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RADICAL RHETORIC AND THE SYRIAN REVOLUTION: TOWARD A TELOS OF SOLIDARITY

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Communication

The University of Memphis

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DEDICATION

To my Syrian mother, to my Syrian father

and to all free Syrians around the world.

Acknowledgements

To my advisor, Dr. Antonio de Velasco, it was a serendipitous set of circumstances which placed you on my path. You have cared about this project as I have, believed in its potential, and when I was still naïve, set a vision for what radical rhetoric could be. You have questioned me, taught me, and pushed me to be better every step of the way. Your respect, and dare I say, your friendship, is something I greatly treasure. To the members of my committee, Dr. Andre Johnson, Dr. Michael Perez, and Dr. Gray Matthews, thank you for your time, commitment, and above all your kindness, which enriched this dissertation and uplifted my spirits when I needed it. Thank you for living this project with me. Dr. Katherine Hendrix, Dr. Marina Levina, Dr. Mandy Young, thank you for your support and guidance, and for being such wonderful role models for me.

To my in-laws, you are not my family by blood, but you are the family I have been blessed with. You have supported me like I was your own and loved me for myself. Thank you for being in my life. To baba, my sanad, my backbone. Remember when you asked me, "but what about you?" - You never let me settle. Your love of life made me love life, your love for people made me love people. If I believe in the goodness of humanity, it is because of you. You raised me not by words, but by the example of your heart, which has never known malice or jealousy or anything other than to want the best for everyone. I am proud to be bint Saad (the daughter of Saad).

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Finally, to all the Syrians who gave their lives for something bigger than themselves, thank you for your sacrifice. You have not died. You live on and have inspired every page of this dissertation.

Abstract

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Transnational rhetorical scholarship has yet to enact solidarity with the subaltern. “Inclusionary” efforts have actively excluded what I term the “radical subject,” the subject revolting against repressive hegemonic forces to achieve liberatory change in society. As an intervention, this dissertation conceptualizes the Syrian revolution as a rhetorical performance which enacts a theory of its own agency and possibilities, an expression of a liberatory moment where radical subjects rose from under an authoritarian regime’s historic rule. Within this rhetorical performance, the radical subject serves as the chief protagonist, a subject whose rhetoric is informative of both practice and theory. The Syrian revolution is a litmus test of our ability to stand in solidarity with radical subjects and which defines the stakes for later movements. My research objectives therefore are: (1) to address the Syrian revolution as a rhetorical performance, and by extension, examine radical rhetoric as practice (*Rhetorica Utens*); and (2) to put forth radical rhetoric as theory (*Rhetorica Docens*). Here, I propose radical rhetoric as a blueprint of rhetorical practice for how to resolve controversies surrounding transnational social movements which fall into the “confrontation between two world-views.” Radical rhetoric realizes the wisdom in placing the radical subject as the starting point in inquiry in contested spaces where negotiation over meaning is ongoing. It acknowledges the radical subject’s testimony as born of the epistemic relevance of social location, the boundedness of knowledge, and latent credibility. As a theoretical rhetorical framework, radical rhetoric arouses the possibility of solidarity with those in revolutionary liberatory struggle.

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Chapter 1

Theorizing Radical Rhetoric

Statement Number One / the Syrian people will not be humiliated / Statement Number One / we sure won't stay like this / Statement Number One / from the Houran comes good news / Statement Number One / the Syrian people are revolting. (Underground anthem of the Syrian Revolution)

Our revolution was a people against an oppressive regime, and then suddenly, it became a people against all the criminals of the world. There was not a blood-thirsty person on the face of the earth that did not come to participate in our killing. In the end, we raised our hands and said, "we are simple revolutionaries facing the strongest armies in the world." (Hadi Abdallah, 2021)[1]

The other day, I came across video footage of Abu Furat (Father of the Euphrates), a colonel who defected from the Syrian military to join the Free Syrian Army after his battalion was ordered to attack the revolutionary village of Al Hiffa in June of 2012. My heart clasped itself - I was taken back to the heady cataclysm of emotions when I first witnessed the video ten years ago. This time, I observed it with the foreboding awareness of what was to come. After leading a successful assault on Aleppo's infantry school in one of the major battles against the Assad regime, instead of a triumphant tone, Abu Furat sat down sentimentally counting on his fingers the reasons for his sorrow:

> I am upset. Because those tanks are our tanks. And the ammunition is our ammunition. Those fighters are our brothers. I swear to God, every time I see a person killed, from our side or theirs, I feel sad. Because if that bastard had resigned, Syria would have been the best country in the world. But you clung to your throne, you bastard. Why? You killed people when we were telling you we were peaceful, and you were saying we were armed gangs. And we officers sat on our beds watching, while you called people terrorists. We are

---

[1] Author's translation.

> not terrorists. You are the one who wants us to become terrorists. (Alarabiya, 2012)[2]

A few minutes after making this speech, Abu Furat was swiftly killed by a landmine he was disabling.

Watching this video today, despite its temporal proximity, there is something disquietingly ancient about the footage. Remarkably, I still carry remnants of the optimism I had at that time, the deep urge for progress and the gratefulness we had toward people like Abu Furat. I relive the tensions we were all feeling at that time - a close friend was upset with me because my city Aleppo hadn't gone out to the streets to support the revolution in its early days like their city of Homs. The revolution *was* personal. It either brought Syrians together or ripped them apart. Even our own family members could become strangers and blood would become water.

In the summer of 2011, I spent my summer in Aleppo planning my wedding. We had booked the venue and paid the florist. But a few months later, upon the trickling of the "Arab Spring," our plans changed drastically. We watched with bated breath to see if the wave of protests would spread to Syria. Many were skeptical, taking the absence of visible political resistance as assent toward the persecution and exploitation of the Assad regime. Syria, under the Assad dictatorship, had become a single-party police state where civil society was severely curtailed, and the military was intricately infused with the regime. But discontent was festering, and in early March 2011, the torture of schoolchildren in the sleepy town of Daraa was the straw that broke the camel's back.

And so, we watched as the exceptional unfolded out of the monotonous rhythm of everyday life and aggrieved and disenchanted Syrians took to the streets in protest. As put by the musical icon Samih Choukair, "the youth o'mother heard that freedom was at the gate, so they went out

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[2] Author's translation.

to chant for it…" (Dagher, 2019). Protests spread exponentially to the cities and towns in Syria. Ultimately, millions gathered on the street in protest - motivated by a yearning for كرامة [i.e., dignity], collectively forming the most significant challenge to the Assad regime in decades. The revolution was at its essence neither sectarian nor race-based but was a unified resistance against a repressive state apparatus. Grassroots mobilization cut across class, political, religious, ethnic, and gender divisions, making it a watershed moment in the transformation of the political consciousness of Syrians. In its explicitly intersectional nature, individuals from all segments of Syrian society, Muslims, Arabs, Kurds, Christians, Alawites, stood side by side demanding: (1) the lifting of restrictions of freedom of expression; (2) the release of prisoners of conscience: (3) the legalization of political parties outside of the Baath party; and (4) a repeal of the emergency law.

The regime's response was swift and unforgiving. The military was given shoot-to-kill orders against protestors, sniping from roof-tops and shelling residential neighborhoods. Sexual violence, including rape, was standard practice (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami, 2016). Though initially only appealing for political reforms, as Syrians were goaded into further revolt, they began to cry out for an overthrow of the regime. Just a few months after the revolution commenced, the United Nation's Human Rights Chief Navi Pillay asked that Syria be referred to the International Criminal Court for over 5000 dead, including 300 children and 14,000 detained (BBC, 2011). He called for the international community to take protective action "before the continual ruthless repression and killings drive the country into a full-blown civil war" (Nations., 2011), but his words fell like coals in the black night. No one heeded the call.

State media immediately referred to protestors as 'infiltrators,' 'armed gangs,' and 'salafist terrorists.' Local Coordination Committees, which would become an extensive grassroots network (تنسيقيات) throughout the country, organized peaceful protests and collected eyewitness testimony to counter the regime’s narrative. In the face of mass expulsions and collective punishment on entire cities, by 2012, many rethought their non-violent principles and took up arms to defend themselves. Self-defense against one-sided assault from the regime nevertheless altered the “moral high ground” of pacifism revolutionaries had clung to for so long (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami, 2016, p. 78). Sustained repression against unarmed resistance has historically served as the instigator of armed mobilization: “Repression not only cultivates the desire for justice or revenge. It also leaves many with a sense that there is no alternative way to defend their families and communities…if you’re going to be killed whether or not you rebel, you might as well go out fighting” (Pearlman, 2016a, p.101). In the documentary *Our Memory Belongs to Us*, Odai, a Syrian activist who is now a refugee in Europe, articulates this logic:

> There was a border control checkpoint thirty minutes away from my house in Daraa. They would detain a girl and broadcast her rape over the speakers. We would hear the woman screaming, “يا عالم انقذوني [i.e., oh people, save me]!” What do you want of me? That I come holding a flower? What do you expect when the whole international community is watching and doing nothing? And now they want to hold me accountable for holding a weapon?[3] (Farah, 2021)

The Assad regime was so incredibly violent that the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon exclaimed “we no longer count days in hours, but in bodies” (Hashemi & Postel, 2013). The latest official estimates on the death toll are from 2016, relying on 2014 data, indicating that over 400,000 have been killed, after which the United Nations stopped counting (Specia, 2018). Syrians were no longer even numbers. Since then, Syrian human rights groups have attempted to document the number of dead. Walid Saffour, President of the Syrian Human Rights Group, predicts the count is over 1.2 million (Salahi, 2020).[4] I write the death toll here with hesitation and exhaustion, as in some ways, the suffering of the Syrian people needs no recapitulation. As Iraqi dissident Rasha Al Aqeedi said on PBS, "having to constantly use the death toll of your country's men and women just as a way of getting someone's attention is quite humiliating" (PBS, 2021). But the escalating numbers, and the plethora of evidence, did not only not seem to matter, but appeared to be deliberately numbing. Waleed al Muallem (a Ba'aath Party member who served as deputy prime minister from 2012 to 2020) once brazenly told international observers investigating crimes in the country that they would "drown them in the details. Let them learn how to swim!" (Syria Stream, 2020).

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[3] Author’s translation.

Soldiers who refused to fire on civilians defected from the military to join the resistance (Alford & Wilson, 2015). By late 2012, around half of the armed groups were operating under the Free Syrian Army, an umbrella term for a "leaderless" resistance of competing brigades. One of the first tasks of the Free Syrian Army was to protect peaceful protestors and those in the neighborhoods where protests took place from attacks (Farah, 2021). Other times, they would close off territories so activists whose names were revealed to the regime could escape (Farah, 2021). With time, the Free Syrian Army grew to over 70,000 armed rebels defending against Assadist assault (Alford & Wilson, 2015). Daesh (ISIS) and the al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al Nusra entered the scene, hijacking the revolution for their own purposes (Munif, 2017).[5] Syrians crafted grassroots revolutionary organizations in the very process of rebellion (Leenders, 2013b, 2013a; Leenders & Heydemann, 2012).

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[4] This is based on estimates that recorded casualties "may make up as little as one-eighth of the total number of casualties of the Syrian conflict." Unfortunately, we can only offer ballpark estimates of the dead. As journalist Rana Abouzeid puts it, "the dead [in Syria] are not merely nameless, reduced to figures. They are not even numbers" (Abouzeid, 2018, p. xi).

[5] The term "Daesh" is used as opposed to the more popular "ISIS" or "the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria." The latter lends implicit legitimacy to these groups and bolsters them as somehow representing Muslim majority ambitions (Al Haj Saleh, 2019b). Syrians themselves refer to the group as Daesh, the Arabic acronym of the "Islamic State in Iraq

Statement of Rhetorical Problem

On 18 December 2015, the United Nations Security Council adopted a road map for a peace process in Syria with United Nations Resolution No. 2254 calling for a Syrian-led political transition and free and fair elections to be held in Syria within eighteen months (BBC, 2015). This resolution was never implemented and to date, there has been no political transition, no truth commissions, no reconciliation, and no harms addressed. Even desperate appeals by Syrians at the height of the conflict to at least have no-fly zones enacted to protect civilians were not heeded. Despite the tremendous amount of documentation of events on the ground,[6] a "deadlock" at the United Nations's Security Council has prevented Syria's referral to the International Criminal Court in The Hague (The Atlantic Council, 2022). Today, in light of the impasse of international law, several countries are reinstating diplomatic ties with the regime, which for all intents and purposes, appears to have "won the war." After fifty years of Assad rule, instead of a truth and reconciliation commission for the regime's human rights violations, the regime was rewarded with an appointment to the World Health Organization's Executive Board. Aside from two trials in the highest regional court in the German city of Koblenz's (which found former regime intelligence officers Eyad al-Gharib and Anwar Raslan guilty of crimes against humanity), not a single security official has been held accountable for their

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and Syria," but one which does not have the "sheen" of the latter and which is also phonetically unpleasant in the Arabic language (Al Haj Saleh, 2019b).

[6] The United States Ambassador for War Crimes Steven Rapp has said that the evidence against Assad is stronger than that used to convict the Nazis in Nuremberg (CBS, 2021).

crimes. For Syrians, it is as if, in the words of disappeared dissident Samira Khalil, “the world has closed its heart and gone away” (Al Haj Saleh, 2017a).

Furthermore, an “attitude of doubt” has plagued Syrian revolutionaries (Ahmad, 2016, p. 136). The Iranian-American scholar Asef Bayat, in his book *Revolution Without Revolutionaries: Making Sense of the Arab Spring* dismisses the Syrian revolution as lacking “revolutionary ideas” and intellectual precepts – claiming it is without an “intellectual anchor” (Bayat, 2017, p. 11). The Syrian revolution is argued to have a problem of “leadership” because it “did not come hand in hand with [a] token revolutionary theorist” (Bardawil, 2019, p. 180). In other ways, the Syrian revolution is positioned within a deficit as compared to Western liberal democratic norms which underscore shortfalls in organization, in cohesiveness, in women’s rights, and accuse the revolution of being coopted by neoliberal logics (Bardawil, 2019). Revolutionaries have been unable to “produce a discourse that adequately represents it [their revolution]…the story has never been told well, either by analysts, pundits, or journalists” (Munif, 2020, p.155). The “orgy” of footage of atrocities (Atassi, 2014) results in “too much information…which generated uncertainty” on the regime’s crimes (Wedeen, 2019, p. 79). At the most extreme side of the spectrum, Syrian revolutionaries have been the target of disinformation campaigns seeking to disorient, sow doubt and erode them as a “hotbed” of terrorists staging attacks against themselves (Bellingcat, 2018; Solon, 2017; The Atlantic Council, 2018). These counter-narratives have garnered an enormous audience online and have been incredibly damaging to the willingness to offer meaningful solidarity to Syrians.

As such, solidarity, when extended to Syrians, has been self-congratulatory, exclusivist, and absent of action (Naprushkina, 2020). In the context of this dissertation, solidarity does not gesture to a politics of pity (Fassin, 2012) or an “admirable feeling of goodwill toward victims”

(Al Haj Saleh, 2018a). Those conceptions of solidarity hark back to 18th century "culture of sympathy," where benevolence relied on a theory of human goodness legitimated by colonial modernity (Hutchinson, 1996). Instead, solidarity in this dissertation refers to "a principle that can inspire and guide action" (Arendt, 2009, p. 89) and which alleviates ethical loneliness and a sense of abandonment (Stauffer, 2015). This primarily encompasses: (1) political solidarity (a highly politicized form of solidarity partial to revolutionary movements and built on leftist internationalism and/or global consciousness); (2) material solidarity (aid for victims of natural disasters or human-caused conflict); and 3) rights solidarity (which revolves around human rights abuses and the actions of states or extra-legal forces to lobby and influence the states in which violations take place) (Olesen, 2004). All these conceptions expand on solidarity as an inherently hopeful act which bridges the abyss between ourselves and those in liberatory struggle.

