

**HUMANITY IN EXILE:
CONDITIONS OF THE ARTISTS AND INTELLECTUALS
UNDER OPPRESSION**

by Bedri Baykam

*“Human bodies on the move don’t always take their soul with them.
Sometimes they leave their soul behind.”*
-Diya Abdo¹

The flow of migration has been the norm since the beginning of times for our species. Humanity has been on the move from one place on earth to the other, from one continent to the other by walking, using land or sea for better hopes, better shelter, or curiosity and conquer spirit (curiosity and an appetite for conquest. There is an unfortunate attitude towards refugees, coming from masses, which stigmatizes them as “others” that this majority believe they will never be a part of. Most of the people, with this kind of attitude, seem to be so sure of that, because they are secure in their situation and their countries’ political stability. History has proven them wrong several times, unfortunately...

Of course, there’s a big difference between desired migration and forced exile. Missing one’s country can be present in both, but the first one is a voluntary act, and the decision has had time to develop itself, whereas you can become a journalist or an artist or thinker in exile in just 24 hours, and of course against your will. They can choose to leave their country immediately because of war or civil war. So, migration often comes with a free will even if the context can force someone to leave their homeland, whereas in exile we are talking about an enforced immediate situation that can result in becoming a fugitive...

As we know, Jean Paul Sartre said, “Man is condemned to be free. Because once thrown into the world, he is responsible of everything he does.”

However, things are not as simple as that. The wishful thinking regarding freedom is often under threat from various ends. Our own freedom can fall by our “free” choices into other dogmas or brainwashing manipulation, may it be religious fundamentals, politics, or personal pressure. Or without using us anyone as a transitory steppingstone, those pressures or dogmas can directly strangle our freedom or chosen ways of being. Unfortunately, such is often the case. Then it’s time to start an existential combat...

We know that life in itself is already hard. Everybody can have their own traumatic or revolting story. We will never forget the catastrophic days under Nazi regime when the world had to suffer genocide, nuclear bombs, mass murders. I guess we don’t need to remind each other, how there was a flow of artists and intellectuals running away from Europe to New York? Artists were looking away for new horizons, first for survival, then in search to exist in a way to be able to carry on with their profession.

Now, we face unfortunately, new scenes as a reminder of World War II in the Middle East, mainly in Syria, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, and Lebanon... It seems that unfortunately people get used to these crimes against humanity over time and years and years of the same tragedies coming from the Middle East or now Ukraine. At this point we are unable to determine any more how to face those heartbreaking bloody scenes where children, disadvantaged people, are walking in their exodus to

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some frontiers with only few garments of their own, not knowing what the future holds leaving behind all their past and potentials. Hunger, diseases, and basic needs are part of this terrible story, which is, it destroys me to repeat it here, the summary of human history.

There is a huge gap between the level of progress done in technology, science, artificial intelligence, and the primitive savage scenes that those wars are forces us to face, every day, everywhere...

On one hand, we have agony, hurting screams against injustice and a revolt against these undeserved prices paid in the 21st-century; and on the other, we have an apathy where masses, who are not directly concerned, seem to care, and cry only for a couple days, and then being sucked in their daily life, forget carelessly those realities. In the midst of this survival struggle which most of the time comes at the most unexpected moments, those who are the involuntary heroes of exile have to look for food, water, shelter, and maybe if they can provide themselves with those then they can seek for friendship or a job for integration in a new society.

They are the ones who left their memories, their roots, their family, and friends behind them, and trying to set foot in an environment that can turn hostile against them at any time, because they can feel threatened by those immigrants in exile, that sometimes can be used as political tool.

Artists, writers, and intellectuals often become the main targets that are forced to exile, because they are the ones who protest and bring an opposition for democracy and human rights. On the other hand, they are also the ones who need their books, their notes, their works at any time with them, their achievements. Which makes them more vulnerable to lose their identity, since they face the loss of not only their country, shelter, basic needs but also all the archive that has built their being. Unfortunately, this is the most common case, their lifelong archives are scattered or totally destroyed and lost forever during those runaways.

Their intelligence and creative spirit can only become a breath of hope in a new land where they will seek refuge.

The cases of Iran and Afghanistan where women are targeted, Afghani women who struggle desperately for their education, social and professional rights; Iranian women who are under threat continuously while struggling for their existence and basic social rights, still today, is beyond belief.

We have the case of those in exile as well as hundreds of thousands of people who are choosing to stay in their country to fight for their future and most importantly their children's future. This is an endless human struggle that has no borders.

The General Assembly will discuss these issues and analyze the situation from different aspects with various speakers.

-How to extend a helping hand to artists in exile?

-How to understand past experiences while preparing a better future?

-How can we create establish new survival patterns for artists and intellectuals in exile?

-How can it be possible to provide legal and bureaucratic assistance, as well as dialogues?

-How can we create a friendly environment that is inclusive of genuine feelings?

Scholars and artists who have been in exile will be participating in all day long discussions at the conference hall of the Pera Museum in İstanbul.

National Committee members who are participants to the General Assembly are invited to prepare from their point of view, specific discussion subjects about this matter. Presentations of around 10 minutes are welcome and please make us aware of this contribution till 30th of January.