

The Duty of a Kurdish Intellectual in a Global World

The world has entered a new century, a century that has been characterized by the triumph of Capitalism over Communism - by globalization, climate change and global warming. It has been characterized by the emergence of China and India as two giant economic powers and emergence of a radical Islam as a new and an alarming political ideology across the Islamic world. It is a century that has been distinguished by fighting against terror from Bali to Morocco as a post-9/11 strategy to defeat Islamic extremists. Finally, this century has shown that America, as a military super power and as a heavily fortified bastion for democracy, human rights and capitalism, is shaky, fragile and economically and morally in recession. This century has shown that a world beyond America is not immune to what has recently happened in the Wall Street.

In the light of the above-mentioned characterizations of the 21st century and dangers that have accompanied our modern and global world, I think it is time for people in academic community to intensify their effort to pinpoint those dangers and share their knowledge and conclusions. It is time for us, as intellectual Kurdish people, to equip ourselves with knowledge and education, and raise a question about our duty in this modern and vulnerable world. As far as I am concerned, nobody has carried out a better research than Amin Maalouf has in this regard. I will come back to his research later in my discussion. Prior to my focusing on his research, I would like to remind the reader on the recent financial crisis that was triggered by thousands of Americans who had failed to pay their mortgages back to banks and how it paralyzed American economy, and effected economies far beyond the American shores. And how our life as global citizens and consumers has been shaped by globalization, and how it will be influenced by any negative as well as positive political and economic change in this modern and global world.

Well, as a Kurdish stateless intellectual and reader, you might ask why we should worry about globalization at all, when we do not have even our own state. No, my dear reader, we should indeed be worried about it, and take its outputs very seriously, for we are an integrated part of this global village, and benefiting from advanced technologies, using Face Book and enjoying cheap flight tickets that have fatal consequences on climate change in terms of increasing CO2 emission. In other words, we are on the same boat with the rest of the world. We have witnessed how the credit crunch in the Wall Street pushed the American economy into a recession, and how thousands of employees both in and beyond America had lost their jobs. In order to restore confidence between the creditors and the banking system and to create liquidity in the market, the Bush and Obama administrations had been forced to bail out billions of dollars to giant investments and auto companies like AIG and GM as stimulus packages. They had also been forced to purchase toxic assets of some ill-functioning financial institutions, and even to nationalize some of the private banks.

Despite the distance, giant economies like China, Japan, Germany, Britain and France could not escape the effect of the credit bubble in the Wall Street. They had been pressured to prop up their firms and auto companies with massive capital injections. They had also bailed billions of Euros and dollars out into their banking systems, as a response to a moral deficient of greedy American bankers and executives. Furthermore, they did that as a response to the mismanagement of highly deregulated American insurance and banking system. Having said that, because our economies are so closely interdependent, we as Kurdish individuals and citizens in this tiny society with a small and well-established economy are not immune to global economic and political changes that are taking place around us,. Even our destiny as human being is associated to each other, if we think about critical issues like climate change, global warming and their effects on ecosystem and our life. Any negative indication in American banking system in the Wall Street will have a negative influence on the rate of employment in China and, at the same time, it has a negative consequence on the employees in Denmark as well, for our economy like that of the Chinese is heavily depending on exports. Any change of the energy prices in Dubai has an influence on our decision whether to purchase a new vehicle, or use public transport instead, in the sense of a constant fluctuation in fuel prices. Any improvement in the harsh conditions of Russian workers in the remote oil fields in Siberia will contribute to increasing Russian oil supply to the market, and it will bring the price of energy further down. Any improvement in the appalling conditions, of the life of millions of Indian and Chinese rural migrants, in the cosmopolitans such as Bombay and Shanghai, has a direct effect on our consumption rate here in Denmark, in terms of purchasing new and cheap clothes, mobile phones, digital technologies, etc; since these workers are fuelling the Chinese and Indian growth machines, and supplying our markets with cheap products and goods.

