

Syrian uprising & wars, the refugee crisis and the world we fight for

“People are the actors of their own emancipation”

Saturday 3 October 2015 (Date first published: 22 September 2015).

How do you identify yourself?

Politically speaking, I’m an internationalist Marxist believing that people are the actors of their own emancipation. My connection to Syria is my father, my family, friends and my numerous travels to the region. The bond with Syria has become more than “blood.” It’s a bond that is political, sentimental, familial, with the society, etc., everything together. I’ve lived in Lebanon, worked in Palestine, traveled to Egypt and Tunis. I’ve been in the region meeting activists and working with them. I also participated in solidarity campaigns with the revolutions of the Middle East and North Africa throughout Europe. I’m active as well in Switzerland and Europe working with people from different backgrounds, especially in Geneva where I live now. Being brought up mostly in Geneva, we’re used to having people with mixed backgrounds similar to other big cities like New York. It’s helped me to think on an international basis. I used to go back to Syria very often. My father lived over there before he passed away one year ago. He came to live with me when the military conflict began in Aleppo in the summer of 2012. I always had a very strong bond with the Middle East, its people and its societies. I just finished my PHD in London on Hezbollah. I’m a teaching assistant at University of Lausanne, while being an activist locally and internationally. I’m married. I have a little daughter that I completely love and a second child on the way.

How have you experienced oppression personally?

I’m mixed background, but I don’t look like the image of an Arab as presented in the media, which is seen as someone with a big beard and dark skin. I pass quite easily in Switzerland, especially since my name is Joseph and not Mohammad. I didn’t have to suffer any kind of oppression related to my mixed background. Regarding European society, I didn’t have to suffer from oppression compared to other populations, especially people from Muslim backgrounds and Black/African backgrounds. I think a lot of things are oppressive in the Swiss society. Generally speaking, the capitalistic society in Switzerland is a very conservative and racist state, very oppressive in terms of social rights, women’s rights, LGBTQ rights, etc. It’s maybe one of the worst countries in Europe along with Great Britain regarding labor rights. It’s even worse in terms of laws than the European Union. Switzerland is not known as an imperialist state, but it is.

Regarding Syria, when I used to go back, it was an oppressive society because it was firstly a dictatorship, repressing all individuals and groups that criticize or oppose it, or just thought differently. Numerous oppressions also exist regarding women’s rights, LGBTQ rights, racism, etc. The Syrian regime also gave increasing weight through the last decades to the conservative layers of society against any attempt to promote a secular society as it claimed to do. Religion played a very important role in all sectors of society and was strengthened by the regime as a tool of control. I don’t have any problem with believers, to be clear, or religion or as a belief. Everyone should be allowed to freely practice their religion. I have a problem with religion as a basis of power in society—oppressive laws, oppression against women, minorities (whether ethnic, religious, sexual

oriented, etc.), artists and the strengthening of the patriarchal authority. The security services went to my father's place in Aleppo as soon as they knew I was active in foreign countries at the beginning of the revolution process in Syria. Syria as a dictatorship was well known to be very violent. In Syria, you also have the big ethnic discrimination against the Kurdish population—politically, socially, economically, etc. The most impoverished region in Syria was mainly inhabited by Kurds, and politically and culturally they were discriminated against.

Kurds have a lot of problems elsewhere in countries they live such as Iraq, Iran and Turkey.

The only time Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey agreed on something, it was oppressing the Kurds. Any people who are willing to have their own state and put an end to the borders inherited from the Sykes-Picot Agreement after the First World War is seen as a threat to the different states and the imperialist status quo. This is why we have to be supportive of the self determination of people, whether they be the Kurds, the Palestinians, or any other group being oppressed.

How do you feel about the oppression that you've witnessed and experienced?

