

Letter Writing 'Movement' and Crisis of Collective Subjectivity

Amin Hosuri

December 24, 2011

1) In a society in which the collective struggle for change - for any number of reasons - is on the wane, conditions are created for hero-worship. Heroes are those who, in their own way and with a particular approach, express and reflect a part of the people's grievances and demands. Lack of social movements and lack of the processes of collective dissent creates a situation, in which, faced with the significance of reflecting and expressing (a part of) the collective grievances, it is not noticed how this 'incidental representation' came about or what its effective content is. People, who consider themselves powerless in the face of the ruling system, see their own un-actualized subjectivity realized in the existence and the acts of a hero. In this way, a flood of moral support flows in the direction of the hero, so that with its spread in the populist media and its reproductions throughout the society, the mythical dimensions of the heroic act can grow. Eventually, an unwritten legitimacy is afforded to the heroes, so that they can present their own understanding of social demands and the methods for political/social change as if they were the demands of the totality of the society, and inadvertently reflect a reduced and distorted view of the social conditions.

The most important criteria for the emergence of tendency toward heroic actions and its social acceptance (hero worship) is the supposition that it's as if the heroes, through their individual acts of sacrifice, open up a new battle front against a tyrannical system, a path that was deemed impenetrable through collective actions. In this trend of social struggles becoming individualized, not only does the struggling subjectivity is reduced to an individual or select figures, but the tyrannical system too inevitably is expressed and personified in the individual faces; for example, Mohammad Nourizad versus Seyed-Ali Khamenei; or a short while ago Moussavi versus Ahmadi-nejad.

2) Social engineers of the reformist trends, with the aid of the 'Green Industry' media and the apostles of 'real politic' amongst the right liberals and the left liberals, during the entire period when the oppositional movement had an active presence across the society in the public spaces and the streets, deployed a systematic and all-out campaign to impose a particular political discourse on the movement, and within that frame they drew and established their own limits and red-lines for the

internal developments and the external horizons of the movement. All this, in spite of the fact that this [reformist] political discourse was incompatible with both the wide array of the demands and the roots of the people's dissent, and despite the fact in its political content and strategy the reformist discourse lacked the ability to spread and lead the movement forward toward horizons for change and the growth of the 'collective subjectivity'. In fact, the reformists and their apostles directed all their criticisms and warnings at the mal-intent 'radicals' and their alienation from realities of the society, and in spite of all these claims, they pursued the systematic elimination and distortion of their critics, so as to impose their hegemony on the movement.

Now that it is nearly a year since the oppositional movement has disappeared as a result of the domination of the aforementioned discourse, these power-oriented trends, through their numerous media outlets and through the myriad platforms they enjoy inside and outside the country, not only do not allow for any critique of their past actions, they actually pretend as if the movement is still alive and thriving, so as to be able to profit from the moral capital of the movement for their own benefit! From a certain viewpoint, the reformists are right: what is left (alive) of the movement is exactly that very 'standard' and desired pseudo-movement which, during the one year and some months of the social existence of the actual movement, they tried to transform and engineer the movement into: a pseudo-movement that is symbolic and virtual and that the 'expert overlords' can leash completely. It is therefore not shocking that the players and newsmakers and the dissidents of the 'virtual movement' are singular figures and that the model for struggling should also be of the type exemplified by letter writing to the rulers.

However, the heroic halo that the 'Green Industry' media draw around today's heroes' heads is of the same kind that they drew around Moussavi's and Karroubi's heads during the course of the oppositional movement, so that everything shall be measured according their ideas and strategies, and so that, as a result, only the 'figures' closest to them shall have the right to exclusive interpretation of their strategies and actions. Therefore, the turn to heroic acts and today's social acceptance of heroes have their roots in the populism that is a painful problem that grew in the heart of the 'Green Movement'. Just in the same way that the collective inability that gave rise to hero worship caused the defeat of the movement in overcoming its internal contradictions, and hence its inability to elevate the level of organizational development and people's belief in themselves as a fighting force.

3) To induce an illusion regarding the existence of the movement (as opposed to developing and strengthening people's organized resistance for future leaps), although not productive in creating progressive political and social change, has definite and important use for keeping the monopolistic

position of the reformists (and their allies) as the main opposition to the current political system. This fact is especially important because when a tyrannical system reaches its unstable stage, at any point there exists the possibility that the crises and the accumulated discontent, in the various economic, political and social fissures, can explode in the form of mass rage and can place the foundations of the system on the verge of collapse. Against such a background, heroic acts find multiple goals and methods: on the one hand [...] the ultimate strains of the continuation of the current situation can be illustrated as a warning to the ruler (ruling system), and on the other hand those trends supporting heroic actions can still remain within those red lines, so as to leave open the path of return to 'political rationality' (to bring the ruler back to his senses).

