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Reaction of different class projects to corona outbreak in Iran

Global disaster: pragmatist *realpolitik* vs ethical politics

Almost a year ago, I asked a friend, an academic figure in Canada, that how is it possible to change the subjectivity of people on a global scale? He told me that “*theoretically*, it seems that the only way is an encounter with a disaster on the global scale, but since we haven’t yet experienced this kind of situation, I guess we have to think about art, movies, series, ...”

I think now we can *literally* detect beginning of a major transformation of subjectivity on the global scale due to a disaster. How?

The first, obvious observations of majority of people on global scale is that *the system does not work properly*. In fact, right now, the global social relations express itself as a **global critical situation**. This can be the very beginning of every kind of change and social movements on every level. From the everyday routines of each of us, conducting social distancing to international relations. On the one hand, we know that due to the corona pandemic, the Pope requested a cease fire in all the international wars, US and Iran are trying to reach a kind of agreement in order to cool down the tensions, and even ISIS has stopped its terroristic attacks! On the other hand, we are hearing about piracy of medical equipment in Mediterranean Sea, or expropriation of medical supplies which belong to Italy, Norway or other countries or even plans of the Pentagon to eliminate ‘Kataib Hezbollah’, an Iraqi, paramilitary Shia group. A process of change, or global transformation of projects have been started, since the beginning of COVID-19 pandemic, which will manifest itself as global transformation of subjectivities. Now the biggest question, in my opinion, is: how can we understand the globalized world and all the social movements happening in every corner? How can we conceptualize the constellation of ‘globalized projects’?

The second observation of the majority of people now is that *each part of the system is internally related to the whole*: If a hunter, illegally brings a wild animal to Wuhan, my mother in New York may die of a wild virus. If one country would be under heavy sanctions, unable to control the spread of virus into other countries, it is possible that I lose my job in Barcelona. Hence, this global critical situation, indeed, needs *global solidarity*.

On another level, in the process of everyday life, people are observing many instances that show them that their own government is not working effectively and ethically. I will explore some of those instances in Iran later on, but in addition, one can refer to the inability of USA and major European countries to manage the situation, a significant rise of unemployment and shortage of supplies. Tedros Adhanom, president of World Health Organization, on 21st of February, told us that the ‘opportunity window’ for control of corona outbreak is narrowing. Now we know that the governments, the authorities, have lost the opportunity. They are not doing their job very well. Consequently, we can expect rise of *ethical politics* on everyday, local and global scales in comparison with pragmatic *realpolitik*. In fact, one can observe the struggle between ethical political projects and realist political projects in these days.

Iran’s situation at the end of March

The ruling class of Iran has not changed its logic. Still we are dealing with the competitive collaboration of two broad sections of ruling class project which shape the Islamic Republic. On the one hand, the state, leader of the merchant/commodity section of capital, is following its main agenda of *privatization* of public wealth and social services, even more harshly than last year (the state has the aim of selling off the state companies, lands and other stuff, 125 times faster than last year). On the other hand, the religious court of Ayatollah Khamenei, in close relation with Revolutionary Guard Corps, owners of the rentier section of Iran’s economy, are following their main agenda of *militarization* of public wealth and social services. The outcome of their collaboration, based on a pragmatic *realpolitik* agenda, has become exactly the opposite of an imaginable outcome of a collaboration based on ethical politics:

1. quarantine of affected cities
2. pause of work in all unnecessary sectors of economy, and permitting ill workers in necessary sectors of economy to leave work, paying their full wage
3. enabling public monitoring of the process of fighting corona (the statistics, allocation of local resources and foreign helps), mediated by free and independent media
4. Free public insurance
5. Free mask and other protective equipment for health workers and those who are in front line of production and distribution of food

6. Nationalization or public occupation (socialization) of totality of facilities related to production, distribution or import of medical equipment in order to *democratize self-government* of this section of economy
7. Freedom for all political prisoners, in addition to freedom of all prisoners with mild crimes.
8. Preparing empty buildings (no matter private or public buildings) for homeless people.
9. Creating official identities for all illegal immigrants
10. Providing short-term and mid-term plans in order to enhance the living condition of poor people (subaltern) in periphery areas of cities¹