Wherever I've lived, the answer to the various oppressions has been to be part of a radical and anti-capitalist organization in order to organize resistance, to be part of resistance, whether it be against patriarchy, against sexism, against a sectarian and bourgeois system like in Lebanon. In Switzerland, it's been struggling for social issues, struggling against racist policies, Islamophobia, being in solidarity with people in struggle throughout the world—Palestine, revolutions in MENA, Kurds, etc. To be in organizations is important in order to build the resistance with people for their own interests and of the society as a whole. Basically, I've been politically organized. Wherever I've lived, I've done this—England, Lebanon, Syria, Switzerland, etc.

Can you talk about the history of what started the Syrian Revolution?

The Syrian uprising has its roots mainly in the absence of democracy and social justice. It is a total dictatorship. It's a killing machine dictatorship. We've witnessed this since 2011, but we witnessed this as well in the 1970's and 80's with the Massacre of Hama at the time of Hafez Al-Assad—the father of Bashar Al-Assad. So the roots are the absence of democracy, total totalitarianism, the absence of social justice. You had increasing social inequalities in Syria and impoverishment of the society, while high corruption was the rule through neoliberal and privatization policies. At the eve of the beginning of the uprising in 2011, you had 30% of the people in Syria living under the poverty line and 30% just above. Neoliberal policies were implemented, especially with the arrival of Bashar Al-Assad in 2000. More than 70% of the economy was in the hands of the private sector with a particular type of crony-capitalism that benefited the family and the people around Assad in a mafia style. The richest man of Syria was Rami Makhlouf, the cousin of Bashar Al-Assad. There were increasing social inequalities. Labor rights were attacked. Rural areas were very hard hit by these neoliberal policies. You had huge slums that were built around the big cities of Damascus and Aleppo lacking services, lacking everything. These were the roots of the revolution. Obviously, the fire started in Egypt and Tunis, and other uprisings in the region followed, including Syria. Neoliberal policies actually reinforced the authoritarian nature of the Assad regime, while the Assad family ruled more and more through the years as if the state was serving its own interests.

Can you talk about how the uprising shifted to war?

I'll start to explain how the uprisings became militarized. It's important to remind everyone that the uprisings in Syria for the first nearly six months were completely peaceful. People were shouting in the streets, "Salmiyah! Salmiyah! Salmiyah!" which means peaceful. People were opening their

shirts and showing that they were not armed, as the regimes propaganda was promoting that they were armed infiltrators and terrorists. Others were coming with roses to demonstrations and giving them to the police and security services. They had slogans in various areas of Syria saying, "We're not Salafists. We're not Muslim Brotherhood. We're just Syrians who want freedom." This was because the regime was accusing all of the demonstrators of being Salafists, Muslim Brotherhood or Islamic extremists. Actually, most of the slogans were, "We want democracy." "We want the fall of the regime." "The Syrian people won't kneel." "The Syrian people are one! Christians and Muslims are one! Sunni and Alawis are one!" At the very beginning, Syrians wanted reforms, but after the massive and very rapid repressions from the first days, people started to demand the fall of the regime. As I said, for the first six months, the revolution was totally peaceful, and until today—although on a less massive scale because of the war—you still have peaceful demonstrations and activities wherever it's possible in various areas.

Hilary Clinton in the first few months said that Bashar Al-Assad was a reformist and was not backing the revolution, while Saudi Arabia—which was the first foreign investor in Syria before the revolution—did not move in the first few months of the revolution as well. Just as Qatar or Turkey didn't have any kind of radical position of support of the Syrian Revolution. All these countries were quite close to the Syrian regime before the revolution, especially Qatar and Turkey. After six months, you had defectors of the Syrian Regime Army and people taking arms. This was the establishment of the Free Syrian Army, which was not organized, neither was it supported by any country. It was mostly people from different regions taking up arms, trying to defend the demonstrations, to let the demonstration be able to go out to the roads and neighborhoods, to oppose the army that would not let the demonstrations go out. It was first of all based on a defensive perspective with a continuation of the massive repression.