On the other side of this coin, the 'alternative building' project for the system is hidden. Alternative building, in this context, means creating the conditions for inhibiting or taming the inevitable and unpredictable developments that face the crisis-ridden society. The current belief of a majority of the people and even a great part of the opposition forces is that the reformist trends are committed to protecting the current system, and since they have no interest in its downfall, they want to lead the developments within the confines of the limits set by the Islamic Republic. However, from about the half point of the oppositional movement, when the ruling regime stubbornly showed that it is not willing to tolerate any change whatsoever, it became well clear that the reformists' strategy changed in the direction of a two-pronged game. Based on this strategy, at the same time that the reformists pretended adherence to the legal struggle within the system, they were busy shaping the social subjective conditions in the direction of imposing themselves as the alternative to this system with its shaky foundations. In fact, the first phase of the 'alternative building' project for the Islamic Republic regime had started many years prior: at the time when a part of the reformist forces turned to 'political migration', and with the aid of their financial and organizational capabilities, and with the widespread support of western governments, in a systematic way they started the trend of the destruction of the traditional oppositional forces outside the country, in order to replace them. ('Alternative building', as it happens, is an important and customary, semi-hidden aspect of the foreign policies of western governments.) Along this trend and with the intensification of internal disputes, other intellectual heads of the reformists also joined this arm of their ilk outside the country; alongside this segment of the 'figureheads', a young generation of journalists who had been trained in the 8-year class of reformism [of the Khatami presidency, 1997-2005 _ translator's note] also joined this political organizational structure in migration, and became its bureaucratic and executive body.

The process of rendering uniform the oppositional discourse and its permutation into the 'virtual green movement', to a great extent was due to the widespread activities of the organizational arm [of the reformists] outside the country, under the cover of the atmosphere created by the western

governments' media. (The impact of the more-or-less uniform political positioning of the western governments' media such as 'BBC Persian', 'Voice of America and Parazit', Radio Farda, Deutsche Welle, Radio Zamaneh, etc., in strengthening and consolidating the reformist discourse in the political consciousness of the public cannot be ignored.) This, along the fact that even the dominant atmosphere in the oppositional activities outside the country was under the influence of the reformist discourse, is an obvious objective display of the success of the alternative building project. (Not to forget that certain layers from within the traditional opposition, such as Fedayee'an-Majority, and the Union of Republicans, with their political stance of the recent years, have facilitated the further smoothing of the path for the ultimate success of this project.)

So, the wishy-washy oppositional moves of the reformists inside the country, in the form of their repeated flirtations with the issue of parliamentary elections and such, and their more aggressive moves outside the country, in the form of leading the 'virtual movement' (in websites like 'JRS' and 'Kalameh', 'Green Voice of Freedom', and 'Green Transformation', etc.) are all at the service of the alternative building strategy, which aims for the taming of the inevitable future developments. The repeated and limitless exposes in the form of speeches and articles by the reformist leaders, or the heroic letters by their allied figures should be analyzed in the context of this strategy.

4) Based on the above, the actual audience of the letter writings by such people as Nourizad [whose letters to the supreme leader Khamenei is a hot topic in the reformist media _ translator's note] is not intended to be the glorious leader of the Islamic regime, but the general public of the country, and in particular the disgruntled and the potential dissidents, so as to give the 'hero' the legitimacy of representation and for the people to yield to the authority of the trends supportive of the hero and their allied political discourse [...]

From a general viewpoint, writing letters to the rulers smacks of the usual gaze directed at the top [to the powers-that-be] which is usual for the reformists and a wide segment of the Iranian human rights activists, who, in order to bring about political change, place their emphasis not on the people but on the institutions of power. The fact that in such texts/letters the people are rarely addressed is not accidental, since in the outlook of social engineering (which, due to its power-oriented nature, it considers the political field as the field of managing the people and events), people's role is ultimately that of the mass of pawns, whose supportive presence is necessary for the power-oriented to capture the seat of power. In order to attract the mesmerized or docile support of the people, they must be brainwashed with ambiguous and populist discourse: people's grievances must be spoken of and yet their intervention must be kept to a limited sphere. In other words, the people are viewed as tools (means) for change [at the top] to a 'desired' set of experts, not as [active historical] subjects!

[...] The dominant cliché present in the campaign of letter writing of the last two or three years is to warn the rulers, in view of the protests of the enraged people, about the particular dangers in case of continuing to disobey the 'original principles and ideals of the revolution'. The rulers are invited to correct their ways, and of course it is implied or explicitly stated that the rulers should 'come to their senses' and stop insisting that the reformists must be eliminated from power. In other words, the structural contradictions of the system and the deeply anti-people foundations of the system are reduced to the mistakes and excesses of certain individuals, and it is implied that in order to get rid of the insufficiencies it is necessary to reform from above.