But, it is "all too easy to say of a story, that makes no sense, that it is the fault of the teller and accordingly the responsibility of the teller to do a better job at telling" the story (Stauffer, 2015, p. 105). The inability to listen, and to apprehend Syrian revolutionaries, is due to a myriad of factors which collectively stymie a recognition of the emancipatory qualities of this genus of revolutionary struggle. These factors are explored in detail in the next chapter, but suffice to say, scholars and critics have been "guardians of a hegemonic political order" (Munif, 2020a, p.155). Whether intentionally or not, the liberation struggle and participatory politics of Syrian revolutionaries has been largely ignored. The repercussions of neglecting these subjects is keenly felt – "activists have…cooled their compassion for the victims and their indignation for the perpetrators" (Flam, 2015, p. 273). In critical ways, Syrian revolutionaries are denied competency in providing determinative analysis of their revolution, which arguably impacts the willingness to stand in solidarity with them.

Fundamentally, dominant orientations in contemporary critical work deny the powerful stature of the revolutionaries. Within this is a critique not only of communication studies, but of disciplinary knowledge production in the Euro-American context in terms of its ability to induce solidarity with radical subjects. Suffice to say, as a case study, the Syrian revolution illustrates the inability to rupture deeply entrenched biases in hegemonic narratives surrounding transnational grassroots social movements.[7] Therefore, this dissertation takes the Syrian revolution as a litmus test of our ability to stand in solidarity with "radical subjects" under current paradigms. "Radical subject" is a key theoretical term of this dissertation referring to subjects revolting against repressive hegemonic forces to achieve liberatory change in society.

As an intervention, this dissertation explores how we might counter the hegemonic attention to rhetorics of power and domination by granting attention to neglected radical subjects whose perspectives deserve more profound acknowledgement. As a case study for radical rhetoric, I conceptualize the Syrian revolution as a rhetorical performance which enacts a theory of its own agency and possibilities, an expression of a particular liberatory moment in history where radical subjects rose from under an authoritarian regime's historic eclipse. Within this multivalent rhetorical performance, the radical subject is the chief protagonist, a subject whose rhetoric is informative of both practice and theory. This dissertation operates on the premise that solidarity is not discovered by happenstance but is created through centering certain subjects as the principal locus of suasive conception. The Syrian revolution is a synecdoche from which I derive the theoretical rationale for radical rhetoric as a paradigm which sets the stakes for later movements.

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[7] 'Transnational" is a relational concept that implies thinking across, over, and against borders that dis/connect nations (Shohat, 1998, p. 46–47)

Next, I discuss the rationale behind this dissertation's rhetorical approach to the exigency of the Syrian revolution and present the dual objectives of this dissertation: (1) to access the emancipatory qualities of the Syrian revolutionary struggle; and (2) to derive a blueprint of rhetorical practice for how one might resolve controversies surrounding transnational social movements. I end with an overview of the dissertation chapters.

A Rhetorical Approach to the Syrian Revolution

This dissertation takes a distinctly rhetorical approach prioritizing the radical subject's voice, agency, and autonomy. Rhetoric here has potential both as a type of practice and as a theory which might guide us toward solidarity. Accordingly, I outline two research objectives for my dissertation: (1) To address the Syrian revolution as a rhetorical performance, and by extension, the practice of radical rhetoric (*Rhetorica Utens*); and (2) To put forth radical rhetoric as theory (*Rhetorica Docens*). As such, this dissertation includes both creation and critique, i.e., presenting a practical application of radical rhetoric, in tandem with the theory, or rhetorical framework of radical rhetoric. In what follows, I expand on each of these objectives.

Objective 1: Examination the Syrian Revolution as Rhetorical Performance (Rheotrica Utens)

The Syrian revolution is selected not as an act of private piety, but as an example of a rhetorical performance which lies just beyond our interpretive capabilities and thus far, has not been explored in all its rhetorical splendor. With this in mind, I present the critical dimensions of the revolution which make the Syrian revolution an appropriate object of rhetorical study: (a) Rupture and (b) Rhetor (the radical subject).

Rupture

The Syrian revolution was a "rupture" during an unstable time in Syrian history, a rupture which found an opening in the ambiguities of political domination of a regime which has never been able to capture an omnipotent commitment to Assad's ultra-nationalist populism (Wedeen, 1999). As put by Omar Aziz, a Syrian anarchist who led the move to democratic self-governance in the Syrian revolution:

> A revolution is an exceptional event that will alter the history of societies, while changing humanity itself. It is a *rupture in time and space*, where humans live between two periods: the period of power and the period of revolution. (Aziz, 2013)[8]

As a liberatory "social explosion" (Al Haj Saleh, 2016), the revolution materialized outside of Syrians' normal existence to instigate an inner renewal or "revolutionary awakening" (Matar & Kadri, 2019, p. 135). As singer Yousef Kekhia says, "what happened in Syria is something not normal to happen, not only now but even throughout history, it is something overwhelming for historians…so just imagine what it was like for those most affected by this" (Kekhia, 2020). Others point to the "عفوية الثورة" – i.e., its natural, unaffected, and non-pre-meditated nature, which came about without any introduction ("مقدمات") after the "congestion" ("احتقان") of everyday life (Kaileh, 2016). In the *Streets of Freedom*, an activist explicates, "truly, we were all taken by storm" (Shehadeh, 2013b). The revolution therefore signaled a negotiation of hegemonic ontological and epistemic spheres of society – a transformation of Syrian "common sense" (Munif, 2020, p. 157).

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[8] The translator of this text from the original Arabic is unknown. Omar Aziz left his comfortable life in France at the age of sixty-two to join the revolution, telling his wife "I will not respect myself, nor will you respect me, if I stay away from my country at a time when I have so much to offer" (Hassan, 2015). He believed revolution should permeate all aspects of life and advocated for radical changes even in social relationships. He died of heart failure in Adra prison in 2013 (Al Shami, 2016; Al Shami, 2013).

Social movements, due to their very nature, often provoke new identities and cultural meanings in a dramatic breakdown or reassembly of social networks (Crick, 2020; Goodwin & Jasper, 2004). As Razan Ghazzawi testifies:[9]

> [t]his revolution is starting to build a consciousness for Syrians. We did not have that before. We did not even have this word "Syria." Like for example, if someone wanted to leave Syria, we would say he wanted to leave the بلد [i.e., the country]. We relate different to the country [now]. (Ghazzawi, 2013)

For others, the revolution was akin to something "hidden" coming out into the open:

> I called my brother in Saudi Arabia. I told him that I went to the protest and was chanting, "Freedom! Freedom!" I felt like I needed to tell him about it. I said, "you have to experience this." I can't describe it…*it was like letting all the energy out of you, all the things you'd kept hidden for so many years.* You felt like you're not on this earth. Like your soul is just flying somewhere else. (Pearlman, 2017, p. 55, emphasis added)

As a paradigm-changing event, "people emerg[ed] from their silence…developing their own language, inventing their slogans and forms of action" (al Atassi, 2011). For a society told to "whisper! The walls have ears," Syrians had found their voice. Riad al Turk, the renowned Syrian opposition leader captures the Syrian revolution as a *revolution of words*, complete with new idioms and advances in discourse, the re-appropriation of old vocabularies, and the re-negotiation of old attachments to everyday conventions:

> The connection between words and the Syrian revolution is quite basic. The revolution was about appropriating politics; that is, owning talk about public issues and gathering and protesting publicly. Building on this, I think it is quite fair to say our struggle was

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[9] Razan Ghazzawi is a Syrian blogger who worked at the Syrian Center for Freedom of Expression in Damascus. She was arrested by the regime for her activism.

> essentially about words: using them, interpreting them, and protesting with them. (Naprushkina, 2020)

Importantly however, as will be discovered in this dissertation, when revolution is viewed purely as a shattering event within an otherwise uneventful existence, we negate the historied nature of revolution and the formation of radical subjectivities through generational witnessing. As Lauren Berlant words it, “the extraordinary always turns out to be an amplification of something in the works, a labile boundary at best, not a slammed-door departure” (Berlant, 2011, p. 10). Therefore, rupture is not a finite or inert phenomenon, but is conceived of in this dissertation as a temporally pluralistic phenomenon where rhetorical inventions unfurl through ebbs and flows across time. These fluctuations, and the contested narratives surrounding the revolution, together make the Syrian revolution a productive site of rhetorical study over the longue durée.

Radical Subject (Rhetor)

In circumstances of rupture, radical subjects emerge as subjects which re-frame, re-invigorate, and re-formulate hegemonic constructs and revolutionary subjectivities. By identifying the radical subject in this manner, I am inviting “new participants into the conversation” (Palczewski, 2003, p. 388). As rhetorical agents of revolution, they are rhetors with a revolutionary identity who act with agency to alleviate oppression at the risk of death, injury and/or imprisonment. These subjects do not exist as a priori, but come into being as revolutionary actors “when it is a question of struggle” (Castro, 1975).[10] Their agency does not exist as an essence or natural category, but arises in their willingness and ability to make history amid lived positionalities created from extraordinary events in history.

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[10] Not all who took part in the revolution always and already qualify as radical subjects. There are many who took advantage of the revolution or who have not lived up to its standards, such as those who took up arms to conduct kidnappings or dishonest smuggling of goods under the banner of the revolution (Al Haj Saleh, 2017d, p. 82; Mrie, 2015) An infamous incident was when one rebel named Abu Sukkar filmed himself cutting into and eating the flesh of a dead soldier. Senior commanders condemned his deranged actions, but revealed Abu Sukkar had had all his relatives and neighbours killed by the regime (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami, 2016). I once overheard an activist declare, “there is no flag on earth under which we do not see abuses happen. There were rapes and abuses

Importantly, they are able to discern the exigencies of oppressive rhetorical situations and act with embodied agency to alleviate these oppressions. Their rhetoric is necessarily liberatory: They rallied one another to “Raise your voice! Raise your voice! We’ll live in dignity or die!” (Al-Kateab & Watts, 2019). They see no other choice but to manifest “irrational faith in the revolution” (cooke, 2017, p. 7). As put by human rights lawyer and dissappeared dissident Razan Zeitouneh, “even with fear that you can clearly see in their eyes, [they] speak[s] about the moment of freedom with great certitude that no one could feel unless they are a true…revolutionist” (Zaitouneh, 2013b).

These rhetors, who form the backbone of this project, are identified through conceptual effort: They must hail from a certain community, their speaking resists “normative scripts of resistance,” and they are characterized by precarity because their actions form a risk to their own life and their family’s life. Their simultaneous precarity and agency permits for a more complex recognition of these liberatory subjects. In movements of the “unknown and insignificant,” they have no “political weight or rights” before revolution (Al Haj Saleh, 2017). The word “grassroots” is apt here - in old English, “root” refers to the underground part of a plant which anchors the body. Moreover, the term “radical” (from the Latin “radic” or “radicalis”), though now taken as an extreme deviation from the norm, originally referred to the fundamental “roots” of a system (Webster-Merriam, 2020). From this etymology, I derive the term “radical subject” for non-elite subjects who become “engine(s) of social production” (Goodnight, 1991). They

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(intehakaat) which occurred under the green flag (i.e., that of the Syrian revolution), and under the name of the Free Syrian Army.” Other times, there were “false-flag operation(s)” where the regime committed atrocities under Daesh or the revolution’s flag to muddy the waters (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami, 2016, p. 245).

have a morality and devotion which lends credence to their proofs, “despite all the disappointments, frustrations and temptations…[they] remained faithful to their founding principles” (Zaitouneh, 2013a).

Among Syrians, they now have “cultural esteem” (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami, 2016, p. 37), with folkloric tales of their bravery and courage. They include a diverse and broad spectrum of revolutionaries who engage in high-risk dissent, be they protestors, intellectuals, dissidents, human rights activists, or those who took up arms against the Assad regime. Some are recognized as icons for their pivotal roles in the revolution’s trajectory, profiled in initiatives such as the *100 Faces of the Syrian Revolution*, a campaign of Syrian activists from around the world to remember their revolutionaries (100 Faces of the Syrian Revolution Group, 2020). Others remain nameless to the public at large, though they of course have names intimately remembered by those who knew them. The revival and acknowledgement of the names of radical subjects within radical rhetoric is a deliberate act of defiance to the regime’s attempts for all Syrians to become “The Assad self” (Al Haj Saleh, 2017, p. 34).

It is precisely because of their anti-hierarchical nature that their rhetoric is informative of how we might think anew time-worn historical and theoretical constructs. Radical subjects possess rhetorical skills which are not just instruments of persuasion but are equipment for revolutionary activity which expand cultural, historical, social and intellectual thought. This affords the radical subject rhetorical ethos and authority, as well as the quality of rhetorical invention as political theorists. Their persuasive qualities as ethical actors allow them to wield power in how we understand revolution. Their rhetoric offers “proof,” i.e., a validity or weight of sorts, in how we conceive of liberatory struggle.

Objective 2: Creating Radical Rhetoric (Rhetorica Docens)

Liberatory moments test our ability to discern the rhetorical significance of extreme political and revolutionary acts under extant critical paradigms. Though purporting an alertness to the real conditions of the world, the practical, and the literal, as opposed to the imaginary, the aesthetic, and the formal (Jasinski, 2001),[11] recent trends in critical rhetorical studies have been inimical to the localities of the radical subject. I offer radical rhetoric as a model for how we might forge solidarity with liberatory transnational social movements. Radical rhetoric introduces an explicit hierarchy which values the rhetorical forms of the radical subject above intersectional approaches which place multiple rhetorical forms on equal footing (Enck-Wanzer, 2006). As a mode of rhetorical practice, radical rhetoric is poised to resolving controversies surrounding transnational social movements which fall into the "confrontation between two world-views" (Munif, 2020). It is not a methodology in the precise sense of the word, but an orientation toward rhetorical practices necessitated by the presence of the radical subject. Radical subjects are foundational to radical rhetoric: through their acknowledgement alternate groundings for solidarity are made possible. To phrase it differently, solidarity is an "empty shell" if not accompanied by a heeding to the radical subject and their "internal power differentials" (Flam, 2015, p. 273). With the above in mind, I propose the following tenets as pivotal to radical rhetoric:

(1) Acknowledgement of the Radical Subject's Testimony as Sacred Knowledge

Radical subjects have a political consciousness which untethers normative ontological and epistemic conceptualizations within society. Their agency has an embodied apparatus which bears superior forms of lived knowledge or testimony. The radical subject has access to higher truths inaccessible to those removed from revolutionary struggle. With this in mind, radical rhetoric moves away from calls for the *inclusion* of vernacular rhetorics into a conversation which acknowledges the radical subject's testimony as sacred - born of the epistemic relevance of social location and the boundedness of knowledge. Moreover, the credibility of the radical subject is based on their testimony being entrenched in memory – i.e., "latent credibility" developed from intersubjective and intergenerational forms of memory.

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[11] Here, I gesture to the rhetorical practice the intends to enlarge the scope of rhetorical practice and to prevent deterministic understandings of history (Jasinski, 2001).

(2) Acknowledgement of the Radical Subject as the Starting Point to Resolving Uncertainty

Radical rhetoric realizes the wisdom in relinquishing skepticism during the reasoning process by placing the radical subject as the starting point in inquiry in contested spaces where negotiation over meaning is ongoing. Radical rhetoric consecrates the epistemologies of the radical subject to resolve, rather than create, uncertainty. By privileging the radical subject, we allow the radical subject to speak truth "about power to the people" (rather than "to power"), as we, the addressees become "partners in word and deed to change power" (Al Haj Saleh, 2019). We must allow for an orientation toward the radical subject as dictating the primary or "responsible" means of creating meaning.

Together, these contingent premises, when accepted, advance us to a radical rhetorical paradigm – a *positive* vision of politically and ethically driven intellectual work toward emancipatory ends. These axioms, inter-related and invoking one another, propose an innovative heuristic for critical inquiry that opens possibilities for the circling out of dominant narratives when we conceive of those in liberatory struggle, I propose this avenue might be pursued to inculcate solidarity with the radical subject, whenever, wherever, and whomever they might be.