You had also various countries that promoted Islamic fundamentalist groups from different tendencies—salafists to jihadists. They funded these groups. After a while, these groups became more well funded, more well equipped. At the same time, a lot of Islamic fundamentalist activists were liberated in the first three months of the revolution by the Assad regime. That let the fundamentalists develop, while democratic, progressive activists were killed on a daily basis. They were tortured and killed because the regime—just as in the 70's and 80's—wanted to reach a dichotomy, which was the regime or Islamic fundamentalism. Today, most of the heads of the Islamic fundamentalist brigades fighting in Syria were in Syrian prison together, and they were liberated, while democratic activists were oppressed, imprisoned, killed or pushed to asylum.

Can you talk about the rise of ISIS in the region?

ISIS was formally established in Syria in autumn 2013 when Al Qaeda and ISIS broke their ties. The roots of ISIS (the Islamic State) are various. First of all, its roots began with the US intervention in Iraq in 2003. Even before this, we have to look at the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein and its consequences on the Iraqi society because today part of the commanders of ISIS are ex-Ba'athists from Saddam's army. You had the role of the Saddam Hussein dictatorship, the US invasion of Iraq, the destruction of the Iraqi society in 2003 and definitely the establishment of a sectarian state after that. The role of the Iraqi government's sectarian policies particularly under the Prime Minister's rule of Nouri Al-Maliki between 2006 and 2014—especially towards the Sunni population—played a big role along with the support of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Lebanese Shi'a Islamic movement, Hezbollah, also trained Iraqi sectarian Shi'a militias that committed massacres against the Sunni population.

At the same time, you had private networks of Saudi Arabia supporting various Islamic Sunni fundamentalist forces in Iraq. Most probably in the beginning, they funded Al Qaeda and Daesh (ISIS) in Iraq. Even though ISIS was supported by private networks of the Gulf monarchies, in 2011,

it became very fast independent and reversed. It was the same trajectory as Al Qaeda thirty years ago in Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia supported it in the beginning, but after it became an independent actor with its own financial independence, it was against Saudi Arabia. Today, ISIS doesn't have political or financial support from monarchies of the Gulf. Maybe small networks in the Gulf, but not directly from the Gulf monarchies. ISIS funds themselves by selling oil, taxing people, selling archaeological pieces and various other stuff. ISIS is a mafia style company today in terms of business and self-funding.

What is their role in Syria, and are they connected at all with the Islamists that were freed by the Syrian government?

Some of them, yes. Mostly Daesh (ISIS). Daesh was an Iraqi fundamental group and then it used Syria as a field to gain political and military experiences in the beginning of 2011. Jabhat al Nusra (Al Qaeda in Syria) was not active in Syria before the beginning of January 2012. Jabhat al Nusra was established in Syria as a branch of ISIS in the beginning. They accumulated experience. They accumulated in the beginning some support, but very small in Syria because their fundamentalist ideas were opposite of those of the revolution. But they had money. They had experience from the war in Iraq and their fight against US occupation and the Iraqi army and Shi'a sectarian militias, so people joined them, but after also left them. For the first two years, they had some kind of popular support because the people were seeking anything to support against the Assad regime. There was nevertheless no massive support because they were not present in civilian revolutionary activities in the beginning, mostly concentrating on military conflict. There are differences between different Islamic fundamentalist forces. You have Daesh (ISIS), which is the most extremist. You have Al Qaeda, which is also extremist. Ahrar Sham is a Salafist organization. I call them all Islamic fundamentalists because they do have in common the goal to establish an Islamic State, even though I agree and acknowledge the differences among them. The various levels of extremism don't make them moderates as people put it.

