are, in a way, the product of the regime's values, and corrupt despotic regimes that remain in power for long periods tend to corrupt societies. The revolutionaries are, then, the product of these societies as well as the product of the societal challenge to the regime. However, a challenge through negation of the established regime does not necessarily signify the emergence of new ethics and values. Here, the public intellectual's role lies in critiquing the dominant culture and its values, often the result of the hegemony of the culture of despotism, and educating society with the values of the revolution seen as a process of liberation from despotism.

There remains a dangerous trend within populism that views the masses and the revolutionaries as sacred and above criticism. This attitude not only denies the crimes that may have been committed by the revolutionaries, by justifying them or making others responsible for them, but also breeds intolerance toward different opinions when they are critical of the revolution, laying the breeding ground for the emergence of individuals who claim to represent the masses through their populist rhetoric. This group introduces itself as speaking on behalf of the revolution, and, usually, quickly moves to claim guardianship over the revolution. Even more dangerously, populism in a weak regime can lead to a slide toward disorder, which incites a public mood that fears the lack of security and may even feel nostalgic to the days of dictatorship.

The mission of the revolutionary intellectual does not stop with the outbreak of the revolution; in fact, it then becomes more complex and vital. Because of this, preaching from outside the revolution is not sufficient. Without siding with the revolution, at a time when the revolutionaries are being faced by bullets, no one will understand criticism if it is an intellectual exercise; instead, such pronouncements will be viewed as an attack originating from the camp of the regime. The only path to critiquing the revolution and to assuming the role of the public intellectual within it is to take an explicit and unambiguous position in favor of the revolution against despotism.

On the Role of the Intellectual

Once public intellectuals comprehend the historic possibilities that exist within the spontaneous revolt against despotism, through utilizing reason and their culture, and once they see it as an instance of uprising against injustice, the intellectual may side with the revolution despite the risks inherent in its spontaneity. Their role in the revolution begins with their enunciation of the hope that exists within this revolution and the formulation of its values of liberation, in addition to critiquing the phenomena that merit such critique, discussing the difficulties of organization, and clarifying the obstacles in the path of the revolution's transformation into a state. All of these roles are public and can easily shift into a form of ineffective preaching; thus, these criticisms should always be placed within their appropriate context. This requires the understanding of the difficulties and pressures facing the political forces that are being criticized and may reject ethical preaching if it were not accompanied by specific suggestions regarding the alternatives—precisely what intellectuals who are satisfied with criticism and who believe that it is not their duty to provide alternatives, a phrase that is often repeated by such intellectuals, but without convincing proof for its validity, seek to avoid. Such an attitude can be easily countered by those participating in the revolution, as they can simply say that their role does not involve listening to moral preaching or criticism that ignores the surrounding circumstances.

Following a revolution, the real tasks ahead require formulating alternatives to the existing situation, and this is clearly not the task of a single intellectual. At the same time, it is also necessary to stress the trenchant questions without which it would not be possible to surpass the condition of despotism, including questions on social justice, the challenges of beating poverty and promote development, and the bases and principles of democratic institutions, including political rights and freedoms, as well as those relating to national sovereignty and inter-Arab relations.

These are the central questions that typically follow disorganized popular revolts devoid of specific and detailed political programs. This is a completely different and separate task from party loyalties at this stage. In fact, an intellectual cannot be reproached for joining a political party, but can be for being careless and lacking commitment. The post-revolutionary phase requires a pro-democracy and pro-citizenship position from the intellectual in order to enshrine these values before joining political parties and acting from within them, a stance that can be adopted by the public intellectual even from within the political parties, especially when party competition flares up before

establishing an agreement on the principles of democracy and its commitments. When such competitions escalate, it becomes easy to forget that this is a stage of transition toward democracy, which is a phase of producing national consensus on the principles of democracy of many political parties, and not a single political force or party.

We have explained earlier that the Arab state did not allow for conservative intellectuals, since the state was not founded upon old state traditions and the traditions of the people and religion as a source for legitimacy together with ethics and political wisdom. The state has battled these traditional forces for various reasons, and the result, in short, has been that the revolutions found civic and traditional and religious forces joining them in their struggle against the regime. This was definitely one of the elements of strength in the Arab revolutions. There is still an inherent risk that these traditional forces may attempt to impose a conservative and simultaneously populist thought, which would negate the possibility of a renaissance project of liberation as an alternative to despotism. Many revolutions have had to face counter-revolutions originating from the old centers of power that have regained their influence, sometimes even through foreign intervention; however, due to their spontaneity and their specific circumstances, Arab revolutions may have to simultaneously face the counter-revolution led by the old order, together with another counter-revolution to the principles and bases of the revolution originating from within the revolutionary camp itself. In such situations, the role and the tasks of the public intellectual in the aftermath of revolution become even clearer.

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