Outline of Dissertation Chapters

Radical rhetoric, as practice and theory, is advanced through the seven chapters in this dissertation. Chapter 1 *Theorizing Radical Rhetoric* details the rationale behind the rhetorical approach of the dissertation and its overarching objectives. In Chapter 2 *Literature Review and Method***,** I provide necessary context with regards to how the Syrian revolution has been studied, portrayed, and represented. This includes: (1) an overview of the "angles" through which the revolution has been addressed; (2) a synopsis of prevalent perceptions of the Syrian revolution in media and popular discourse; and (3) an overview of recent trends in rhetorical social movement scholarship and dimensions of rhetorical practice deemed expedient to how dissenting groups shift away from a normative social imaginary. Throughout this section, I identify the disciplinary, methodological, and epistemological limitations of how the Syrian revolution is situated in the scholarship and popular discourse. In setting the exigency for the dissertation, I highlight the neglect of transnational liberatory social movements such as the Syrian revolution within the communication discipline and the urgency for an interventionist consideration of radical subjects who underpin revolutionary phenomena. I conclude with a discussion of the methodological approach undergirding this dissertation.

Chapter 3 *Radical Rhetoric: Toward a Telos of Solidarity* presents the conceptual framework of radical rhetoric as a paradigm which opens spaces within rhetorical studies for liberatory transnational social movements, particularly those which exist in marginal localities and peripheral spaces. In this foundational chapter, the theoretical foundation for the dissertation is offered. Radical rhetoric centers the radical subject's lived knowledge as determining (as opposed to having "bearing" on) meaning. Radical rhetoric realizes the wisdom in relinquishing skepticism during the critical reasoning process by placing the radical subject as the starting point in inquiry in contested spaces where negotiation over meaning is ongoing. This approach acknowledges the radical subject's testimony as born of the epistemic relevance of social location and the boundedness of knowledge. Radical rhetoric consecrates the epistemologies of the radical subject as inculcating the imperative for action on behalf of the oppressed.

After presenting the theory of radical rhetoric in Chapter 3, the remaining chapters present case studies of the practice of radical rhetoric, in which various theoretical/intellectual precepts are derived from the radical rhetoric of Syrian radical subjects. Chapter 4 *Reverse Moral Exceptionalism & the American Left: When Do Villains become Heros?* illustrates the discursive dis-alignment between the continuum of lived experiences of revolution and those external to it. The assassination of Qasem Soleimani is selected as a case study manifesting the schism between the ontological and epistemological realities of the radical subject and those who might gather in solidarity with them. I select the American Left to illustrate how even "just-minded people" may be oblivious to those in revolutionary liberatory struggle. The key term "reverse moral exceptionalism" is explicated as a nationalist tendency to insist on oneself as central to every event of significance on the world stage. Reverse moral exceptionalism approaches the world from a position of dominance, saturating the space available for others and inducing the inability to listen to the testimony of others. The analysis brings to the fore the dialectical relationship between a hyperbolic identification the imperial self ("I") and non-grievable Syrian radical subjects. Though reverse moral exceptionalism may be thought of as virtuous, worthwhile, or harmless, I illustrate how it imperially positions and silences radical subjects, bringing about indifference to the immense fecundity of revolutionary discourse, the intimacy of testimony and the micropolitics of resistance. This chapter therefore provides context for how radical subjects are positioned and solidarity averted.

Chapter 5 *On Syrian (Post)Memory: Our Hearts Haven't Been Quenched, Yet* is dedicated to explicating the radical subject's latent credibility and the role of "knowledge-legacies" in revolutionary practice. Centered around family oral histories of Suhail's political exile and Rafi's murder by the regime during the Events of the early 1980s, I argue for the historied nature of revolution and how memory functions as a vehicle for confronting transnational social movements within authoritarian contexts. I locate the intimate spatialities in which radical subjectivities emerge and are enacted beyond the performativity of public displays of memory. In doing so, I trace the implications of second-generation memories, or (post)memory, on what I term the "latent credibility" of radical subjects. Specifically, I structure latent credibility along the following two registers: (1) (post)memory as Resistance and (2) (post)memory as Knowledge. Latent credibility, built on the onto-epistemological authority of intergenerational memories inherited from those with ancestral power, saturates revolutionary practice and enriches the epistemic salience of the radical subject. This chapter complicates how we conceptualize social movements and radical subjects beyond the visibility of the 'political street.' In ending, I underscore the imperative for a heightened sensibility to the subversive forms of resistance of historicized radical subjects. I argue that to understand revolution, we must discern how latent credibility informs the weight of the radical subject's testimony. This chapter also illustrates how intensified contemplation to the radical subject does not mean one has lost sight of the social and historical dimension of their agency.

Chapter 6 "*Syrians are Palestinian, Syrians are Black": Revolutionary Calls for Solidarity in the Peripheral* considers the rhetorical potency of calls for solidarity of radical subjects and the new modes of deliberation which they initiate. I identify an "*elastic periphery*" as a rhetorical form of argument which constructs a spatiality where radical subjects around the world are relational, and together, central, to a global revolutionary project. A panoply of events and social actors are weaved together to overcome the circumvention of hegemonic frames which cast certain struggles as suffering from deficits. The elastic peripheral does not emphasize identification through a common "enemy" as much as punctuate the relationality of struggles to elicit rhetorical scaffolding for solidarity. This chapter demonstrates how the anti-colonial and anti-racist reverberations of revolutionary struggle are revived to draw strategic alignment with the Palestinian Liberation Movement and the Black Lives Matter Movement. The elastic peripheral legitimizes claims to solidarity, hinting at the possibilities which occur when differently situated subjects at the periphery are in concert.

Finally, Chapter 7 bookends the dissertation with concluding thoughts on the driving intellectual quest of this work to examine how might one resolve the dissonance between revolution as lived and experienced by radical subjects and its perception by the outside world. In this chapter, I highlight *belief* as the leap required of the audience of radical rhetoric to transcend forces acting in a direction divergent from that desired for solidarity. I accentuate radical rhetoric's potential to alleviate realities which oppress and invisibilize struggles through marking belief at the heart of radical rhetoric. By underlining this dimension of radical rhetoric in the terminus of this dissertation, belief is necessitated as the rhetorical response to the radical subject's motifs of hope and resistance in confronting injustice. In the second part of the chapter, I consider the conceptual potency of radical rhetoric in the diaspora as a continuation of the work this dissertation sets out to accomplish. In particular, I conceptualize "*hope talk"* as a multi-directional site of rhetorical invention with salience in the diaspora. To conclude, I sketch the limitations and challenges faced completing this dissertation, after which I speculate about prospects for radical rhetoric outside the liminal case study of Syria.

Chapter 2

Literature Review and Method

This literature review is divided into three sections. The first section characterizes the “angles” through which the revolution has been addressed in public scholarship. I argue that the literature on the Syrian revolution principally relies on historical, cultural, auto-biographical, and/or (geo-) political analysis. With some noteworthy exceptions, I note how by and large the rhetoric of Syrian revolutionaries has not been theorized. Instead, scholarship on the Syrian revolution, including my own (Ghazal Aswad, 2019a, 2020a; Ghazal Aswad & de Velasco, 2020), has excessively depended on the discourses of the empowered, i.e., those who control and design the public space. The second section provides an in-depth overview of common perceptions of the Syrian revolution in media and popular discourse and the ways in which the revolution has been controversial and misunderstood. In the third section, I examine rhetorical social movement scholarship and dimensions of rhetorical practice deemed expedient to how dissenting groups shift away from a normative social imaginary. Here, I identify the disciplinary, methodological, and epistemological limitations of how social movements are situated in the scholarship. I conclude by underscoring the neglect of transnational liberatory social movements such as the Syrian revolution within the communication discipline and the urgency for an interventionist consideration of radical subjects who underpin revolutionary phenomenon.

Characterizing the Literature on the Syrian Revolution

Historical Materialism: State Resilience and State Violence

The literature on the Syrian revolution has preferred a structural/materialist approach chronicling the Assad regime's strategic response in crushing the revolution, the revolution's transition toward militarization and the complexity of geo-political presence in the region (e.g. Achcar, 2016; Ajami, 2012; Al Haj Saleh, 2017a; Aldoughli, 2020b, 2020c; Alford & Wilson, 2015; Daher, 2020; Dagher, 2019; Di Giovanni, 2016; Hashemi & Postel, 2013; Heydemann & Leenders, 2011; Hinnebusch & Zintl, 2015; Lister, 2015; Matar & Kadri, 2019; Wedeen, 2019).This scholarship attends to the discursive and institutional violence of the Assad regime, prioritizing a historicized understanding of the regime's repression, its authoritarian resistance, and social base. For example, Al-Haj Saleh's *The Impossible Revolution: Making Sense of the Syrian Tragedy* traces the historical arc of the revolution, in particular the role of the state, the shabiha (state-sponsored thugs), Syrian fascism, and militant nihilism in derailing the peaceful protest movement, along with the author's personal story as a hunted dissident (Al Haj Saleh, 2017a). Dagher's *Assad or We Burn the Country* retells the saga of the Assad family from the perspective of Manaf Tlass (a defected General in Syria's elite Republican Guard and a confidante of Bashar al-Assad) and regime insiders (Dagher, 2019).[1]

Wedeen's *Ideology, Judgement, and Mourning in Syria: Authoritarian Apprehensions (2019)* offers an analysis of the "workings of ideology," i.e., how the regime exploits digital media to create fracture among the citizenry in their pursuit of political change. She explores the complicated ideological machinations of the regime to seduce the “ramadiyyin” (“grey people”) - an ambivalent mass of citizenry lukewarm toward revolution, invested in stability and fearful of alternatives. In a similar vein, Aldoughli examines the Syrian state’s employment of religion and secularity, when convenient, as a source of legitimacy (Aldoughli, 2020c, 2020b).

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[1] Dagher was the only journalist for a western newspaper in Damascus from 2012 to 2014 before he was detained and exiled.

Della Ratta's *Shooting a Revolution: Visual Media and Warfare in Syria* (2018) scrutinizes the regime’s performance of violence, specifically the warfare which occurs when an armed man *shoots* at a peaceful activist who is using their camera to *shoot*. While revolutionaries use film as a means of resistance, the regime uses film as a tool to appease society. Della Ratta identifies how musalalat (soap operas) are a “soft” political tool for “tanwir” (i.e., enlightenment or reformist ideals of ‘progress’) and “tanfis” (i.e., letting off steam) of the populace. While these are some of the more prominent works, there are many rich portraits of the structural, economic, and institutional dimensions of the Assad regime that have buttressed authoritarian rule and led to proxy war.

Cultural Production of the Syrian Revolution

Others showcase an archival yet poetic remembrance of the Syrian revolution’s cultural expression. *We Crossed a Bridge and it Trembled: Voices from Syria* curates testimonies from Syrians on the evolution of their revolutionary experiences (Pearlman, 2017). These are published without interpretation to preserve their rawness and authenticity. *Syria Speaks: Art and Culture from the Frontline* is an anthology of cultural products from Syrian artists, such as graffiti, stencils, memoirs, songs, cartoons, poems, and photography (Halasa et al., 2014). *Dancing in Damascus: Creativity, Resilience and the Syrian Revolution* analyzes the cultural production of “activist-artists” from the first four years of the of the revolution (cooke, 2017). cooke evocatively renders the revolution's aesthetics of resistance to the physical and affectual violence of the regime.

Alternative media as a space for news beyond regime control has also garnered interest as a form of revolutionary cultural production. For example, Crilley (2017) explores how "the pain of others" is represented in the social media platforms of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, while Wessels (2017) draws similarities between revolutionary Syrian video activists and the "Kinoks" that formed part of Dziga Vertov's Soviet filmmakers collective of realist cinematic practice. Television serials are also a nodal point of study in deliberating revolutionary discourses (Halabi, 2019; Alhayek, 2020).

(Auto)-Biographical & Grassroots Accounts

A handful of journalists have documented the inner workings of the revolution through intimate first person auto-biographical accounts. Alawite journalist Samar Yazbek shares her secretive forays to sites of protests, her interviews with Free Syrian Army battalion leaders, and the Assad regime's threats to assassinate her and her daughter, before she eventually fled the country (Yazbek, 2012, 2015). War correspondent Janine de Giovanni's book *The Morning They Came For Us: Dispatches from Syria* (2016) offers a visceral account of the lived experiences of Syrian revolutionaries, be it non-violent activists, rebel fighters, pro-regime nuns, or artists such as the Alawite actress Fadwa Suleiman. She relays harrowing stories of prisoners who survived torture, soldiers murdering fellow Syrians, mothers who lost their children because of the unavailability of medical care, and refugees who returned to Syria because there was nowhere else to go. Journalist Rania Abouzeid's *No Turning Back: Life, Loss* *and Hope in Wartime Syria* (2018), who clandestinely entered Syria numerous times while blacklisted by the regime, chronicles the revolution through the lens of multiple individuals, namely a legal scholar, a protestor, an Arabic literature student and a field clinic doctor. Syrian-American journalist and human rights lawyer Alia Malek's *The Home That Was Our Country: A Memoir of Syria* (2017) threads her struggle to reclaim her grandmother's Damascus home at the start of the uprising with textured historical narratives of country, place, and memory. These penetrating perspectives of the revolution weave eye-witness testimony into the global tapestry of war and human suffering.

One of the most celebrated books on the revolution, *Burning Country: Syrians in Revolution and War*, provides a historical account of the revolution from the initial graffiti protests to the taking up of arms by the opposition whilst relying on first-hand testimonies of activists (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami, 2016). Munif's *The Syrian Revolution: Between the Politics of Life and the Geopolitics of Death* (2020) connects the revolution's popular nationalism and democratic sentiments to Syria's history through a macropolitical analysis of the geography of violence of the regime and a micropolitical analysis of revolutionaries' self-management of the bread distribution lines of liberated areas. However, by and large, Syrian revolutionaries are "the topic of study but not as fully engaged and equal individuals in the realm of intellect and agency" (Aldoughli, 2020a, p.2). To date, aside from piecemeal efforts, the "breathtaking richness of the defiant protests and resilient claims-making [of Syrian revolutionaries]…their inventiveness…and their lucidness in expressing their grievances and demands" is yet to be ascertained in their full splendor (Leenders, 2013b, p.275). In a plethora of ways, the overemphasis on structural factors has “strip[ed] Syrians of their own agency, responsibility, political decisions, and indeed, of their capacity for conceptual reflection” (Aldoughli, 2020a, p. 1). The political subjectivities of Syria’s revolutionaries, the very ideas of the revolution, are not recognized in all their richness, nuance, and “collective insolence” (Beinin & Frederic, 2013, p.247).

Prevalent Conceptions of the Syrian Revolution in the Media and Popular Discourse

In spite of the staggering amount of first-hand documentation by activists on the ground,[2] the revolution has been notoriously mysterious, complex, controversial, and misunderstood, allowing narratives dismissing the revolution to endure uninterrupted. Wafa Mustafa, an activist campaigning for the release of her detained father, names this the “competing war of narratives” (Mustafa, 2021). Hegemonic narratives, even at the initial stages of peaceful protest, insinuated Syrian revolutionaries are exempt of “good guys,”[3] Islamic extremists, proxies of Western imperialism and/or belittled the human right abuses against them. While the media referred to a “civil war,” Syrian revolutionaries eschewed the term for its suggestion of an equal playing field between the oppressor and the oppressed, arguing the conflict is better characterized as a one-sided genocide against civilians and poorly armed revolutionaries. Odai, a Syrian activist articulates this logic:

> You want me to call one of the greatest revolutions in the world a “civil war”? No, it is not a civil war. It was never for a day a civil war, or an armed struggle. It

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[2] Syrians engaged as activists, revolutionaries, journalists and photojournalists, uploading millions of images, videos, blogs and tweets as events unfolded (Al Haj Saleh, 2017; Boghani, 2019; Sigal, 2016; Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami, 2016).

[3] For instance, see Robert Fisk’s article “Syria’s ‘moderates’ have disappeared... and there are no good guys” in the Independent.

> was a revolution, and it still is a revolution. And in the heart of Syrians, a revolution. No matter how much the world wants to change our revolution, it is a revolution and it will remain a revolution. (Farah, 2021)[4]

In what follows, I parse through recurring narratives around the Syrian revolution which have currency in popular and political discourse, namely as (1) an islamist revolution; (2) a "brown" revolutionary against a "white" leader; and (3) a sectarian revolution.