To give you an example, Ayman Al-Zawahiri—who is the head of Al Qaeda today—said in September of this year, “Despite the problems and the mistakes of the Islamic State (ISIS), we would rather collaborate with them against the crusaders, the Shi'as and the seculars here in Iraq and Syria. The difference between The Islamic State (ISIS) and Jabhat al Nusra (Al Qaeda in Syria) is that with ISIS, every kind of territory that is conquered by the group must be declared Islamic State. The Jabhat al Nusra say, “No, we should wait until the regime in Syria is overthrown to declare an Islamic State. In both cases, it's fundamentalism. It's in opposition to the demands of the Syrian Revolutionary process. In addition to this, Jabhat al Nusra have been opposed in a lot of areas in Syria by revolutionaries because of the authoritarian fundamentalist practices. At one point, Jabhat al Nusra did declare in some regions an Islamic State because there's an opposition between them and Daesh (ISIS). Regarding Ahrar Sham (Salafist organization in Syria), just a few months ago, they wrote a statement for the death of the Mullah Omar, the head of the Taliban in Afghanistan, which is a fundamentalist and reactionary organization. So even though I acknowledge the differences, they are still counter revolutionary forces when it comes to Syria or the region.

Do the people fighting for democracy in Syria feel like their voices have been muffled because these other groups have been coming in and speaking on their behalf?

Actually, these groups have attacked the revolutionaries since the beginning. They killed Free Syria Army commanders. They attacked civilian revolutionary activists. Definitely, they feel that these forces are not supporting the demands of the revolutionaries. This does not mean that on the military battlefield sometimes you don't have collaboration against the Assad regime and against the Islamic State (ISIS). So there's contradictions as well because on the military field, it's practical needs sometimes, so you need to collaborate, but most of the activists consider these groups as

counter revolutionaries and opposing the demands of the revolution. This is why you had a lot of demonstrations and protests against Jabhat al Nusra (Al Qaeda in Syria) and against Ahrar Sham (Salafist organization in Syria) as well because of the authoritarian practices. I document a lot on my blog various demonstrations against these kinds of groups.

Before the revolution, was Syria considered an Islamic State?

No, it was not considered an Islamic State. It's a dictatorship. In the same time, Syria has been wrongly considered a secular state. It's not a secular state. In the constitution, the president had to be Muslim. In the new constitution that was agreed democratically—this is completely bullshit—the main source of law is Islamic law—Sharia. When it comes to inheritance, family laws, it's Sharia according to Sunni interpretation for all the Muslims, even for Islamic minorities. For Christians, it's particular Christian laws. It's not a secular state. The Assad regime has supported various conservative layers of the society and encouraged the spread of conservative and reactionary organizations allied to it in order to control society, whether it be Sunni or Christian. Especially for neoliberal policies, you had the development of Islamic and Christian charity organizations, while state services were being weakened considerably in terms of quantity and quality. Just as today, the regime has used Shi'a sectarian militias as actors of repression against revolutionaries.

How do the Syrian people feel about the role America has played?

I will speak on my behalf. I don't want to speak on the behalf of the Syrian population. There are various opinions on the subject. The US since the beginning has had a very clear position. It wants a kind of a Yemini solution. In other words, it would prefer that Bashar Al-Assad leave power but that it maintains the same regime in place. This was one of the lessons of the Iraqi defeat following the military invasion in 2003. This has been the position mostly of the US since the beginning. They want limited change. This has been the position of the US in all of the revolutionary processes—limiting any kind of radical change, maintaining regimes as it is, maybe cutting off the head of the regime, but bringing the Muslim Brotherhood. This is what you had for a moment in time in Egypt—the military with the Muslim Brotherhood, before the coup of Sissi in July 2013 following massive protests. In Tunis, this is what you have currently. This is what they've done in Yemen in 2011/2012, and this is what they wanted to do in Syria. They wanted to bring the Syrian National Council—the coalition that is dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood—to deal with the Assad regime. Today even US officials have said that maybe they see Bashar Al-Assad playing a role in a transition, but it's clear that the US doesn't want any kind of radical change in the region, including Syria.