Undoubtedly, our role as global educated individuals requires us to look at globalization as a new and ongoing phenomenon from different perspectives and pinpoint dangers that are generated by a modern world, and to find out new ways to combat our modern world from these dangers. I think nobody has done so in a very precise and understandable way than Amin Maalouf, a highly respectable Lebanese journalist and author, in his newly published book in French (*Le-dereglement-du-monde*). My English translation of the title sounds like that (*Disorder of the World*), and I beg your pardon in advance if it sounds unfit. I have had opportunity to read an article about his new book, published in *Al-Hayat*, an Arabic daily paper based in London, on 9 April 2009, written and translated from French to Arabic by a journalist Antwan Joki. I would really like to translate this article and create a sort of discussion around it and let my academic colleagues share the most crucial conclusions of Maalouf's book that Antwan Joki has highlighted. I think Maalouf has highlighted and pinpointed the dangers that surround us, and how they will deteriorate the life on our planet and human diversity if we not combat those dangers collectively. The combating of the dangers requires a collective effort. In other words, the author does not exclude any human being in the world from the task of protecting our planet. He believes that everybody should take responsibility for making our planet a better place to live

in. His belief in human's collective effort shows us how great Maalouf's faith is in human being and how noble is the aim of his research.

As Antwan Joki puts it like that in the outset of his article in Arabic, as we read Maalouf's research, it seems hard to feel optimistic about our future as human being. Our future will be very gloomy and uncertain, unless we change the direction of a path that we have taken so far. We have taken a wrong path, and it will lead us to a catastrophic ending. The research should be regarded as an alarming scream that awakens us and makes us more conscious about the dangers that encircle us, and encourages us to change the direction of our path. It should also be credited for being very precise and comprehensive in terms of collecting all the dangers that had been referred to previously by other researchers and scientists in one book. On the other hand, the research should be appreciated for using a very simple style that has made it easier for many readers to read and understand it.

At the outset of his research, Maalouf signifies the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 as a first conclusion in his work. He stresses how that historical event led us to believe in the birth of a new world. A historical event that put an end to four decades of confrontation between the then Soviet Union and the West, and it made our world free and empty from the threat of nuclear bomb and the arm race. We believed the democracy would spread out to the rest of the world. However, our belief and predictions turned out to be wrong.

The demolition of the Soviet Union and the Socialist Bloc was considered as a victory for the EU, since many Eastern European countries showed their willingness to join the EU, but the EU lost its direction and entered a new era. An era has been featured since then by raising questions about the EU's identity, borders, and the role of its institutions in the future of the world. The EU has not been able to give convincing answers to its populations.

When it comes to the Arab world, the case seems to be the worst, for the Arab world is full of hatred to itself and to the rest of the world, and it faces extreme difficulty in coping with the challenges that confront it and finding a way to survive. Arguably, the case in Africa does not seem to be better than the Arab world; the African Continent is still suffering from civil wars, epidemic diseases, and unemployment and deterioration of its social fabric. As Russia endeavours to recover itself and sets its seventy years of Communism behind, its leaders dream about strengthening their international positions at the expense of the interests of the Russians and people in the neighbouring countries. Meanwhile, the US, after defeating its traditional rival, has been profoundly engaged in building its highly demanding project of controlling the Planet Earth in terms of material resources. Moreover, as it surprisingly continues to make economic

growth, China starts closing itself to an area where the compass, that had yielded China economic boom, cannot benefit China any more.

The author believes in his second conclusion that the strategic victory of Western Capitalism over the Communism has enhanced the deterioration of the West, rather than strengthening its superiority. The victory has entered the West into the most dangerous crisis in history. Maalouf argues that the victory had put an end to, as he called “a balance of horror”, which means balance between the socialist bloc and the capitalist bloc. In return, the victory has played a great role in generating a new horror in the world; it has transformed humanity from a world which was divided across two major ideologies and a constant discussion on them into a world which has been featured since then, by division across identities, sects, and most dangerously by the absence of discussion. He considers the shift from ideology to identity as a development that has had destructive as well as negative results around the world.