An Islamist Revolution

Broadly defined, hegemonic narratives insist the revolution is a symmetrical conflict between the Assad regime and Islamic extremists, often ignoring Syrian revolutionaries. In the vacillation between the dichotomous prism of the Assad regime and zealot Islamist groups is a complete subversion of the revolutionary grassroot movement. This rhetorical framing obscures the birthplace of the revolution and the creation of the Free Syrian Army as stemming from a peaceful protest movement. The entry of extremist factions into the arena allowed for the promulgation of a "war on terror" narrative to "whitewash" the Assad regime by characterizing the entire Syrian opposition as its violent Islamist counterpart (Kudaimi, 2017).

Undeniably, the vernacular rhetoric of Syrian resistance against the Assad regime, though initially worldly and secular, in certain localities, is asserted within religious formations. For example, the chant 'Ya Allah Malna Ghairak Ya Allah' (O God We Have Nothing But You) became ubiquitous among protestors (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami, 2016, p. 109). Over time, a segment of Syrian revolutionaries drew justification for their fight against tyranny from their religion.[5] For many, there was a genuine devotedness from which Syrians found succor for their resistance. For these revolutionaries, demands for political and civic freedom were not incongruent with Islamic piety. Arguably, this is *in part* propelled by the fact that historically, Syrians existed in a politically impoverished society without channels within which to practice their political freedoms, allowing for Islam to "provide a cultural base for their emotions" (Al Haj Saleh, 2017a; Al Haj Saleh, 2017d).

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[4] Author's translation.

In numerous ways, the Syrian resistance, with its at times Islamic vernacular, makes the Syrian opposition culturally unrecognizable as freedom-fighters within hegemonic notions of "civil discourse" and utopian "secular" revolutionaries. By vernacular, I am implying the language of the working class, the disempowered, and the marginalized in their everyday communicative exchanges when resisting oppression. From this perspective, the vernacular of Syrian revolutionaries relies on culturally and socially specific language reflective of their local knowledge, value schemes and traditions (Hauser, 2008). Vernacular discourses commonly manifest themselves within religious and cultural formations (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994). The expectation that the Syrian opposition fall into either "secular" or "Islamist" narratives overlooks that Syrians do not live in either binary (Munif, 2017). Additionally, because early protests came out of mosques (the only place large numbers of people could gather without arousing suspicion) became a ready-made pretext to oppose the revolution (Al Haj Saleh, 2017d).[6]

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[5] I am cognizant of the remarkable diversity of revolutionaries and activists, including Christians, atheists, secularists, and "secular" Muslim revolutionaries, who were critical in the long-term trajectory of the Syrian revolution. But here, I am responding to the heighted attention to the character of Syrian revolutionaries perceived as Muslim.

[6] Christians, Alawites, Druze and atheists attended Friday prayers with the singular intention of joining the protest afterwards (Pearlman, 2017; Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami, 2016). Even mosques (considered an

A demand for a "pure" secularity and putative separation of religion from resistance effaces the manifold realities of Syrians. To use the language of Judith Butler, the Islamic vernacular serves as a ""frame" differentiat(ing) the lives we can apprehend from those we cannot" (Butler, 2009, p. 3).

These narratives are no doubt rooted in acute reservations about the Islamic character of Syrian revolutionaries (Achcar, 2013). A "generalizing Islamophobia," regardless of whether revolutionaries are "moderate" Islamists who seek democracy or extremists, labels all facets of the Syrian opposition (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami, 2016). The sole detail which matters about is Muslimness or absence of "ideologically pur(ity)" (McKelvey, 2015). Islam becomes the determining explicative variable and impediment to supporting Syrian revolutionaries, particularly when "Islamist" and "Muslim" are synonymous. A fixation on the "religiosity" of revolutionaries makes them indistinguishable from the atrocities of Daesh (Alford & Wilson, 2015). In a rhetorical slippage, Syrian revolutionaries are casually and routinely conflated with extremists in one hyphenated monstrous identity. Al Haj Saleh differentiates between "believers" and "fundamentalists" and the consequences of the slippage between the two in hegemonic narratives:

> The majority of Syrians become invisible and nonexistent. But we do exist, and it is not true that the majority of believers are the natural social base for the extremist groups. I made six profiles of fighters in Eastern Ghouta in the spring of

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appropriate form of indigenous infrastructure appropriated for igniting resistance as was the case with African American churches in the American Civil Rights Movement) are highly monitored by the Syrian state and were not a place of free congregation or recruitment (Pearlman, 2020). Friday prayers were the rare exception where people could legally gather and organize.

> 2013. Five of them were believers, but none was a fundamentalist. (Al Haj Saleh, 2015a)[7]

An Islamic theological corpus imbues resistance to oppression, even if not (necessarily) the raison d' être of the revolution. Syrian revolutionaries are denied legitimacy for not knowing how to deploy their political ideologies within acceptable "civil" discourse. The expectation of cultural assimilation here is another tactic of political and imperial domination. Islam is "culturally" anti-democratic (Massad, 2015), an assumption fueled by the belief that Islamic theology is intrinsically alien to civil modes of resistance. Within a Christian-centric global religious hierarchy (Grosfoguel, 2012), Islam cannot incite, or even co-exist, with emancipatory mobilization. The Islamic vernacular therefore is one of the tools harnessed to "muddy the waters" and make terroristic the very forms of political dissent which these movements seek to displace.

To contextualize the damage of these skewed narratives, and without denying the disturbing presence of extremist groups in Syria, it is important to note the Assad regime has been far more destructively violent against the country's people than any other group in the country. Although media and scholarly debate disproportionately focuses on extremist groups, ninety four percent of the victims of the revolution were killed by the Assad regime with support from its Russian and Iranian allies (Syrian Network for Human Rights, 2017). A "fractional perspective" heightens attention to killings by Daesh over the regime's chemical weapons attacks or aerial bombing (Al Haj Saleh, 2015b).

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[7] Elsewhere, the journalist Hassan Hasan nuances these designations: "Syria is no longer witnessing a struggle of moderates versus extremists, but of extremists versus both moderates and religious moderates." Fighting groups were not ideologically homogenous in terms of religion, with a few joining groups because of effectiveness and discipline on the battlefield, rather than religious ideology (Hassan, 2013). Indeed, within the Free Syrian Army for instance, fighters "differ so widely in the extent they adhere to the moral principles of the revolution…the vast disparity they embody are a carbon copy of real life in all its diversity" (Yazbek, 2015, p. 15).

Neither Daesh nor any rebel factions possess the attack helicopters or fighter jets that "rained death" on civilians in the thousands (Alford & Wilson, 2015; Dagher, 2019).[8]

In actuality, Syrian revolutionaries are the victims of both extremist groups and the Assad regime (Hassan, 2014). Human rights activist Raed Fares shares that "the truth is, Syrians are victims of two forms of terrorism. From one side, Assad's terrorism, and, from the other, Daesh and other extremists' terrorism" (Griswold, 2018). Syrians fighting both the Assad regime and extremist parties are "missing from these conversations" (Mrie, 2017). In tandem to this denial of their existence, colonial notions of weak individuality position revolutionaries as "mindless fighters" manipulated by various regional and global powers, a narrative which has found a home in the anxiety over Western-led regime change (due to the perception that the revolution is conspiracy against an anti-imperialist state) (Al Haj Saleh, 2017b; Munif, 2017, 2020). Among the most egregious of claims is that the White Helmets, a humanitarian organization of search and rescue workers who rush to the rubble to salvage civilians, are an al-Qaeda linked terrorist organization (Bellingcat, 2018).[9] These disinformation campaigns have also denied the regime's use of chemical weapons (Bellingcat, 2018), an erasure of genocide which has been a thorn in our side.[10] To put it simply, Syrian revolutionaries defending and rescuing their communities are barely marked, registered, or acknowledged, and certainly without full cognition of the courageous facets of their existence.

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[8] Daesh did not arise *ex nihilo*, but Assad himself was responsible for its presence in Syria in a systematic strategy of releasing previously imprisoned Islamic extremists who had fought against American troops in Iraq. This was part and parcel of a concerted effort to radicalize and discredit the democratic revolution, including abandoning posts at the border so Al Qaeda fighters could cross from Iraq into Syria in 2012 and the imprisonment and killing of leading peaceful activists (Gutman, 2017; Munif, 2017).

[9] For more on their work, watch *The White Helmets* which won Best Documentary (Short Subject) at the 89th Academy Awards (von Einsiedel, 2016).

[10] For a detailed analysis, listen to the BBC's Mayday podcast (BBC, 2021).

A "Brown" Revolution against a "White" Leader

Following from the above, another dynamic at work is the performativity of the "bourgeois" Baath party of Assad, insinuating a type of semiotic whiteness and hyper-secularism. A representational politics of whiteness allows for the signification of the Assad regime as identifiable within a politics of aesthetics. Bashar Al Assad's appearance operates as a site through which a modern Syrian identity is staged: young, foreign-educated, open to the West, and polished (Al Haj Saleh, 2017d). Assad's deliberate "soft" aesthetic and "non-totalizing" image is a way of disciplining citizens and implementing state control (Wedeen, 1999, p. 29). This eases a pitting of the "secular regime" against "fanatical extremists" (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami, 2016, p. 216). Bashar Al Assad's "expensive suits and neckties" are instruments of whiteness affording him legitimacy to rule a nation of "black" Syrians with shaggy beards (Al Haj Saleh, 2018a; Naprushkina, 2020). Bashar Al Assad and his "elegant" wife become "symbols of the First World inside Syria," a couple with whom the First World can easily identify with (Al Haj Saleh, 2011). The image of a terrorist Bashar Al Assad and his regime's brutality are irreconcilable with scripts of his whiteness and signified position as a modernizer.

In conditions of crisis, our allegiances are to those who are "recognizable to us, and who conform to certain culturally specific notions about what the culturally recognizable human is" (Butler, 2009, p. 42). And so, the signification of the mild-mannered former ophthalmologist Bashar Al Assad and his British born investment banker wife positions them as preferable to black-clad barbaric Daesh terrorists and

Muslim rebels (Dagher, 2019). These logics are simultaneously informed by class, given the economically and culturally privileged embodiments of the Assad family. This framing has aided and abetted the white-washing of Assad's crimes against various communities in Syria, be it Syrian-Palestinians, the Kurds, or even his own Alawi base (Mrie, 2016). Despite the universality of their calls for freedom, Syrian revolutionaries are seen as counter to these cosmopolitan depictions of the oppressor.

A Sectarian Revolution

Another dominant narrative surrounding the Syrian revolution is that it is a sectarian movement of Sunni-Alawite strife, in which the Sunni majority wants to overthrow the ruling minority. Here, the revolution is portrayed as inimical to racial and ethnic minorities and not based on a genuine desire for reform. In a discourse fashioned on inherited narratives from colonial powers, the regime contributes to these narratives by casting itself as the protector of racial and ethnic minorities. Minorites are tokenized through the regime's supposed protection of them to legitimate the regime's behavior and scorched-earth policy toward the "majority" Arab Sunni population. The Assad regime has "effectively recruited minorities as a social category" (Wedeen, 2019, p. 161), exploiting both real and imagined dangers of racial and ethnic intolerance to its benefit. Identity markers once bequeathed by colonial actors in the country are reinvigorated as a "shield" to camouflage the massacres of the Assad regime (Al Haj Saleh, 2019; Al Haj Saleh, 2019b).

By giving sectarianism a "disproportionate visibility" as a factor in the resistance (Al Haj Saleh, 2018b), the Syrian revolution is articulated within parameters of a sweeping Islamic resistance embedded with orientalist sectarian politics. Parochial conceptions of the region where sectarian identities are innate, deep-rooted, and permanent is used to apprehend the grassroots uprising for self-determination. For example, President Obama spoke of “ancient sectarian differences” as a way of describing the Syrian conflict (Obama, 2013). This is just one instance of what has been a popular retort describing the revolution as mired in ancient blood feuds and primordial hatreds between ethnic and religious sects (Hashemi & Postel, 2017). Even prior to the revolution, these prevailing orientalist categorizations have long been considered insufficient to understanding the region (Vali, 2006). Though I do not deny the presence of sectarianism in the country, the Assad regime has complicated these orientalizing narratives by impelling sectarianism to the surface as a tool of governance to divide the working class solidarity of the revolution (Al Haj Saleh, 2017d).[11] Another recent scholarly effort to examine the revolution, slippingly insists “sectarian” differences are “ethnic” and characterizes the revolution as an “ethnic insurgency’ as the dominant form of contention based on pre-existing “ancestral” differences between Syrians (Mazur, 2021). The author problematically insists that because “nearly all participants were Sunni Arabs,” their revolution was based on “identity claims” rather than a genuine quest for liberation (p.116).

Rhetorical Social Movement Scholarship

Next, I situate the dissertation within developing trends in social movement rhetorical scholarship. This section is structured around the following themes in the scholarship: (1) social movements as ecosystems;(2) rhetorical embodiment; (3) the positionality of the rhetorical critic; and (4) undertheorizing the rhetorical study of the Syrian revolution.

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[11] From the perspective of the Syrian revolution, the Assad regime, along with majority Iranian-militia and Hezbollah allies, and Alawi shabiha (state-sponsored “thugs”) are more intensely sectarian than the resistance has ever been (Badran & Smets, 2018; Hashemi & Postel, 2017).

Social Movements as an Ecosystem

Though rhetorical social movement scholarship has traditionally been leader centered (Enck-Wanzer, 2006), recent incursions into the field view social movements as a fluid ecosystem with a plethora of rhetorical purposes, actors and bodies (Crick, 2020, p. 21). The field has shifted from the study of presidential speeches of charismatic leaders toward "innumerable movements of people, objects, processes, and events," including non-human actors such as manifestos, slogans, bodies, money, and local news stations (Crick, 2020, p. 21). This transition inculcates an engagement with the confluence of forms habitually regarded as "externalities" to social movements (Endres & Senda-Cook, 2011). Enck-Wanzer (2006) suggests adjusting the focus beyond singular rhetorical forms to an "intersectional rhetoric" in which multiple rhetorical forms are placed on equal footing without privileging one over the other. For instance, he explicates how radical organizations with no clear leader (such as the Young Lords) utilize body rhetoric in conjunction with alternative rhetorical forms, such as verbal, embodied and visual rhetorics, in the resistance to colonial oppression. Another case in point is scholarship which has taken the border as a concept that informs identity and agency in social movements (Cisneros, 2012; Ghazal Aswad, 2020c) or which argues for the rhetoricity of place as a heuristic in social movements (Endres & Senda-Cook, 2011). An intersectional approach to social movements demands attention not be restricted to certain aspects of rhetoric, while obscuring others.

Rhetorical Embodiment

At the forefront of the critical rhetorical turn is an acknowledgement of the rhetorical performance of abstract and actual bodies, or what is referred to as "body rhetorics." The intersectional approach in social movement scholarship takes embodiment as a prime rhetorical artifact, both in its symbolicity, discursivity, and materiality. In this calculation, the body is a "vehicle for rhetorical performance" (Butterworth, 2008). At least until the 1970s, the implicit "body" in traditional rhetorical scholarship was almost exclusively the actual body of white able-bodied heterosexual men (Chevrette & Hess, 2019). In contemplating rhetoric's historical narrative, Chávez (2015) outlines how the field is dominated by "western, white, heterosexual, physically and mentally able, educated, cisgender, citizen men in Europe and the United States" (p. 162) who have been both the subjects and objects of rhetorical critique. These bodies were central to rhetorical study in terms of their visibility and message production (Enck-Wanzer, 2006).

With time, there has been an impulse to acknowledge other bodies as a "site of cultural inscription, self-regulation, and resistance" (Patterson & Corning, 1997, p. 7). That is, the actual bodies of invisible others as significant to the site of rhetorical study and rhetorical invention. DeLuca (1999) suggests favoring the corporeal performativity of "vulnerable bodies, dangerous bodies, taboo bodies, ludicrous bodies, transfigured bodies" in grassroots resistance movements (1999b, p. 9-10). Calafell critiques the text-centeredness of rhetorical studies and suggests a "theory in the flesh" which acknowledges non-United States citizens, disabled, queer, and people of color's bodies in scholarly inquiry (Calafell, 2010; Yousef, 2020; Yousuf & Calafell, 2018). Some notable incursions in the field exemplify how this kind of rhetorical scholarship might appear.