Why do you think they don't want radical change?

The US wants the imperial status quo to remain the same in the region. This means not threatening Israel. This means not threatening monarchies of the gulf. This is also the deal that has been made with Iran. In the opinion of the US, Iran can play a role to stabilize the region, and we can see today there's kind of a deal between the US and Iran when it comes to the Islamic State (ISIS) in Iraq. Iran helps Iraqi sectarian militias to fight the Islamic State (ISIS) on the ground, while the US takes care of the air. The USA and Iran also spoke previously when it came to Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. All these regional and international players want an end to the revolutionary processes. Obviously, there can be contradictions between these different regional actors, but at the end of the day, the US wants to maintain an imperialist status quo in the Middle East, maintaining its interest in the region. This is why we should oppose all imperialist (USA, Russia and others), and sub-imperialist powers (Saudi Arabia, Iran, Qatar and Turkey) because they all oppose the interests of the popular classes, and not choose one or the other because we consider it the lesser evil.

The US, relatively speaking, has witnessed a weakening of its imperialist powers since 2003 with the

defeat in Iraq, and after with the economic crisis in 2008 and labor strikes as well. The revolutionary popular uprisings that began in 2010 changed the imperialist status quo. The US has not at all, or very slightly, supported Syrian revolutionaries, nor have they provided them with needed weapons, such as the anti-aircraft missiles demanded by the revolutionaries in Syria. All of this propaganda that they've provided them weapons is not true. Less than one hundred Syrians have been trained by the USA. The military assistance of Russia, Iran and Hezbollah is a whole other level in terms of boots on the ground, providing weapons, economic, political and military assistance, etc. Only Hezbollah has between four thousand and five thousand soldiers in Syria. Even in the documents of the US officials saying that they would provide arms to the Syrian revolutionaries, it was not in order to fight the Assad regime. It was in order to fight ISIS because the Islamic State is an actor that cannot be stabilized or cannot be dealt with in the stabilization of the region. This is why there is a will of the different states of the region to put an end to ISIS, whereas the Assad regime can still be an actor that is rational to speak to for the US. The last Russian initiatives towards the international imperialist actors goes in this direction.

We shouldn't forget that Assad's regime collaborated with the second gulf war in 1991. They collaborated in the bombardments of Iraq, especially with the US to so-called liberate Kuwait. Syria was part of the coalition. Syria participated in 2001 in the war on terror working with US security officials. In 1976, Syria intervened in Lebanon to crush the Palestinian resistance and the Lebanese National Movements, a Coalition of nationalist and leftist forces. This was done with the approval of the US and even at the time with Israel as well. Israel said they don't want to see the fall of the Bashar Al-Assad regime. They want it to be weakened, but they don't want to see the fall because since 1974, not a single bullet has been shot from the Syrian occupied Golan Heights. Syria had prevented any kind of resistance from Syria against Israel to allow the liberation of the Golan Heights. No one has an interest—especially not the US—to see the overthrow of the Assad regime, a weakening definitely, but not the overthrow of the regime. The US has played its general role to maintain its interests—the imperial status quo.

Can you talk about Israel, the role it plays in the Middle East and the occupation of the Syrian Golan Heights?

The Golan Heights have been occupied since 1967, while in addition, colonial settlements have been established. The population of settlers is around, I think, 170,000 today in the Golan Heights. The Israeli society is a settler colonial state, which is different than being just a colonial state. For example, Algeria was a settler colonial state. You had one million people that were French that were brought to Algeria. They were benefiting from the oppression of the indigenous people just like Australia and the US were settler colonial states. The difference in the settler colonial state is that they don't necessarily have as a final objective to exploit the indigenous people like the colonial state, but a settler colonial state also is to put an end to the indigenous people. This is what happened in the US and Australia, and in many perspectives, although not totally, in Palestine with the forced displacement of the population in 1948 of 800,000 Palestinians.