The Arab world has had the lion’s share of that negative result, in terms of rising of Islamic radicalism and gaining power in political and social spheres. The dispute on identities in the world has helped the radical Islam to transform itself from a suppressed and isolated position in a society to a position of suppression and tyranny. It has suppressed and prohibited the freedom of thinkers and intellectuals and controlled every single sphere of a daily life of people in most of the Arab societies. The victory of Capitalism has also led to the emergence of two different ways of reading and viewing history. The first reading says that the Arab civilisation has showed its weakness to adopt the comprehensive values that the West glorifies and is proud of them. Whereas, the second reading of history says that as the West continues with its suppression of the Arab world and insists on imposing its values on the Arabs by force, the Arab world tries to resist that by using their limited means. According to Maalouf, both ways of reading history are right and wrong at the same time. Each of them is right in the view of its supporters. The supporters of one reading believe they are right, and they do not show any willingness to listen and understand the reading of the other side. This unwillingness to understand each other and engage in dialogue reflects his view that the two civilisations that are responsible for these two different readings are paralyzed and, as he describes, they are in the state of moral bankruptcy. These two readings of history are responsible for dividing humanity across identities and sects. It is time for us to avoid those views. He warns that either we should establish a common civilisation, where everybody should be represented, and allowed to make change a civilisation that should adopt the same comprehensive values based on its strong belief in humanity, and the notion of multiculturalism, or we should be judged to live in a common barbaric civilization.

The rapid and huge growth of the middle classes in China, India, Russia and Brazil is another significant danger that Maalouf stresses on in his third conclusion. He stresses that if the rate of consumption in those countries, which have three to four billion people out of 6.4 billion people

in the world, reaches to the same rate of consumption of the Europeans, Japanese and Americans, it would create a huge environmental as well as economical disorder in the world. That will lead to increase in pressure on the natural resources, such as fossil fuel, drinking water, and raw materials. It will also increase conflicts on gaining access to the places of resources, and probably it will lead to bloody conflicts.

The author believes that the advantage of Western triumph over Communism would have been greater if the prosperity and democracy of wealthy capitalist West could have been reached to peoples and nations beyond the EU's cultural border. Apparently the EU has greatly contributed to increasing the living standards in Greece, Portugal, Ireland and Spain, and later on, the Middle and Eastern European countries, and yet it does not let its prosperity reach to the other side of the Strait of Gibraltar, its southern border towards the Mediterranean Sea. We got a high wall instead between Europe and North Africa. Though it is invisible, it is like the Berlin Wall that had divided Europe in the past. We have the same situation in the US as the country does not let its prosperity reach out to people in the south of the Rio Grande River. The US has built a great wall alongside Mexican border, and that has generated hatred among Latin American people towards America.

Maalouf argues that the historical mistake of the European colonial powers in the past, and the American in the present, was not their insistence on imposing their values on the people of the world. It was completely opposite, in the sense that the colonial powers were disrespecting their own values in their relations with the colonized nations that were captivated and occupied by them. For instance, in India and Algeria, the British and French colonial powers did not accept to meet the demand of those nations for democracy, freedom and justice; rather they had suppressed those rights. The bill of that historical mistake is very expensive today, because the West has lost its easy access to natural resources in southern countries. On the other hand, the southern countries are not benefiting from the resources and expertise of their own educated middle class people who could have been able to build up free and democratic societies, for they have left their countries and gone to the West due to the lack of opportunities and social equality in their native countries.

In Maalouf's view, the most dangerous crisis that confronts our planet today is environmental pollution and climate change. He believes that people in rich countries should change their habit of consumption. Large developing countries in the south should find a balance between growth and the scale of challenges that threatens our world, if we should reduce the release of CO₂ emission in the atmosphere. Every single individual and nation on the planet should make sacrifice if we are to protect our planet from environmental crisis. However, he believes that our willingness to make sacrifice does not seem to exist in the short term.