For example, Osei-Kofia et al. (2018) examine the embodied rhetoric of the clenched fist in the counter demonstration of an Afro-Swedish-Latinx activist who stepped out in front of a march of neo-Nazis. Another study on a white supremacist Mother's Day shooting in a Black neighborhood in New Orleans studies how historically marginalized bodies are constituted in a "national intimate public" and how affective divestment from their suffering occurs (Mack & McCann, 2017).

The Rhetorical Critic

In situ rhetorical field methods in the critical rhetoric tradition draw attention to the bodies of both the rhetor (as a research participant), the critic (as a researcher), and the interpersonal relationships between them (Middleton et al., 2015). McHendry et al. (2014) argue that in situ rhetorical approaches, such as rhetorical fieldwork, embed critics and their bodies in a web of relationships with the phenomena they study. Ideally, a participatory rhetorical approach where affective bonds and vulnerabilities are created is more likely to result in rhetorical action ("immanent" action as opposed to "action-deferred"). In Pezzullo's (2003) influential paper, it is argued that the critic must place themselves in proximity to rhetorical action. Particularly for scholars in the West, an awareness of how their scholarly positionality might reproduce colonial patterns of intellectual dominance is paramount (Shome & Hegde, 2002). Without such an awareness, the boundaries between the text, the rhetorical artifact, and the rhetorical critic are blurred and the critic does not place their body, their security, "on the line." There is "constant vigilance" required in the critic's reflexivity about their epistemic privilege, especially when working with vulnerable communities (Hess et al., 2020).

Following from the above, rhetorical studies has been reckoning with its own coloniality and its influence on hegemonic frameworks within the rhetorical canon. Raka Shome's germinal essay observes how rhetoric scholars would benefit from engaging with post-colonialism (Shome, 1996). More recently, Lechuga (2020) claims rhetoric's social movement activism exhibits a logic of settler colonialism and territoriality. Though some assume that rhetoric's postmodern turn allows the field to surpass its European colonial roots, the "ethnographic gaze" of settler colonial modes of knowledge is still entangled in the field amid the tendency to treat activists as "objects, not theorists" (Lechuga, 2020, p. 383). Of further concern is the danger of false universalism when considering other subjects and locales, and how universalism is imposed on the rest of the world (Na'puti, 2020). As Ono & Sloop (1995) write:

> Rhetoricians cannot take the tools they have now and blithely apply them to the study of cultures. Rather, new methods, approaches, orientations, even attitudes, toward cultures need to be created. (p.42)

In this vein, Shome & Hegde (2002) argue that critical praxis in communication prioritizes axes of power such as race, gender, and the nation within the United States, while not attending to other historical and geo-political dimensions in transnational contexts. This highlights the necessity of thinking transnationally and addressing indigenous issues in academic theorizing. Colpean & Dingo (2018) outline how "drive-by-race" rhetorical scholarship takes whiteness as the norm, and then passingly makes "mention, for example, that people of color may have had a different experience" (p. 306). Another blind spot is how post-colonial research ignores colonial relations which exist outside of the sphere of western influence (e.g. cross-national coalitions between Arabs and Africans) (Chávez, 2009).

Undertheorized: Rhetorical Study of the Syrian Revolution

The communication field is yet to produce a reading of the Syrian revolution from the perspective of those who resisted and protested the Assad regime. The neglect of the Syrian revolution from the communication discipline must be reckoned with, a reminder that rhetoric as a field is not "alive and well" in all places and spaces.[12] To date, rhetorical social movement scholarship has coalesced around the civil rights movement of the 1980s, and over time has extended to Black liberation movements, LGBTQ liberation, feminist movements, and Chicano/o/x rights. Notably, even when the perspectives of non-white subjects are examined, the research is skewed to those within the "Global North," such as Latin American, African American, Indigenous (Native American), and Asian-American perspectives.

By way of illustration, a collection on the rhetorical tactics of historical and contemporary social movements, *The Rhetoric of Social Movements: Networks, Power, and New Media* provides case studies from Black Lives Matter, Occupy, Greek anarchism, indigenous land protests in New Zealand, and Chinese protests, but not a single case study from the Middle East and North Africa region (Crick, 2020). Similarly, *What Democracy Looks Like: The Rhetoric of Social Movements and Counterpublics* attempts to "go global," but only passingly mentions the Syrian revolution in the context of the 2010 Arab Spring (Foust et al., 2017). *National Rhetorics in the Syrian*

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[12] In *Research in Rhetoric: A Glance at Our Recent Past, Present, and Potential Future*, McKerrow states the field of rhetoric is "alive and well" (2010, p. 205).

Immigration Crisis explores national discourses surrounding the Syrian refugee crisis, declines to include the voices of Syrians themselves, a single Syrian author or touch on the revolutionary qualities of Syrian refugees (Tilli & Rountree, 2019).[13] Greene & Frank (2019) inspect presidential rhetorical on Syria, taking a closer look at President Obama and President Trump's rhetoric in the context of chemical weapons and military action in Syria. While attention to rhetorics of power is important, an equivalent attention to the rhetoric of Syrians and their quotidian perspectives is not probed. Other studies, such as Greene & Kuswa (2012) article about the rhetorical cartography of ''regional accents' of the Arab Spring examines "rhetorical movements" between Egypt's Tahrir Square and the Occupy Movement's Zuccotti Park, though only one transient reference is made to Bashar Al Assad and none explicitly to the Syrian revolution.

This is not to say that the Syrian revolution does not share intersections with other revolutionary praxis. As Robin D.G. Kelley (2002) says, "once we strip radical social movements down to their bare essence and understand the collective desires of people in motion, freedom and love lay at the very heart of the matter" (p. 12). Revolutionary movements within the United States, though existing within a civil rights framework, are inextricably linked to the human rights struggles of the colonized across the globe (Daulatzai, 2012; Kelley, 2002). Similar to Syria, African-Americans live under "domestic colonialism" and their freedom struggles are part of the vanguard of anticolonial movements (Kelley, 2002, p.73). By the same token, parallels are detected between the Syrian uprising against neoliberal autocracy and the Zapatista's uprising against the Mexican government over poverty, inequality and exploitation (Marcos, 2001).

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[13] The chapter authors appear to originate from Turkey, Holland, Serbia, Hungary, Poland, the United Kingdom, and Finland.

Moreover, the Syrian revolution falls most obviously within the wave of 2011 “Arab” spring across Tunis, Morocco, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Bahrain against deeply entrenched authoritarian regimes. Much “cross-fertilization” exists between these uprisings: They were all experimental; did not rely on significant “revolutionary accumulation” and were characterized by de-centralized organizing amid the absence of pre-existing structural and/or organizational civil society (Al Haj Saleh, 2021; Galián, 2020). Slogans and rhetorical framing of events were also initially comparable (Lynch et al., 2014). Important congruities are also observed between the Palestinian and Syrian liberation struggles. Though both movements often pitted against each other in a competitive manner,[14] stiff repression against unarmed protestors as a key driver of militarization is identified in both movements (Pearlman, 2016). It is also ofttimes forgotten that since 2011, the Assad regime holds the “dubious distinction” of killing more Palestinians (referred to as “cheaper Syrians”) than Israel (Al-Shami, 2018).[15] In all of the above, the transnational linkages between the Syrian revolution and other liberatory social movements, along structural, genealogical, and relational dimensions, are evident.

Nevertheless, each of these movements differs in ideologies, leadership, and political agendas (Bayat, 2017). The Syrian revolution is so “tragically different” from the other revolutions of the Arab Spring that "it is only the starting date that links it to neighboring revolutions" (cooke, 2017, p. 5). Although the Syrian revolution initially "modeled itself after counterparts across the region," its unique character and anomalous trajectory means that over time, the Syrian revolution became "far more of a polarizing issue" for those willing to stand in solidarity (Lynch et al., 2014, p. 1).

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[14] This is arguably due to the perception that the Assad regime is anti-Israel and better for stability in the region (Ayoub, 2020; Barghouti, 2016), as well as the fact that the Iranian regime, an oppressor in Syria, has been a supporter of the Palestinian cause.

[15] However, Israel was never able to infiltrate the autonomy of the Palestinian people as the Assad regime has for Syrians, resulting in greater internal fissures and less political cohesion in the Syrian resistance (Pearlman, 2016).

Therefore, while acknowledging the intersections between various liberation movements, there remains a need for rhetorical studies to attend to the grassroots liberation struggles of non-white, non-western, and non-United States people from the perspective of those who resisted oppression. Attending to the singular dimensions of the Syrian revolution entails a rejection of the "universal" which has been complicit in the erasure of Others (Wanzer-Serrano, 2012) and a wariness of the tendency to "import concepts drawn from the Greco-Roman tradition into contexts minimally touched by those conceptual traditions" (Olson, 2012, p. 132). Western-based rhetorical approaches are not "elastic," especially in contexts which "lack the basic structures" of the experiences of these populations (Martinez, 2021, p. 127). As yet, we do not have the frameworks necessary to access the emancipatory qualities of this genus of revolutionary struggle. In the words of Raka Shome, "while critical (rhetorical) theory has already produced a rich body of work in rhetorical studies, we do need to expand our critical/rhetorical frameworks… to yield new ways of looking, feeling, thinking, and being, that are transnationally responsive and responsible" (Shome, 2013, p. 517). Not only does the Syrian revolution, as a radically transformative movement, deserve in-depth rhetorical study, but arguably, it requires new modes of theorization and lines of inquiry. And so, this dissertation addresses the "undertheorized" revolution (Pearlman, 2020, p.2) to remedy, to the degree possible, the “deficiencies of analysis” of grassroots rhetoric (Munif, 2020, p.145).

With an eye toward generating theoretical approaches to freedom struggles, I re-think critical rhetorical theory with a decolonial lens beyond just the inclusion of an “interesting” case study from the “Global South.” The Syrian revolution, within existing scholarly norms of social movement scholarship, “do[es] not have a space to operate in.” (Munif, 2020, p. 5). Hence, my dissertation crafts a framework which elucidates an alternate vision of what rhetorical excellence might be in the study of transnational liberatory social movements. This vision centralizes, rather than silos, radical subjects within revolutionary movements. Moreover, this dissertation is plainly not a project of inclusion, a “widening of the scope” (Chávez, 2015, p. 163), or an attempt to superficially adopt more voices in the canon. As Chávez (2015) rightly states, “projects of inclusion don’t rupture oppressive structures; instead they uphold and reinforce those structures by showing how they can be kinder and gentler and better without actually changing much at all” (p.166). Following the lead of rhetorical scholars who connect embodied rhetorical forms and anti-colonial agency, I think through the emancipatory possibilities of an embrace of the radical subjects who underpin the revolutionary phenomenon.

Methodology

In this section, I provide an overview of the methodology which guides the dissertation. As explicated earlier, the objectives of the dissertation are: (1) to present radical rhetoric as practice through an analysis of the emancipatory rhetoric of radical subjects and their revolutionary struggle for liberation (*Rhetorica Utens*); (2) the advancement of radical rhetoric as a theoretical framework which arouses the possibility of solidarity with the radical subjects of transnational liberatory social movements (*Rhetorica Docens*). As a result, radical subjects are both sources for analysis and objects of analysis – an oeuvre to delineate the contours of radical rhetoric and to examine the interventions their texts perform at this juncture.

To achieve my research objectives, I perform a close textual reading which engages intimately with and within the texts to uncover the interplay between the extrinsic and intrinsic dimensions of the text (Leff, 1992). Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin, a text may be an "utterance" of the rhetor, but it cannot be studied insularly, but in "dialogue" with other texts (Bakhtin, 1994). A close reading attends to the inventional qualities of the rhetoric, as well as the inner workings of the text, such as arrangement, style, memory, delivery, argument patterns and larger discursive units (Jasinski, 2001). By iteratively putting fragmented rhetorical texts in conversation with one another, I take an equivocal approach to both theory and practice which vibrates "theory" against "text" and "text" against "theory" (Leff, 1980, p. 347).

Moreover, this dissertation theorizes from Syrian radical subjects, not only as objects of study but as theorists, taking "seriously the epistemic perspective/cosmologies/insights of critical thinkers…thinking from and with subalternized racial/ethnic/sexual spaces and bodies" (Grosfoguel, 2011, p. 3). This dissertation therefore taps into a distinctly rhetorical vein of scholarship which privileges radical subjects and their embodied rhetorics. In this sense, the main selection criteria is that texts are the enunciations of radical subjects in embodied resistance to omnipresent historical oppressors. As focal points of study, these texts are populated with the intentions and imaginings of radical subjects.[16] As constitutive rhetorics, they generate understandings the "revolutionary mood" of radical subjects (a term from Pearlman, 2020, p.14). Embodied rhetoric derives from the materiality of the body (Foust et al., 2017), extending beyond a "text-centric approach" to the symbolicity, discursivity, and materiality of radical subjects. To put it differently, embodied rhetoric encapsulates the phenomenal and the discursive, the lived lives of radical subjects and their lives as talked about. Together, a close reading of their embodied rhetoric brings us closer to their "revolutionary subjectivity," i.e., their collective conceptualization of themselves as a social force re-organizing the distribution of power in society (Matar & Kadri, 2019, p. 146).

Following from the above, the dissertation relies on a loose archive of embodied rhetorics of radical subjects, which I string together into a pastiche of rhetorical texts. As Enck-Wanzer (2006) puts it, this is a "bricoleur, assembling ''texts'' and defining the bounds of a fragmented rhetoric" (p. 184). Though these texts appear fragmented, they are held together under the umbrella of the radical subject. This restrictive approach is taken in opposition to those who call for a maximal "inclusion of multiple participant perspectives into the process of making critical judgments" (Hess et al., 2020, p. 871). Aside from auto-ethnographic texts and my own oral family histories, I rely on documentaries such as *Our Memory Belongs to Us, Our Terrible Country, Streets of Freedom*, *Return to Homs, For Sama*, *Little Gandhi*, *I Will Cross Tomorrow*, and *The Revolution is Being Televised*. Moreover, I include media coverage from Syrian-owned pro-revolution news outlets, such as *Enab Baladi*, *AlJumhuriya*, *Syria Plus*, and *Orient*

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[16] Language as a non-neutral medium "populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293).

TV. Activist artwork, such as the Kafranbel protest banners, the works of the Syrian collective *The Syrian People Know Their Way*, the *Abbounaddara Collective*, the artist Aziz Asmar and caricaturist Ali Ferzat are also included. Beyond these texts, I rely on a diffuse array of texts from interviews, poems, posters, music and protest slogans, at times translating them myself from the original Arabic. Occasionally, in the analysis, I err on the side of including extensive quotations to bring to life the intimate world of the radical subject with the intention of permitting the reader to decipher meanings in the text beyond that devoted to the course of my argument. All translations into English from the original Arabic by myself are indicated in a footnote or within the text.

Notably, the emphasis is on diversity and quality over the selection of a maximal number of texts. The selection of exemplary rhetorical texts or "primitives" of rhetorical art is a more particularized practice of rhetorical study where the texts are "substantial representations" of the radical subject (Leff, 1992, p. 225). Importantly, the method of text selection avoids an undifferentiated textuality which characterizes universalized perspectives on rhetoric where one "staggers aimlessly between texts and contexts" (Leff, 1992, p. 226). In comparison to official archives, these texts are considered footnotes and do not neatly fall into a "box," and therefore may be seen as "more fallible, more prone to bias and distortions than official documents" (Allan, 2009). Nevertheless, the difficulty and diffuse nature of selecting such rhetorical texts means that "there has been this vast repository of experience which hasn't been tapped into" (Allan, 2009). When incumbent, the direct social, political, and historical contexts affecting the production, distribution, and interpretation of radical rhetorics are considered.

In the next chapter, I expand more fully on the theory of radical rhetoric as a theoretical rationale which finds home in the embodied struggles for emancipation from omnipresent historical oppressors.