Israel has been playing the role of a tool of US imperialism since 1956 in the region. This means it intervenes in various countries in the region to attack progressive actors. Israel is a colonial, apartheid, racist state that has oppressed Palestinians for more than sixty years. Any kind of solution to the Middle East must find a solution in the liberation of the Palestinians, definitely. The way to liberate the Palestinian people is to support the uprisings in the region because the road to the liberation of Palestine is the road to the liberation of Damascus, Saudi Arabia, etc. All of these regimes have no interests of the Palestinians and had an interest in crushing the Palestinian people because they were revolutionary energy. This you see in Black September in Jordan (where Palestinian organizations and leftist organizations tried to overthrow the regime), in Lebanon in 1976, in the embargo on the Gaza strip (assisted by the Egyptian regime for years) or in Syria and

elsewhere as well. So Israel is part of this imperialist status quo in serving US and Western interests and is directly or indirectly allied to the old regimes of the region to maintain the status quo. This is why I say the liberation of the Palestinian people goes through the overthrow of all the regimes in the region, including Iran and Turkey.

Regarding a solution to the Palestinian issue, I'm in favor of a democratic secular socialist bi-national state for Palestine where everyone would be considered a citizen regardless of their religion, ethnicity, whatever. Of course, there should be a social distribution in favor of the Palestinian people that have been deprived of their lands, houses, etc. The right of return must be granted to all Palestinian refugees. There also needs to be a complete dismantlement of the current Israeli apartheid, colonial and racist state. In the new state, Israeli Jews should be recognized as a people, and they should have the right to stay in Palestine. Currently, Israel is still a counter revolutionary actor, and as we can see, it's really willing to support any kind of dictatorship and has been opposed to these uprisings. Avigdor Lieberman, who was the Israeli foreign minister at the time, said something really true at the beginning of the revolutionary processes in the region. He said the biggest threat to Israel was these uprisings in Egypt and Tunis and the various countries. They are a far bigger threat than the Islamic Republic of Iran. This is 100% true because what we saw was new demonstrations of the Palestinian people going to the borders towards Palestine in the various Arab countries following the uprising. You had this in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Jordan etc. The first demonstration against the Israeli embassy in Egypt followed the overthrow of Mubarak. It is true that these uprisings are the way to liberate Palestine.

Getting back to talking about the Golan Heights, what is the motive for Israel to continue to hold onto the Golan Heights, especially since there has been no conflict between Syria and Israel? Why do you think they are continuing to hold onto that piece of land?

It doesn't play anymore of an important role. Militarily speaking, it's an advantage for them. Today, this is less important. You have a lot of water that is being used by the Israelis for their own benefits. More importantly, I think it's a way to make a deal of peace against land with Syria in the future. Even though we're seeing less and less of a possibility to see the Golan going back to Syria. There's a new law that any kind of deal to give back the Golan to Syria must go through a popular referendum. It's going to be very difficult to see the Golan returned to Syria, especially with the situation in Syria. Actually, the Syrian regime said quite often, "If you give us back the Golan, we're ready to make peace on the Palestinian issue. You deal with it."

How do you feel about how the world has responded to the refugee crisis?

I think the problem with refugees has been an issue for years, but especially for the last four years. More than 95% of the refugees from Syria are living in horrible conditions in neighboring countries—Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, etc. It's very difficult coming to the European Union. The European Union has made policies to build itself like a fortress where only the vast majority of people that can come are people with money, or because they serve a particular economic purpose. The European Union is responsible for the thousands of deaths in the Mediterranean Sea and on the roads of Europe. It's a clear responsibility of the European Union whereby they also use a company called Frontex. It's a private company that is used by the European Union to prevent the arrival of refugees. They use security measures that are horrible—attacking the refugees, etc.