The other aspect of the current letters [to the rulers] is that the history of the deviation from the 'acceptable path' goes back to the point at which the reformists started to be eliminated from power, and the return to the path of sharing power through elections (and not even elections with participants from all political trends) is introduced as the way to a final solution. [...]

In general, those who, due to their 'revolutionary' record or due to their familial labyrinth-like connections to those in power, who enjoy a certain level of immunity, while using their immunity to pursue their factional political agenda, pretend that they are acting to realize people's rights while they put in danger their own and their families lives and well-being (e.g., Nourizad, Tajzadeh, etc.). One can more easily come to terms with such heroic acts as a part of the bitter social realities and reflections of the society, if the heroes and their media supporters, instead of pretending that the heroic acts are representing the interests of all the people, would come clean and tell their audience which social class or political layer is being represented by such acts.

Of course, there is the possibility that some of these heroes - with a sense of selflessness and personal sacrifice - would be used as tools of power-oriented trends. And some of them, by committing such acts of self-sacrifice, in a vague and unclear manner believe or pretend that they have drawn a line against their own political past, whereas in their actions they continue their previous political line and help their side to reach political power again.

5) Reformist media apparatuses, in order to push forth the 'virtual green movement' and in the service of their 'alternative building' project, in addition to their tame exposes and protest letter-writing and reliance on calendar-driven occasions, have other arsenals as well, one of which is the issue of political prisoners; meaning, while selectively supporting some political prisoners and under the cover of human rights, they also pursue delicately the process of creating political figures (editing the political identity of the prisoners), so as to expropriate the unjust and oppressive nature

of prison and the totality of the resistance by political prisoners to the benefit of 'particular' reformist ideals. This means that going to prison and the resistance of the political prisoners and also their symbolic actions inside prison are all used in uniform fashion in conjunction with a particular reading of the 'green movement', so as to use the popularity of certain prisoners among the people and the society's sense of solidarity with the oppressed political prisoners, in order to push forth and proliferate a particular model of 'ideal' form of struggle which falls within the framework and strategies of the reformist camp.

Another campaign tool which has been inaugurated recently is this: those reformist factions that are active are using the opposition to a military attack and economic sanctions to prove that they are 'of the people'. This is a progressive slogan, but without any real backbone and indeed a lie! First, if the opposition to foreign intervention is proposed from the usual human rights angle, it will inevitably involve some sort of war and/or economic sanctions. Another thing is, the opposition to military intervention and economic sanctions can be bereft of any contradictions only when there is a real adherence and commitment to the collective people's subjectivity.

In the case of the our reformist fellow countrymen, however, this commitment (to people's subjectivity) was clearly contradicted by their monopolistic domination over the oppositional movement and its metamorphosis into 'virtual pseudo-movement', and also by the trend of their implicit cooperation with western governments in the process of building an alternative for the current regime (both trends are still being pursued and completed). However, under the conditions in which both the Islamic regime and the dominant global powers beat on the war drums with their own particular interests in mind, we can escape from this nightmare of 'humanitarian imperialist war' (which is becoming more real by the day) only when and if the people build an all-out movement which connects the opposition to war with the opposition to the power structures. Such a necessity requires the growth and nurturing of the collective 'self-belief' and oppositional organizations of the people; and neither of these two factors is compatible with the reformists' political record and their current strategies.

It therefore seems that by raising such seemingly 'radical' slogans in opposition to war and economic sanctions, the reformists' goal is to prevent the radicalization of the social fissures that are created by the military threats and economic sanctions, and to transfer to a more manageable sphere those potential fissures. Just as this was done under the 8-year project of 'religious yet people-oriented rule' under the reformists [i.e., Khatami's two terms as president], and just as the same was done when the 'Green' discourse was imposed on the oppositional movement after the [June 2009] elections.

In short, creating an 'illusory movement', which is reproduced through the media outputs of the 'virtual green movement', is nothing other than the denial of the people's subjectivity and delaying the process of growth of the 'collective subjectivity' with the aid of obfuscating matters and confusing the people. This pseudo movement has been engineered to not serve the ideal of political change, but in particular to serve the 'alternative building' project of the reformists for the inevitable transfer of political power in Iran. The 'virtual green movement', in order to actualize its perspective must create artificial 'events', so as to produce 'heroes' for the society.

Activists and actors who are incapable of distinguishing between the popular foundations of the people's defeated oppositional movement and the power-oriented goals and monopolistic strategies of the reformist trends, are prone to take cover under nostalgia and deny the defeat of the movement, and would find legitimacy for any voice that is raised in the name of the movement. In other words, the fetishism and idolization of the movement causes great many people to turn to passively repeating and proliferating the power-oriented discourse of the reformists, with the illusion of doing some service for the movement and with the hope of progressive change. Not only does this phenomenon not help in building a movement for an alternative (to fundamentally break with the discourse that dominated the previous movement), but it also helps to divert and mislead people's social consciousness and inadvertently to block the formation of the collective subjectivity.