Chapter 3

Radical Rhetoric: Toward a Telos of Solidarity

"Listen, listen oh sniper, this is my neck and this is my head" (Abdul Baset al Sarout to the regime forces posted around the clock tower in Homs during early protests) (Abdel Baset al Sarout, 2019b)

"I am no longer afraid of death. We breath it in. I wait for it, calm with my cigarette and coffee. I imagine I could stare into the eye of a sniper on a rooftop, stare at him without blinking. As I head out into the street, I walk confidently, peering at the rooftops." (Samar Yazbek, 2012, p. 4)

When the most credible voices become the most negligible, what mechanisms might position us to recognize those with messages of truth? How might we anchor ourselves to solidarity with those in liberatory struggle in face of the "centrifugal dynamic of discourses" (Fiumara, 1990)? In this chapter, I propose a radical rhetorical paradigm constitutively stained by the Syrian revolution and the Syrian subject who has resisted and protested Assad's rule, and yet has been systematically ignored. Not only do such liberatory movements have a major impact on our ways of knowing, but they undeniably test our ability to discern the rhetorical significance of extreme political acts under existing critical paradigms. As a theoretical rhetorical framework, I posit radical rhetoric as a paradigm which arouses the possibility of solidarity with those in revolutionary liberatory struggle. Specifically, I proffer a series of propositions about the "radical subject," a key term I explicate here, that I hope will be provocative. Insofar as we do not allow these radical subjects to be seen or heard, we limit our ability to arrive at transformative outcomes which bring "two worlds" into relation and make encounter possible. In this sense, solidarity does not occur organically, but must be purposively created "by increasing our sensitivity to the particular details" of others (Rorty, 1989, p. xvi).

This chapter is based on one premise: The urgency to *recognize* the radical subject - to make their rhetoric the object of our interior worlds. This is not to question the legitimacy of doubts about the radical subject, but to restore the legitimacy of their truths. As I will put forth, without privileging the radical subject (and a critique of freedom over a critique of domination), we will never intuit the material realities of the radical subject. Without centering the radical subject as an active knower, as one whose lived knowledge determines, as opposed to has “bearing” on meaning, we obviate a recovery of the totality of the radical subject’s lived experience. Foregrounding the radical subject is the only way to balance the favored discursive constructions of those “who move(s) with the least friction and the most favor in the field of rhetoric” (Chávez, 2018, p. 245) with the counter-hegemonic articulations of the oppressed.

In this chapter, I necessarily address the limits of the legitimacy and efficacy of current critical sensibilities toward transnational social movements. This critique identifies an attendant conditionality placed on the radical subject within the pluralism of power/discourse formations which prevents a shift of master-narratives on radical subjects. Within postmodern/post-structuralist tendencies where notions of discourse are the principal objects of investigation, the radical subject’s embodied rhetoric is expected, indeed, dictated, to not be the primary or “responsible” means of creating meaning. The subject may “play a role in the revised conception of rhetoric as corporeal, *but is not the starting point for such a revision*” (McKerrow, 1998, p. 326, emphasis added). Post-modern paradigms operating outside the realms of truth and validity engender a neglect of the censured radical subject, in tandem with the expected workings of hegemonic frameworks. The post-humanist “discursive turn” takes us away from Enlightenment theories on the autonomy of the individual toward an arena where ethical, political, and social knowledge are not based on an a priori abstract truth, or even an agreement on the existence of oppression in society. The commitment to values which this entails prevents the meanings of radical subjects' words from being born. Though such theories purport an alertness to the *real* conditions of the world and encourage attention to historically marginalized subject matters and populations (Shome, 2006), our contemporary modes of meaning-making surrounding revolution are inimical to the localities of the radical subject. We are unable to acknowledge their capacity to act and their competence to speak. By de-centering the radical subject, we delegitimize them, constraining not only what we consider "true," but also "who can speak and with what force" (Campbell, 2005, p. 3).

Fundamentally, the terms under which progressive "inclusionary" efforts operate actively and materially excluded the radical subject, a subject whose agency is already circumscribed and subverted by hegemonic forces. I illustrate how a well-intentioned quest to inhibit deterministic understandings of history enables a detachment from material realities of radical subjects and a curious moral ambiguity retaining the privilege of those in power. Within this conception, an exhaustive inclusion of a kaleidoscope of discursive formations is not a sign of maturity (Leff, 1980), but rather a case of magnetic interference deflecting the compass away from the material reality inherent in the condition of marginality. We sit comfortably as "ironic spectators of vulnerable others," open to helping but cynical and ambivalent toward moral attachments (Chouliaraki, 2013, p. 2). All this is to say, a postmodern approach is not without merit, but has a time and place outside of radical exigencies, certainly outside of liberatory transnational social movements. Though I derive theoretical rationale from the Syrian liberation struggle, radical rhetoric finds home in all struggles for emancipation mired in the vernacular, in the non-normative, and in embodied resistance to omnipresent historical oppressors.

In what follows, I present radical rhetoric as a paradigm which acknowledges: (1) the Radical Subject's Testimony as Sacred Knowledge; and (2) the Radical Subject as the Starting Point in Inquiry. These axioms, inter-related and invoking one another, inculcate solidarity with the radical subject, whenever, wherever, and whomever they might be.

The Radical Subject's Testimony as Sacred Knowledge

Radical rhetoric recognizes the "radical subject" as a specific category of subject who dreams of self-determination. The radical subject is above all an autonomous subject capable of discerning the exigencies of oppressive rhetorical situations and acting with agency to alleviate these oppressions. I restrict considerations of the radical subject to one who hails from historically oppressed communities, is in crisis, and is revolting against repressive hegemonic forces. As a "subject(s)-in-revolution" (Spivak, 1988a, p. 67), the radical subject risks death, injury, and/or imprisonment to create liberatory social change in society. The radical subject's agency is not illusionary or fantastical but has a corporeal quality arising from purposeful political action in the face of formidable constraints. This assertion does not disregard intention, or even dreams, as a factor of analysis, indeed intention is central to the radical subject's actions. Though there is a radical exteriority to their resistance, a manifest dimension of self-empowerment may be identified which does not elide the interior striving of the radical subject. Their *felt* resistance is rooted in optimism defiant of deterministic conceptions of oppressive power.

In the documentary *Streets of Freedom*, an activist describes the ethos of sacrifice of radical subjects: "Chants emerged spontaneously, and we kept on marching. People were saying, "God, these people must be *suicidal*, crazy, why are they doing this? At the same time, they were dreaming of joining us, but they were too cowardly to join" (Shehadeh, 2013b). Another example is Abdul Baset al Sarout, the national football player who embodied these characteristics when he famously decided to put his life on the line to break the siege of Homs to deliver food to those starving in the city:

> I decided that I would return, in solidarity with those under siege, that *we would starve and even die with each other* and if God granted us liberation then *we would all be liberated together*. (al Sarout, 2019b, emphasis added)

Importantly, radical subjects are not located at an unmoving center, as all subjects are in permanent states of transition. The radical subject exists at a moment in time, emerging out of extraordinary, revolutionary events in history. By identifying the radical subject in this manner, I am inviting "new participants into the conversation" (Palczewski, 2003, p. 388). Omar Aziz, a Syrian anarchist and intellectual who lead the move to democratic self-governance in Syria, defines the juncture from which the radical subject emerges:

> A revolution is an exceptional event that will alter the history of societies, while changing humanity itself. It is a rupture in time and space, where humans live between two periods: the period of power and the period of revolution. A revolution's victory, however, is ultimately achieving the independence of its time in order to move into a new era. (Aziz, 2013)

As discussed, the radical subject is endowed with the free will to manifest agency through choice and in creative relation to the world – their rhetoric is necessarily liberatory. They see no other choice but to manifest their will: “how could I be silent, when the volcano of revolution was erupting within me?” (Abdallah, 2021d). Unlike postmodernist notions of agency privileging the multiplicity of the abstract, this notion of agency is born of the pre-discursive ontological positioning anchored in historical, political, and social location. In a radical conception of rhetoric, agency has an embodied apparatus which brings about superior forms of lived knowledge in existential situations, or as will be explicated later, شهادة (i.e., testimony). The radical subject’s testimony has an epistemic realism which simultaneously dis-authorizes other voices:

> [s]ystematic divergences in social location between speakers and those spoken for will have a significant effect on the content of what is said. The unspoken premise here is simply that a speaker’s location is epistemically salient (Alcoff, 1991, p. 7)

Notably, the radical subject does not forsake their oppositionality as a site of contestation. For Syrian revolutionaries, this means “owning politics” (Al Haj Saleh, 2019b), instantiating a radical political imaginary in which their subjectivity is preserved in its entirety. The radical subject does not “bear” on meaning, but “determines” meaning (to borrow the words of Alcoff, 1991, p. 16). In other words, their epistemological agency has a relevance born of the boundedness of knowledge. This boundedness arises from the first-hand exposure to revolution infused with latent credibility. Their latent credibility, built as it is on the onto-epistemological authority of intergenerational memories, saturates rhetorical revolutionary practice and enriches the epistemic salience of the radical subject. As “designated carriers of awesome knowledge” (Hoffman, 2003), a unique awareness of a set of historical problems related to system of power is inculcated.[1] As historical actors, they are “bitten” with knowledge which is historically uncirculated. Their latent credibility, informed by acts of generational witnessing, stands for a critical mode of rhetorical invention. The having-been-there quality of the radical subject’s testimony inspires imaginative iterations of resistance to a historical oppressor.

Often they are the only trusted sources when nation states deny independent media access and freedom to report on events (Dagher, 2019). In Syria, international journalists are denied permission to enter the country, officiating a “stranglehold” over Syria (cooke, 2017, p. 43). Visas are denied to foreign NGOs: for months at a time there was no sign of “an NGO, not the Red Cross, Not a Doctor Without Borders; no one” (Borri, 2015, p. 13). This made international coverage of the revolution “extremely limited” (cooke, 2017, p. 17). At times, even the radical subject’s own cameras could not document the atrocities they were witnessing:

> We cannot always raise our camera to transmit the suffering of a child. Sometimes, we try to raise our cameras, but the camera comes down of its own accord, in humility and shame over what has become of these children and these families. (Abdallah, 2021d)[2]

Other times, they would carry cameras and side arms, shuttling between them as needed. Ziad Homsi, a Free Syrian Army fighter and photojournalist, explains: “we are fighters, and at the same time we are journalists. When you are holding a camera, and you are on the field holding weapon, often you have to put down your camera, turn around, and pick up your weapon" (Atassi & Homsi, 2014).[3] At times, the cameras were shunned, out of concern that it would diminish their اخلاص (i.e., ikhlas, or sincerity of intention).[4] Trad Al Zahori, a regional boxing champion and activist cameraman from Homs who diligently covered events from Al-Qalamoun, to Eastern Ghouta and eventually Yabroud, discloses how the radical subject is at times the sole source of testimony, even to his own suffering:

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[1] More about this dimension of the radical subject is explicated in Chapter 5.

[2] Author’s translation.

> If I don't film this video, who will? And send it to people? But with my brother, when I first started filming, I took the video, the first body was my brother, but I didn't realize it. So I started filming the others, suddenly I realized that was my brother...This is my brother! Guys, this is my brother! Oh God, Oh God. (Pletts, 2014)

This testimony forms a specific kind of knowledge, or epistemological agency, born of the radical subject's visions of his own utopia. Perhaps it is only fitting that Trad Al Zahori would later inadvertently film his own death. With a camera in his hand, he is hit by shrapnel from a mortar explosion, and his voice can be heard behind the camera as he takes his last breath (Jazeera, 2014)

Such subjects "[produce] critical knowledge, which in turn empowers the voice of suffering to make its own cognitive-epistemological intervention by envisioning its own utopia, rather than accepting an assigned position within the amelioratory schemes proposed by the dominant discourse" (Radhakrishnan, 2003, p. 97). In contrast, one of the limitations of postmodern critical paradigms is that though it may pay lip service to epistemological agency, it is in fact "on hiatus" in its praxis. Epistemological agency is given to the academic, or institutional bodies and their "discursive formations" (Aune, 2009). For example, though Foucault saw power everywhere, he prioritized the University and helping professions (Aune, 2009). These professions are more often than not dominated by Western, white, cis-gender men in Europe and the United States who exhibit assumptions embedded in the judicial and public sphere (Chávez, 2015; Hasian & Delgado, 1998). These intellectuals, particularly those from states competing for hegemony, have "disproportionate influence and power over how international political space is represented" (Tuathail & Agnew, 1992, p. 195).

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[3] All of the quotes from Our Terrible Country in this dissertation are taken the English subtitles of the online version of the film, though I have made minor edits.

[4] For instance, it was difficult to get the Free Syrian Army fighter Abdul Qadir al-Saleh (Haji Mari) to consent to be on camera. He once told the journalist Hadi Al Abdallah: "the camera kills our sincerity " (Abdallah, 2021b). This is likely out of concern for رياء (i.e., "riya" or hypocrisy). In Islamic theology, narcissism and admiration of the self in front of others might enter the heart and takes away from one's good intentions.

Indeed, most dismissive critical readings of the revolution are by well-respected intellectuals, journalists, and academics, including Noam Chomsky, Robert Fisk, Patrick Cockburn, and Seymour Hersh, to name a few. Another case in point here is Slavoj Žižek, who confidently asserts that the Syrian people have no "radical-emancipatory" voice and that the Syrian revolution is ultimately a "pseudo-struggle" (Žižek, 2013). Within the postmodern reconceptualization of human subjectivity, there is no differentiation between the forms of the "specific intellectual" and the forms of the social actor engaged in political action. This "equality" of positionalities, and the abandonment of the "originating individual," though seemingly innocuous and egalitarian, enables hegemonic frameworks to do their bidding uninterrupted. While not eliding the subject entirely, the oxymoron of post-modernism's treatment of the subject has been its Achilles' heel. It is therefore no surprise that critical readings of the revolution mirror oppressive hierarchies, denying the Syrian radical subject competency in providing determinative analysis of their revolution:

> Either there is no value to what we say, or we are confined to lesser domains of knowledge, turned into mere sources for quotations that a Western journalist or scholar can add to the knowledge he produces. They may accept us as sources of some basic information, and may refer to something we, natives, said in order to sound authentic, but rarely do they draw on our analysis. This hierarchy of knowledge is very widespread and remains under-criticized. (Al Haj Saleh, 2017f)

Instead, discursive formations of those removed from conflict are afforded theoretical primacy, positioned within the worshipful lens of "the transparency of the intellectual" (Spivak, 1988a, p. 75). These unmarked privileged locations are "discursively dangerous" and should be treated as such (Alcoff, 1991, p. 7). Perhaps counter-intuitively, fundamental to granting the radical subject epistemological agency is a realization of their humanity as innovators of discourse. Post-modern paradigms too often forsake the human to fixate on "technologies of the self," where the human is a machine produced by various effects or social practices (Siegel, 1990; Zarefsky, 2004). As put by Aune (2009), it is not the "subject position" who is being persecuted but vulnerable humans (p. 104). And so, we must be cognizant of the moments in which the concreteness of the "lived pain" of others is evident (Ono & Sloop, 1995). Privileging the testimony of those closest to crisis in the constitution of knowledge is important. *Radical rhetoric is conscious of testimony as sacred knowledge, as foundational to epistemological agency.* Yassin Al Haj Saleh, a former political prisoner and key revolutionary figure, explicates the apprehension he felt writing about the Syrian subject, grappling with an uneasiness about his own “naïve consciousness” (Al Haj Saleh, 2017d, p. ix). However, in overcoming this hesitancy, his words illustrate the recognition of the power of one’s شهادة (i.e., “shahada” or testimony):

> The Syrian revolution released me from such Hegelianisms. For me, naivety has come to mean the *shahada* of a witness, my own shahada about what I was part of, and my sense of things when the seemingly impossible erupted into vivid existence in my country. The impossible was a revolution. (Al Haj Saleh, 2017a, p.ix, emphasis added)

He describes the pre-theoretical, uninterpreted, experiential state of cognition of the Syrian radical subject. These subjects are not given a “single day of reprieve”:

> Not one day has passed without Syrians being killed by airstrikes or under torture. We are not distant from these events, and *we have not had time to catch our breath and look around*, to check on ourselves and on our neighbors, *to think about where we are and ponder the path* that has taken us to where we are today” (Al Haj Saleh, 2017, p. 2, emphasis added).