When the small amount of refugees can reach Europe, they are faced with police violence and repression. They are faced with establishments where they have to wait a year, two years to work, to have a dignified life. So the European Union is anti-democratic and anti-social when it comes to refugees and also on other issues when it comes to local population. With the propaganda, Europe is

terrible. When it comes to the refugees coming from the Middle East, they are characterized by the extreme right wing conservatives as terrorists, or they are accused of threatening the “Christian inheritance and cultural roots” of Europe. So from all sides, it’s been catastrophic. The rule of the European Union has been criminal regarding the issues of refugees, especially those coming from sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. It has built itself as a fortress using security to prevent the arrival of refugees in addition to racist propaganda. We shouldn’t forget that the imperialist policies of the European Union is also the reason why people are leaving their own countries, whether by supporting dictatorship, by intervening militarily, by neoliberal economic agreements, etc.

These people have suffered a lot, suffered from dictatorship, suffered from fundamentalism, suffered from socioeconomic problems and from various forms of oppression. In coming to the European Union, they are resisting and organizing themselves against police violence, against the security measures of the states. We have to take example of these people in our own struggle, to collaborate and participate with them in their struggle against the security measures in order to be able to freely circulate all around Europe and freely establish themselves in Europe. This is very important. On the issue of refugees, what is worrying—especially with Syria—is that most of the corporate media is saying that the main problem regarding refugees is that they left because of the Islamist State (ISIS), which is not true. Some of them left because of that. The Islamic State is a reactionary barbarian organization. That’s true, but the biggest creator of refugees from Syria is the Bashar Al-Assad regime. By 2013, you had two million refugees in neighboring countries and 4.5 million refugees within Syria. This was the Bashar Al-Assad regime. Who has the planes in Syria? It’s the Bashar Al-Assad regime. They are the ones bombing. The way to prevent the creation of new refugees is not by allying with the dictatorship of the Bashar Al-Assad regime, or any kind of dictatorship.

It’s important to note the story of Aylan, whose picture was published all over the world when he drowned in the Mediterranean. The story of this boy and his family is an illustration of the tragedy of millions of families in Syria. First of all, his father is a Kurdish Syrian who was living in Damascus. He was imprisoned first by the Bashar Al-Assad regime, tortured by the regime. He had to sell his shop. He was a hairdresser. He sold his shop to bribe the security officers that were keeping him. He left Damascus when he was able to with his family to Aleppo. He had to leave Aleppo because of the daily bombardments of the Bashar Al-Assad regime. He went back to the city he was originally from—Kobani. Then, he had to leave Kobani because of the attacks of the Islamic State (ISIS) on the city. When he reached Turkey, he didn’t receive any help from the Turkish government, so he decided he wanted to leave Turkey. What happened? He asked with his brother for a visa to establish himself in Canada where his sister lives. Canada refused the visa asylum for the father of Aylan. Therefore, he decided with his family to go through illegal ways to reach Europe. This is how Aylan, his brother and mother died. The tragedy is this.

Do you think we are able to overcome these cycles of oppression?

I hope so. This is why I’m organizing. I’m trying to build popular resistance wherever I live because otherwise I would just sit at home. I hope that we can, and everyday there are small victories. Even though they’re small, I hope we have many more victories because I hope to be able to live in a better society, to be able to help with the emancipation of the popular classes wherever I am or wherever I live on an international basis. This is why I continue to be part of resistance, actions or programs wherever I live, helping others wherever they are. There’s no other solution as Rosa Luxemburg said, “socialism or Barbarism.” We need to continue the resistance. I would like to cite the French Marxist, Daniel Bensaid: “Les lendemains, chantants ou non, ne sont pas prévisibles avec exactitude, mais les tendances du présent déchiré, lacéré de contradictions et blessé de sourdes menaces, ne sont pas pour autant inintelligibles et indéchiffrables. Renoncer aux prédictions hasardeuses n’annule pas l’impératif de changer l’ordre existant. Là où persiste le conflit, demeure

aussi le choix, la décision, le risque raisonné entre plusieurs issues, et l'obligation inéluctable d'agir." It's hard to translate, but he's talking about the obligation to act. We have the unavoidable obligation to act despite the non-guarantee of victory.