In addition, Maalouf highlights the significance of sophisticated and highly advanced communication technologies in our time. Our time, as he describes, is featured by confrontation of civilizations and development of the logic of conflicting identities. Any penetrating statement or even rumour could lead to massacres, in a matter of few hours, tenth of thousands kilometres away from the place of releasing statement with the assistance of modern technologies. To support his argument, he refers to recent tragic events that occurred in Iraq, Lebanon, Indonesia, Rwanda, former Yugoslavia, India and Nigeria. According to him, our capability of designing and inventing new as well as effective technologies, which have turned our planet into a global village, does not have the company of our moral promotion. In other words, the moral side of humankind has not developed at a pace of our technological and economical development. The slowness in our moral development does not allow us to face the tragic results of this new reality. The writer does not urge us to bring down the speed of our technological advancement, but he urges us to enhance our moral development, which requires us to launch a revolution in terms of changing our habit as well as behaviour. Unfortunately, there is still a long way to go in order to gain the improvement in our habit.

The recent economic as well as financial crisis that the world has recently witnessed and we are still going through is another essential point that Maalouf highlights in his fourth conclusion. He shows us how they affect all of us, and how poor our abilities are to find solutions for those great dangers. Maalouf believes that, as the great scale of financial crisis requires us to act and confront it in a collective and cooperative way, our political, economical and rational structure forces us to think and to act according to our private interests. He adds also that the world has never before witnessed an era like this, in which the officials who are in charge of observing national economy, are not able to observe the structure and adventurous activities of executives and bankers, this is from one hand,. From the other hand, the era is also characterized by having billionaires, who are making profit by dirty and illegal means, and they are completely ignorant about political economy. They do not take care of the consequences of their bad acts on institutions, workers, families, and friends.

The discussion of financial crisis leads Maalouf to investigate another interesting point, which he called the absence of legitimacy, as a concept, on the national level in many different countries around the world in general, and in the Arab world in particular. As American administration tries to impose its authority and will on the rest of the world without letting itself to be restricted and subjected to international conventions and treaties, he emphasizes on some remarks that could be taken into the consideration when we investigate the causes behind disorder of the world. He refers to disorder in our moral value, as a major cause to disorder of the world. He emphasizes that we live in a time, when the process of making money, is being separated from any mental as well as material effort, and from any controlled social activity, and when stock markets are being converted to huge casinos, where the fate of hundreds of millions people rich

and poor, is being put at risk, when the financial institutions behave like bad and careless boys. Moreover, the efforts of many years of making economy solid and banks solvent have been undermined and made to vanish in a matter of few seconds by invisible means which are not even perceivable to economists and bankers themselves. The defect in financial and economic system has not only had negative financial and economic results on our life, but it has made us face a moral crisis. According to him, we cannot overcome the moral crisis unless we adopt a new value that appreciates education and give teaching and culture a leading role in our world. He stresses that the only solution to avoid consuming our natural resources is to prefer other forms of gaining satisfaction and other sources of getting leisure, such as acquiring knowledge and developing prosperous internal life. He describes knowledge as a world without borders, and he says that we can all benefit from it and educate ourselves endlessly. The more we are educated, the more we are aware about the danger of consuming our planet. The more we prioritize and glorify the value of asking knowledge and appreciating education in our countries, cities, and quarters, and preserving human diversity in the world, the more we will be able to achieve a peaceful and harmonious living among nations.

In the light of what I have highlighted so far, I hope I have contributed in making the reader and my follow Kurdish academics aware of how volatile our global and modern world is in the face of dangers that threaten our planet and human being as well as cultural diversity. Just like Maalouf, I believe that struggling for education and knowledge is the only way that could save humanity and our plant from further risk and further deterioration of our moral side. I think our duty as Kurdish academics is that we should continue to educate ourselves, and encourage our family members, friends, relatives in Denmark and fellow citizens back in Kurdistan to appreciate education and be aware about the significance of education in this age. We should tell our follow citizens that this age is ultimately about education and competition, and if we ever wish to have an independent Kurdish state in the future, that will not be achievable without having an educated Kurdish population.

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Note: For further information and research about Amin Maalouf and his works, please visit his homepage (<http://www.aminmaalouf.org/english/>)

And for information about Journalist Ant wan Joki and his articles, please visit the following page (<http://international.daralhayat.com/>)