The IR is doing none of these things. Why? On the one hand, the state clearly knows that launching the project of quarantine needs a significant amount of money and resources. A significant part of the state budget is for religious organizations which themselves are related to many merchant projects and capitalist companies. Transferring a huge amount of resources from the hands of its direct supporters into hands of people affected by the corona virus is not a *wise* choice for the state. Beside this, an effective project of quarantine, necessarily needs to be done with significant participation of military organizations. During the bloody competition of state and military section in capturing national power, it is also not a wise choice to let the military organizations become more involved in social management and political issues. On the other hand, military organizations and court of Ayatollah Khamenei have more important priorities. First, they are dealing with contradictory signals from USA in Iraq (they are preparing themselves for another wave of possible military encounter with USA after the US terrorist attack on Gen. Qassem Soleimani) and second, they have to preserve their energy for another possible wave of national revolt in upcoming months, due to major increase of unemployment and anger upon their politics. It is not a wise choice, maybe too risky to get heavily involved with corona outbreak social issues. If the COVID-19 spreads among military personnel widely, it may do huge damage to their organizations.

One can see that each section of our ruling class pragmatically acts in order to increase its *own* chance of survival and elimination of its opponents. Is this only the logic of Iran's ruling class or is it also true about your country?! In this context, people *themselves* have to take care of each other. People themselves should

¹ This is part of the statement of a group of left and libertarian activists in Iran which has been published 29th of March. I will talk about this statement more.

realize the ‘ten commandments’ explained above. It is not possible to expect dominant politicians to act ethically. They are representatives of another logic.

In Iran, we are also facing gradual development of 1) grass-root movements (in some areas we have reports of people preparing daily vital needs of poor neighborhoods, hospitals and medical institutes), 2) self-governed neighborhoods (committees of *Mahalaat*) in which all the local needs of people, including daily detoxification of streets, taking care of sick or old people and so on, are being done by the self-governed committees; without any help from central government. And in some unique cases 3) collaboration of people in freeing prisoners from prisons².

It is still hard to give an estimate of the power of these instances of ethical politics; Those who are collaborating in solidarity with ‘public consciousness and will’. However, one can certainly observe the construction of alliances between the ‘poor middle-class project’ and the ‘autonomous, poor working-class project’ in opposition to ruling class. On 29th of March, group of left and libertarian activists published a statement addressing to ‘public consciousness and will’ (not the president, the leader or any established organization of ruling class, but the people). I believe this is not just a statement to Iranians, but also to all the people around the globe:

Steps into structural change in accordance with public interest

To the public consciousness and will:

One month after the quarantine of China, in spite of global warnings, our government affirmed the spread of COVID-19. Iran was the first country that officially announced the existence of the virus with death of two people. In the meantime, necessary preparations in order to control the widespread threat to public health were not done. Now, in a situation where there is no possibility of comprehensive testing for COVID -19, according to official statistics we have more than 30,000 infected and more than 2,000 dead victims.

Almost all of the people are unanimous about government being unsuccessful in crisis management and transparency of information about the disease.

Short-term and structural mismanagement of the government, confronting critical situation, and years of economic privatization, have portrayed a horrible situation in front of us: millions of workers in conditions of poverty, without unemployment insurance and no other source of income, have sent to home; vendors literally have lost their job. *Coolbers*³ who previously were victims of

² I will elaborate each of these 3 projects in the upcoming reports

³ Unskilled workers who carry loads of commodities on their back and smuggle them from Iraq to Iran, through high mountains of west of Iran.

cold weather and the bullets of border guards, are also losing the chance of continuing even this dangerous job. Those who still work, have the least protective equipment. Prisoners are enduring their imprisonment under the shadow of death. Multiple discriminations have intensified the lack of access to medical care, while our medical system is weakened, almost disintegrated, due to privatization. Health and service workers are deprived of job support and security.

Other countries do not have so much a better situation than us. From the paradise of capitalism in USA to the authoritarian capitalism of China and Russia, everywhere, we are witnessing various degrees of misinformation, mismanagement, and empty words. However, ordinary citizens and more than that, a multitude of subalterns, shall pay the price.

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, now the cracks and contradictions of political-economic systems have been completely revealed. In this condition, instead of general comparisons and ideological misconduct in order to serve fictitious propositions, (e.g. following the logic of “choosing between *bad* and *worse*,” etc.), we have to take the courage of realizing the first steps of structural change: **a change beyond all the contemporary forms of capitalism and ultimately, all forms of oppression.**