Once we are able to overcome that, what would you like the world to look like?

I would like to live in a socialist world, but even though we reach a socialist world, there will be struggle because it's not because you put an end of the capitalist system that all the forms of oppression just disappear. This was unfortunately one of the biggest mistakes of the various sections of the Stalinist left in the world by advocating that various forms of oppression will disappear automatically with the end of the capitalist system. It was a way to prevent any kinds of discussions and struggles around oppressions regarding racism, feminism, homophobia, etc. The end of the capitalist system will be a fantastic victory for all the people of the world and give new opportunities to build a socialist society, which will able us to tackle other forms of oppression. So with the establishment of a socialist society there would be new struggles. The challenge is that we have everything to build from scratch. We need to put an end to these various forms of oppression. We shouldn't forget that oppression of women, oppression of Black people or other oppression are mixed together with social oppression as well. We shouldn't differentiate them. We should understand them as mixing with each other. People will radicalize themselves through different means. Some radicalize themselves because they feel the oppression because of the color of their skin. Others feel it because of their gender. You have to reach all of these people. This is why as revolutionaries we shouldn't undermine them by saying, "Oh, we'll just deal with them later." No, it's very important to deal with them directly. So even in a socialist world, we'll have to deal with these kinds of things—with sexism, with homophobia, with racism, etc. These things don't just disappear in a click. Our duty is to build a whole other society, not only on an economic understanding, but on all levels.

Do you want to talk any further about what you want the world to look like?

Peace, peace, but not in a hippie way. I want to put an end to social injustice, various forms of oppression (racism, gender, religious, etc.), ecological catastrophes, etc. I think we can imagine it, but without forgetting that everything has to be built from scratch because never in the history of human life have we experienced—on a large-scale basis—a socialist world. Even though we can take experiences from the past, everything has to be done from scratch. And this does not mean that no mistakes will be done. It just means that we have to live different experiences and see what works. In the perspective in the emancipation of the people, what I would like is that people won't die at their workplaces, that the maximum you work is what you need to work according to the interest of the society, according to your own interest, according to how you are, etc. And you spend a lot of time also doing whatever you want—culture, learning, reading, art, sports, etc. It's a whole completely different way of how to deal with the organization of life. For example, fathers taking care of their children as much as their wife or two persons of the same sex, etc.

Imagine we're able to get to that place. That world is going to be so incredibly different than the one we're in now, and the way that we react to that world is going to be different. A lot of weight will be lifted from our shoulders. We will be more free to do art and other things. In a world like that, where we aren't constantly battling each other and battling ourselves in a lot of ways, what then do you think we are capable of?

Great things! More seriously, I think we'll always have to be careful if we reach this level to not fall back in old mistakes. We always have to be careful to challenge oppressions. This is something that even though we end capitalist system, I think we still have to deal with this for a long period, and we always have to remind ourselves to re-challenge new forms of power. We'll be capable of hopefully

saving our planet. We're not doing it very well. Quite the opposite, now we're destroying it. This is something to do. Cure sickness, hopefully put science at the interest of the people and not for profits, equalize so that rural areas are not dominated by urban areas. So much things to do. I hope that we'll see new victories of people wherever in the world but especially for the Middle East. I'm happy we're seeing new popular uprisings in Lebanon and Iraq lately. This is very positive, with democratic, social justice and equality demands, secular state demands, supporting the pockets in Syria opposing all the different forms of counter revolution, whether old regimes or Islamic fundamentalist forces. So hopefully we can build a new society on democracy, social justice and equality.

Joseph Daher

P.S.

* "People are the actors of their own emancipation". From the web site Elements of Oppression:
<http://elementsofoppression.blogspot.ch/2015/09/joseph-daher.html?>