The “imminent realism” of testimony (Alcoff, 1996) is directly implicated in the superiority of the radical subject’s knowledge. The radical subject is wholly formed through their discourse, and their discourse wholly forms them. At its most extreme, their testimony is incapable of transitioning into a “discursive formation” – human language collapses due to the impossibility of bearing witness to that which has no language (Weheliye, 2014). Their (post)memory is sometimes untranslatable into “discourse,” existing in the realm of private moments with those held in trust and articulated through whispers, images, objects, sounds, silences, and affect which comes to the tongue and cannot be expressed. These emanations are abstract but perceptible, not necessarily literal, but always rhetorical.

One story which surfaces here is the now mythic story of the start of the revolution when five schoolboys in the rural province of Daraa spray-painted “You are next, doctor” (in reference to Bashar Al Assad) on their school walls, innocently hopeful at the wave of protests in the Arab world. The next day, the schoolboys, along with twenty others ranging from eleven to sixteen years old, were taken by security forces to the regional mukhabarat (security) headquarters. The elders of the city pleaded for the boys’ release. Instead, the head of the local mukhabarat Atef Najib told the parents, “Forget you have children. And if you want new children in their place, send your wives over and we’ll impregnate them for you” (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami, 2016). The affront spread like wildfire in the conservative society of Daraa. Local protests exploded seemingly out of nowhere. Hamza Al Khatib, a pudgy thirteen-year-old who participated with his father in these anti-regime protests was detained. Frantic, his family begged authorities to release him. In response, his dead body was delivered to his family a month later, peppered in burn marks and gunshot wounds, his jaw and kneecaps shattered, and his genitals severed. Al Khatib’s family distributed a video of his battered purple body with the realities of his torture evident (see Souriaelna, 2011). The images of his dead body thrust the protests from an “abyss of potentiality” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 130) to the actuality of revolution.

I do not bring these stories to light to spur empathetic appeals or to manipulate emotions, but to signify the rhetorical significance of the body’s testimony as holding “truth,” the unhidden, unconcealed, non-perspectival *alethia*. The reality of torture exists "independent of our consciousness of it" (Cherwitz & Hilkins, 1983, p. 251).[5] One wonders, if the body's scars are not discursively (re-)produced, are they real? Is there another set of facts which vitiate the material reality of a dead boy's body and his family's intimate knowledge of the culprit? Are we all in a position to adjudicate the truth or falsity of their certainty? If radical subjects are "not the center of all experience and change" (McKerrow, 1993, p.60), if their texts are only a "fragment" of the truth (McKerrow, 1993, p. 62), what other "forms" better stand at that mantle?

These rhetorical questions are not an invitation to silence, one is naturally free to "converse" about these matters, but they speak to the non-perspectival testimony of the radical subject. More importantly, there is a specific kind of epistemological agency in which the "body" can articulate cerebral ideas, thoughts and concepts. The normative ideal of discursive formations, often summoned in an academically detached manner, has become more relevant than the embodied epistemologies of the radical subject. Assertions that the subject alone cannot be a truth-teller, but that truth is arrived at through a computation arising from various social actors, fragments, and critics, result in skewed half-truths or semi-truths (Badiou, 1991). I warrant that in moments such as the death of Hamza Al Khatib, the radical subject is *the* "active knower" (Wood & Cox, 1993) and no omniscient perspective is needed to ascertain the whole truth. Emmanuel Levinas shows how a concern with knowledge accumulation and the multiplicity of perspectives proffers an indifference to others:

> It all happens as though the multiplicity of persons…were the condition for the fullness of "absolute truth," as though each person, through his uniqueness,

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[5] Indeed, in my feeble attempt to write, my words fell like logs on the page, hardly doing justice to the distressing images of Hamza Al Khatib found online.

> ensured the revelation of a unique aspect of the truth, and that certain sides of it would never reveal themselves if certain people were missing from mankind. (Levinas, 1994, p. 133)

Importantly, the radical subject is not an ahistorical being, but rather their autonomy exists *despite and notwithstanding* their existence as historicized social actors, i.e., their ontological and epistemological groundings are from within a historical context. As such, the radical subject is not unshackled from contingent cultural contexts, circumstances, and neo-colonial histories – they are not de-centralized "generalized, transhistorical, transpolitical subject(s)" (Ono & Sloop, 1995, p. 20). Often, as will be shown later, intergenerational memories interpellate radical subjects into resistance long before revolution is ignited. In this sense, their testimony operates at multiple registers of spatio-temporality, disavowing the separation between the past, the present, and the future. The fusion of ancestral *post*-memory and *living* memory stands for a critical mode of rhetorical invention. The radical subject exists at a "rhetorical ecology" of various temporal, historical, and lived fluxes which augment their affective power (Diab, 2021).

Within radical rhetoric, even in their most rarefied form, the radical subject is enmeshed in circumstance, place, time, and society. Their testimony encapsulates relevant economic and larger structural entitlements, just as it attends to the particulars of the grassroots. In this respect, radical rhetoric emerges from a space of liminality, retrieving elements of modernist and post-modernist rhetorical theory, whilst crossing beyond them to create a fertile space for human solidarity. However, the radical subject is *not* an empty vessel whose actions are *wholly* attributable to his subjectivation by his society and culture. Resistance cannot be both against oppressive power and also completely a dependent function of it (Said, 1983). Thus, though the radical subject exists in situ and not in vacuo, he is able to act in a politically resistive manner to hegemonic norms. As such, radical rhetoric does not relinquish the radical subject's position as the creative originator of meaning, as a subject experiencing "self-renewal" (Al Haj Saleh, 2017d). In the acknowledgement of their ابداع [i.e., human creativity] is an unmasking of their authority as the originators of meaning.

The radical subject is not unshackled from the coercion of language or social practice, however, they assert their own forms of autonomy despite this coercion.[6] They use the language of the tribe, but they are also able to find their own words. The language of the dominated is conditioned by the dominant, but for radical rhetoric, this "conditioning" is not a defining condition of their existence. Indeed, the musical texts of Syrian revolutionaries show how radical subjects "develop their own language, inventing their slogans and forms of action" from the ancient Arabic language (al Atassi, 2011). That is to say, semantic forms of expression are *immersed* within the traditional practices from which they *emerge and innovate from*. For instance, protest songs used old Syrian wedding melodies (عراضة) as tools of resistance (Issa, 2018), or as I show later, old Iraqi love songs were reappropriated into revolutionary songs ode to the ontolgoies of those in resistance. Classical proverbs were adapted to novel expressions of dissent:

> After the first revolutionary sparks in the country, new linguistic transformations have taken place: the Arabic language and its Syrian dialectal forms have evidenced new word formations, semantic changes, the creation of new proverbs,

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[6] Hence the decision to not label the radical subject definitively as an "oppressed" subject. The difference between the two is evident in Abdel Baset al Sarout's response to a question about why the regime wanted to kill him: "I don't know how I should answer this question. Should I answer it as an individual who has been oppressed, or should I answer it with the spirit of the revolution?" (al Sarout, 2019b)

> and other phenomena that will bear a longterm mark on the linguistic fabric of Syria. (Neggaz, 2015, p. 22)

Autonomy remains with the radical subject, but their agentic voice does not negate embeddedness within habitus. Radical rhetoric therefore is in tension with the assumption that a valorization of the radical subject repudiates the power-laden character of social relations. As such, though the radical subject in some sense responsive to the dominant ideology, their resistance purposefully works for power removal and social change, as opposed to the tendency within the post-modern turn for interpellation to gravitate toward power maintenance. In the eagerness to see "power everywhere" (Foucault, 1980), the radical subject's insurgency is annihilated. As Spivak expresses, the theoretical prowess of these discourses disguise the subject's revolutionary dissent: "while in theoretical full dress, [they] do not show themselves" (Spivak, 1988, p. 228).

The Radical Subject as a Starting Point in Inquiry

Following the premise explicated above, radical rhetoric posits the radical subject as the principal locus of suasive conception. Radical rhetoric necessarily centralizes the radical subject, sensitively listening to their truths as opposed to hiding them under philological bushels or viewing them with critical suspicion. The invitation to rhetorical listening enacts a "stance of openness" where one "stands under" rhetoric, listening not for what one can agree or disagree with but rather "for the exiled excess" (Ratcliffe, 2005, p. 25). This is not to say that the radical subject should not be answerable to critical contemplation, but that they should be given the ethic of decolonial love, i.e., the same privilege furnished to mainstream orders of knowledge. When we subject vernacular rhetorics within a critique of freedom to the same suspicion afforded to the hegemonic rhetorics of those with ‘superior’ rationality, we preemptively prevent a “dwelling” in the language of the radical subject. Hegemonic rhetorics have always and already been afforded a privileged space. In radical rhetoric, we counteract by not constraining those who requires higher orders of hearing, response, and theorization to be on a level-playing field with those in elevated positions in “hierarchies of civilizations” (Alcoff, 1991, p. 26). This re-orientation requires strict discipline, an attitude of rigor, to unblock the rigidity of our habitual modes of meaning-making and discernment.

Noam Chomsky, the distinguished linguist and intellectual is a provocative illustration of the necessity of centering the radical subject. For all his brilliance, it is oft forgotten that Chomsky participated in the denial of the Khmer Rouge’s brutality toward Cambodians, dismissing their agency and the veracity of their narratives. In reference to stories shared by Cambodian refugees who escaped the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge regime, he stated that “refugees are frightened and defenseless, at the mercy of alien forces. They naturally tend to report what they believe their interlocuters wish to hear” (Chomksy & Herman, 1977). Similarly, he repeatedly dismisses the voice of Syrian revolutionaries, insisting their revolution is indistinguishable from atrocities committed by Daesh, a narrative Syrian revolutionaries have repeatedly denounced.[7] Of note here is that Chomsky’s admitted source on Syria is the Irish journalist Patrick Cockburn (Hamad, 2017), resulting in a phenomenon which Syrian writer Leila Al Shami has called “old white men who rely on each other for their news about Syria, rather than actually talking to Syrians” (Massey, 2016). One might even call it a form of “epistemic coloniality” (Wanzer-Serrano, 2012, p. 648). Alternately, Riad al Turk, a prominent

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[7] Chomsky’s genocide denial has also extended to the Bosnian muslims killed in the Srebrenica massacre (Katerji, 2017; Linfield, 2019).

Syrian opposition leader, nicknamed “Syria’s Mandela,” beautifully captures the hermeneutics of decolonial love with which one must engage the radical subject:

> [N]ow we face a people emerging from their silence…*Let us listen to them carefully, walk with them and not ahead of them and forbid ourselves to hijack their voices to our benefit.* (al Atassi, 2011, emphasis added)

By insisting on the absolute relativism of the world, a poststructuralist perspective insists we not “privilege one form of ‘rationality’ apart from others” (McKerrow, 1991, p. 250). In this manifestation of the subject, “the stranglehold of the subject on knowledge and rationality has been removed…the subject, whether seen in Derridean of Foucauldian terms, is not the originator of meaning” (McKerrow, 1993), and is certainly not afforded a privileged position in “truth-calculations.” This “unmitigated rhetorical relativism” (Cloud, 1994) contends all are on an equal footing, diminishing the epistemologies of those closest to oppression. My logic here is akin to those who problematize the rhetorical manifestation of “All Lives Matter” as inviting a color-blindness to those whose voices are not heard in the struggle for social justice (Edgar & Johnson, 2018). In the chase for objectivity, we romanticize certain rhetorics as enlightening, namely those who sit in silo, at a desk, content with circular reiterations of their own world views (Wood & Cox, 1993). If dialectic ever occurs, it is rarely with the radical subject, as “no one has seen rhetorical practice strut into her office” (Leff, 1992, p. 225). Those already implicated in the dominant rhetorics and who are detached from the historied nature of conflict are given equal considerations of credibility. In extreme cases, this results in a “standard total academic view” (Ear, 1995) far removed from what the radical subject has experienced. The “aggregation of talking heads” (Fiumara, 1990, p. 167) does not enhance our capacity to create or produce solidarity.

Though privileging all forms of rationality echoes an ethos of inclusivity, in broadening the possibilities of what “counts,” we inadvertently relegate to lower dominion those with intimate knowledge of crises. Poststructuralism’s “inclusive” ethos hovers too close to the institutional standards that demonstrably marginalize the radical subject time and time again. The proliferation of rhetoric entails a major risk, a compliance with the status quo. Though ostensibly situated within a labyrinth of knowledge, if we were to “unroll” this labyrinth, “we would find a single thread in our hands” (Fiumara, 1990, p. 160). Radical rhetoric draws this distinction: *the rhetoric of the radical subject should be consecrated above that of others as a starting point in inquiry*. As put by Edward Said, “if power oppresses and controls and manipulates, then everything that resists it is not morally equal to power, is not neutrally and simply a weapon against that power” (Said, 1983, p. 246). Those protesting on the streets and in universities chanting “peaceful, peaceful” against the sclerotic Assad regime as they were being shot in cold blood are not “insane rhetors” (McKerrow, 1993, p. 63) but surely heroes.[8] Their rhetoric should be bestowed positional superiority so we may “listen closely to prophetic traces of the hieroglyphics of the flesh” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 125).

Without privileging the rhetoric of the radical subject, one effortlessly slips into the sea of “epistemic misrepresentations” (a term from Go, 2016), making “obvious issues mysterious and complex issues even more complex” (Al Haj Saleh, 2015b). As such, a kaleidoscope of viewpoints is not always a sign of health or maturity, but rather serves a gatekeeping function which deflects from the material reality detected solely on conditions of marginality. In essence, without differentiating between that which must be esteemed and that which must be disparaged is an unstated regulating of the ontological and epistemological frameworks of the radical subject. By designating the radical subject's discursive formations doxastic (and not epistemic), ontological ambiguity is introduced into interpretations of radical epistemologies, sanitizing their "irrational" aspects. The radical subject's emancipatory rhetoric rarely aligns with normative scripts of resistance, triggering anxieties that lie at the heart of Euro-American reason, whether by rule or convention. Orientalist tendencies ease the downplaying of the radical subject (Ghazal Aswad, 2019a). These rhetors are "disturbers": their rhetoric is illegible, offending, ill-suited, and inappropriate (Lacy & Ono, 2012; Law & Corrigan, 2018, p. 327). The innumerable tensions they evoke act as a repelling force which impinges on the willingness to listen.

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[8] McKerrow (1993) states that “raising the subjected individual or the “insane” rhetor to heroic status is not a final answer…to consecrate the language of the dominated over or against the language of the dominant is not a sign of freedom” (p.63).

Due to the imposing nature of hegemony, the de-centralization of the radical subject *compounds* their negation, retaining the inherent precarity of these subjects even among those who theoretically stand in solidarity. Hegemonic rhetorics ignore or misrepresent the insights of Syrian revolutionaries, invalidating the radical subject while placing themselves as "chief informants" (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami, 2016, p. ix). Radical rhetoric is therefore a vital counter-correcting mechanism to the peripheralization of the radical subject's testimony as one reading within a constellation of other readings. It is through the centering of their rhetoric that we resituate the radical subject into contested spaces where “negotiation over memory and meaning” (Davis, 2016, p. 19) is ongoing in the deliberative arena.

Conclusion

“Remember me when you celebrate the fall of the regime… And remember that I gave my soul and blood for that moment” (Ghiath Matar, 2020)[9]

When skepticism becomes an end in and of itself, there is no substantive telos at the end of its practice.[10] This postmodern sensibility keeps us within the control of a rationality that will not release us from deep-seated automated judgements toward the other. We cannot place the vernacular discourses of the radical subject on the same plane of suspicion as mainstream discourses and hope to transformatively inculcate the imperative for action on behalf of the radical subject. It is precisely here that I identify the rhetorical *reason* behind the “disconnect” of what our rhetorical practices purport and what they entail – a jadedness, if not a paralysis, toward radical subjects. Rhetorical practice cannot undermine the radical subject and still expect to one day alter oppressive hegemonic orders.

Actions of solidarity, be they a no-fly zone, a strike, a demonstration or rally of support, policy initiatives, or otherwise, are the meaningful conclusion of a *process* which purposively values the alternative ontologies and epistemologies of the radical subject above other determinations. Radical rhetoric aspires to not only analyze rhetoric, but to intervene in structures of power. In this respect, radical rhetoric is closer to enacting the emancipatory ends of post-modernism's critical turn. As a politically-motivated project, it is expressly not grounded in notions of neutrality, impartiality, and independence. Instead, it establishes a practice of rhetoric which agitates toward creating a space for us all to become "cognitive revolutionaries" (a term by Wynter, 2015). This can only be achieved within a noncircular paradigm which places the radical subject as the leading point of inquiry and realizes the wisdom in relinquishing skepticism at times during the critical reasoning process. Such hermeneutic efforts recognize the meaning-making authority of subjects of liberation struggles with the explicit intention of engendering consciousness of messages of truth. At its heart, radical rhetoric suspends modes of thinking, momentarily, so we might become vulnerable to the voices of others, guiding us beyond circumscribed spaces and cognitive frontiers.

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[9] Ghiath Matar, a tailor from the Damascus suburb of Darayya was named Little Gandhi for gifting regime forces red roses and water after their violence against his townsfolk. He was killed in detention and his mutilated corpse returned to his pregnant wife (Sly, 2011).

[10] “Telos” in the title of the dissertation is inspired by calls for critical approaches which align with a “commitment to telos,” i.e., with intention (Ono & Sloop, 1992).

In the next chapter, I outline how attention to the rhetoric of radical subjects alerts us to the unlikely ways in which those who might gather in solidarity erase and efface others, especially when it interrupts narratives about themselves which they hold dear.

Chapter 4

Reverse Moral Exceptionalism & the American Left: When Do Villains become Heros?

"In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends" – (Martin Luther King Jr., 1967)

"*We do not anticipate the world with our dogmas but instead attempt to discover the new world through the critique of the old*" —(Karl Marx, 1843)

In the early hours of the 3rd of January 2020, Qasem Soleimani, the commander of Iran's Quds Force, the external operations branch of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), was killed by a targeted United States drone strike in Baghdad, Iraq. His death was confirmed when pictures of his severed arm with its signature amulet ring on his digitus medicinalis were made public. In the aftermath of the strike, Twitter exploded with the hashtag #WorldWarIII, concerned that Donald Trump's actions would cause a third world war. Debates raged about the legality of the strike, how it might play into the 2020 presidential campaign, what this intervention would mean for their long-held stance against American imperialism, and potential consequences for the Iran-United States relationship (Ghattas, 2020). By the next day, anti-war protests broke out in over seventy cities across the United States, with protestors holding Iranian flags in solidarity (Hauck & Woodyard, 2020). When Iran retaliated by attacking two American military bases (Romo, 2020), there was a sigh of relief that no Americans were killed, after which attention to the incident subsequently died down.

While the "American Left" was skeptical of the killing of Soleimani, Syrians and Iraqis celebrated his death.[1] In Idlib, Syrians passed out confectionery sweets to celebrate his death. Iraqis rejoiced, taking to the streets in jubilation with large Iraqi flags to celebrate the death of a figure who had just two months prior been responsible for a deadly crackdown on protestors incensed about corruption and foreign Iranian influence (Al Aqeedi, 2020; Ghattas, 2020). Syrians were much less influenced by the "Trump effect" (i.e., bias due to popular notions of Trump's tendency toward impulsiveness and rash decision-making), and therefore less likely to place the United States as the center of analysis (Hamid, 2020). These grassroots expressions were not naïve to the fact that President Trump had not acted in their defense, but that for a cataclysmic moment, American interests had coincided with theirs and justice was served. With this in mind, I present the assassination of Soleimani as significant, not as a source of inspiration for this chapter, but rather for its manifestation in a microcosm the detachment between the ontological and epistemological realities of the radical subject and those who might gather in solidarity.

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[1] The term "American left" is an essentializing term. As Edward Said stated, the "Left" should be "enclosed in skeptical quotation marks" (Said, 1983, p. 160). However, it is difficult to circumvent since it is

Syrians watched the sudden apprehension over the region, as if they were not already engulfed in a raging conflict in which an excess of 600,000 Syrian lives had been lost, one of the deadliest genocides of the century (Specia, 2018). They were guided by their intimate awareness of the scale of Soleimani's atrocities in the region and his sectarian cleansing of their villages and cities (Katerji, 2020). Soleimani was involved in starvation sieges on the rebel-held cities of Madaya and Zabadani (Tsurkov, 2020), enhanced the Assad regime's chemical weapons capabilities, and waged brutal assault on Syrians for over eight years (Dagher, 2019; Sadjadpour, 2014; Yassin-Kassab & Al-

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prevalent in most of the discourse. I am aware of its analytical limitations, but for lack of a suitable alternative, I retain it with the caveat that it is not a historically specific discursive formation. Moreover, the themes in this chapter, indisputably, do not characterize all the American left.

Shami, 2016). For Syrians, Soleimani was not just an Iranian general, but a colonial figure who “haunted” their existence (Ghattas, 2020; Katerji, 2020). As such, he was not only a strong supporter of the Assad regime, but according to the regime’s own sources, had become an influential presence in the country (Dagher, 2019). Riad Farid Hijab, the former Prime Minister of Syria, stated after his defection that “Syria is occupied by the Iranian regime. The person who runs the country is not Bashar Al Assad, but Qasem Soleimani” (Sadjadpour, 2014).

Regardless of the reasons behind Trump’s actions and the legality of his behavior, Syrians were incensed at the lack of solidarity with the actual victims of Soleimani’s repression by a Left seen as their likeliest and potentially strongest allies. To many, this marked a “blind spot” (Hamid, 2020), a collective myopia unable to recognize the tragedy and ironies of conditional solidarity with brown bodies in the region. The inability to contemplate the consequences of Soleimani’s life or to engage in a nuanced critique of the assassination was an erasure of their suffering at Soleimani’s hands (Chabkoun, 2020; Huneidi, 2020). As Walker (2006) put it, those who suffer feel immense pain when sites of repair are neglected by those who might stand in solidarity with them:

> Victims of wrongful harms often experience as much or more rage, resentment, indignation, or humiliation in response to the failure of other people and institutions to come to their aid, acknowledge their injury, reaffirm standards, place blame appropriately on wrongdoers, and offer some forms of solace, safety and relief as victims experience toward the original wrongdoer. (p. 94–95)

This is a challenging topic to write about considering the exclusionary anti-immigrant discourses engaged in by President Trump, in which he directly appealed to voters' racial and ethnic prejudices against Arabs, Muslims, Latinx, and a host of "others" during his presidential election and subsequent time in office (Ghazal Aswad, 2019b; Ghazal Aswad & de Velasco, 2020), and of course, the reality of the United States as an imperial actor (in terms of its economic, military, and cultural presence) in various countries across the globe. As such, this chapter is not written to make judgement on the appropriateness of United States actions, but to explore the schism between the reaction of the American Left and Syrian revolutionaries. The time is ripe to address the asymptotic nature of the discourse in which points of principle and points of articulation never meet.

In what follows, I theorize "reverse moral exceptionalism" as a logic culminating in a hermetic sealing indifferent to the radical subject. I then detail the revolutionary discourses of radical subjects on the occasion of Soleimani's assassination. Here, I foreground the Syrian radical subject as a primary source of rhetorical texts, including footage of the reaction to the assassination, social media posts, and coverage of the assassination in outlets such as *Enab Baladi*,[2] *AlJumhuriya*, *Syria Plus*, and *Orient TV*.[3] This foray into the rhetoric of Syrian radical subjects provides a frame of reference through which reverse moral exceptionalism may be deciphered in the reaction of the

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[2] *Enab Baladi* (Grapes of My Country) is a local revolutionary newspaper from Daraya, a city famous for its grape farming. The newspaper was set up in the first year of the revolution by a group of citizen journalists and continued work even through the regime's siege and invasion of Daraya. They are still active to date (see https://english.enabbaladi.net/).

[3] These texts, with the exception of those already in English (such as Huneidi, 2019; Jamal, 2020) or those translated into English online (namely AlJumhuriya, 2020) were translated from the original Arabic by myself.

American Left. It is therefore intended to be situated against, read alongside, and juxtaposed with, a cross-section of the American Left's discourses on the assassination. The latter includes media coverage from leading leftist news outlet, such as *Jacobin* and *Current Affairs*, and as well as statements by Democratic political representatives and opinion leaders from the American Left. I conclude by reflecting on the implications of reverse moral exceptionalism for our understandings of the radical subjectivities of those in liberatory struggle.

Reverse Moral Exceptionalism

In this chapter, I explicate a key term "reverse moral exceptionalism" as a metanarrative implicated in the engagement with transnational liberatory social movements. I argue reverse moral exceptionalism induces an inability to listen to the testimony of what others have suffered on their own terms. For those whose lives have been destroyed, this forms a "second harm" or bystander complicity compounding the original violation - an instance when "failure to hear abounds" (Stauffer, 2015, p. 73). I select the American Left as a case study of the peculiar manner in which "just-minded people" are oblivious to the devastation of those in liberatory struggle. Though formulated from the particulars of the Syrian case, the analysis demonstrates a broader phenomenon of the "gentle back-door cruelties of 'nice people'" who are unable to act as containers for the pain of others (Levina, 2018; Silva, 2018; Smith, 1994, p. 12).

Syrian revolutionaries have long been critical of "the Left, writ large" (Wedeen, 2019, p. 160). Despite attentiveness to local oppressions related to prison reform, woman's rights, racial justice, and healthcare, the American Left has not attained an equivalently progressive stance with transnational subjects. This "progressive dystopia" has been attended to in various settings (Shange, 2019). But in the context of Syria, it is characterized by a narrow anti-imperialism, reactionary thinking, and shackled conceptions of revolution (Al Haj Saleh, 2014; Ghazal Aswad, 2021c).[4] In this vein, I probe the unexpected form in which mythic narratives of exceptionalism persist in encounters with transnational others. I suggest that exceptionalism is the normative interpretive framework through which radical subjects are intelligible – one which errs too much on a critique of the self (or one's nation) and the super-iconicity of the United States as a rogue imperial actor on the world stage, as opposed to listening with humility to radical subjectivities. The case of Soleimani's assassination allows insight into how exceptionalism inculcates deafness to revolutionary discourse, such that even those with "progressive" positions domestically have not been able to exit the "generalized callousness" toward the extinguishing of transnational lives (Wedeen, 2019, p. 121). Ultimately, I illustrate how reverse moral exceptionalism remains loyal to visions of American greatness, while reinforcing existing values which prevent the revelation of new truths.[5]

Traditionally, American moral exceptionalism ties into the conviction that the United States is the greatest country in the world. In other words, the United States or

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[4] Al Shami (2018) calls this narrow anti-imperialism "anti-imperialism of idiots," Hensman (2018) calls it "pseudo anti-imperialism," while Al Haj Saleh (2018) calls it a "neoliberal form of imperialism."

[5] Syrian activists argue that Syria was not strategically important to the United States and generally, the United States has not intervened massively in Syria. Whereas the United States used a "regime change" strategy in countries such as Iraq, with Syria an effective choice was made to not intervene decisively to overthrow the regime (Daher, 2019, p. 288). Having said this, the United States has intervened in Syria, sending around 4000 troops to Raqqa with the objective of combatting Daesh within a "war on terror" framework (Daher, 2019). United States -led air strikes on the city killed 1,600 civilians and flattened the city such that it is now uninhabitable (Amnesty International, 2019; Bauer, 2019; BBC News, 2017). However, there is no moral equivalency. The Assad regime along with its Iranian and Russian allies have been exponentially more harmful to Syrians than American imperialism (Al Haj Saleh, 2017d; Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami, 2016).

"America" is not only unlike any other nation but is an exemplary nation with a superior role to play in history.[6] In this calculus, the United States is a beacon of light for the world. As an ideology, it is so ingrained in American national identity that it is "a natural part of the language" (McCrisken, 2003, p. 190). Though American moral exceptionalism is ubiquitous in political discourse, it predominantly revolves around the morality of United States military actions and foreign interventions. However, it is hardly monolithic in character. There are a multitude of American exceptionalisms, each "sufficiently distinct to justify further study" (Edwards & Weiss, 2014, p.6). As such, this chapter attends to moral exceptionalism in progressive discourse as an important dimension yet to be addressed. Given that moral exceptionalism is commonly associated with conservative and centrist groups, as a narrative pattern, it tends to operate invisibly and without recognition in Left spaces. As a rhetorical invention, reverse moral exceptionalism provides much needed context for understanding how radical subjects are erased within the discourse of the American Left.

As a point of departure, reverse moral exceptionalism is a nationalistic tendency to vigilantly insist on oneself as behind every event of significance on the world stage. Reverse moral exceptionalism challenges notions of a pure "moral exceptionalism" which unilaterally maps the United States as an unrivaled humanitarian actor. Though the term may appear nonsensical, in the marrying of "reverse" and "moral exceptionalism" is a tension productive to deciphering how the radical subject is constituted. Reverse moral exceptionalism, similar to traditional moral exceptionalism, is based on an ethnocentrism which approaches the world from a position of dominance. Though exceptionalism is typically predicated on self-admiration, it is arguably present in the less expected form of self-flagellation which saturates the space available for others. This self-flagellation, often thought of as virtuous, is problematic when it leads to a blindness to the multi-sided truth of the malicious aspirations (and actions) of others. In its overdetermination of the banality of national evil, the United States is the only actor capable of making history in a zero-sum equation of evil in the world.

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[6] For more on American moral exceptionalism, refer to Bell, 1989; Edwards, 2011; Edwards & Weiss, 2014; McCrisken, 2003; Olson, 2021.

Reverse moral exceptionalism anchors the unwillingness to entertain risk, uncertainty, or something other than what we expect or want to hear. As the egoistic self is inserted universally as the object of analysis, an orientation toward radical subjects is averted. The radical subject is discounted as unworthy of intellectual engagement or curiosity. In the inability to suspend oneself from the equation, others are disembodied, the capacity for attentive listening obstructed, and openings for solidarity constrained.

Rhetoric of Syrian Radical Subjects

In what follows, I identify germinal themes in the rhetoric of radical subjects which reveal their ideational conscious and material practices on the occasion of Soleimani's assassination. First, grassroots euphoria and communal dance; second, agency reclamation in the face of oppression; and third, an argument for the heterarchical colonization, i.e., where multiple power hierarchies are entangled in complex ways rather than in one singular colonial or capitalist world-system. Together, the alluring chants, spontaneous gaiety, black satire, dilapidating sorrows, and agentic vernaculars provide a reference point for the exigency of this dissertation, underscoring the colossal incongruence between the radical subject's subjectivities and that of the American Left.

Affective Joy and Celebration

Upon the news of Soleimani’s assassination, symbolic and physical expressions of joy and conviviality ignited in public spaces. A carnivalesque mix of bodies filled alleyways and streets, replete with clapping, dancing and drumming. In the hustle and bustle of the streets of Idlib, Atareb, and Suwaida, tray after tray of sweets were distributed with hearty congratulations on the news, with placards on which was written: “on the occasion of the death of Soleimani, from Syrian revolutionaries.” Arms clamored over each other for a piece of baklava in a communal act of “breaking bread” (see Figure 1). As a dish, baklava is “matched by no other …the king of sweets” historically commemorating special occasions, be it the promotion of military men at guild ceremonies, milestones of life (birth, marriage, death), and political events such as military victories (Isin, 2018, p. 109).

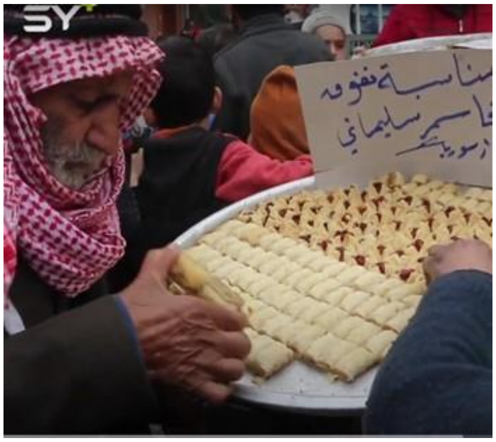

Figure 1: Baklava distributed on Soleimani’s death (Syria Plus, 2020)

The Syrian revolution’s flag is held high as revolutionary anthems roar from the speakers, as a hanging banner metaleptically claims the assassination as rooted in the revolutionary struggle against despots and tyrants, with the words “the revolution goes on” (see Figure 2) (EuroNews Arabic, 2020; Euronews, 2020b). Such protests are easily indexed as “image events” on the “political street” (DeLuca, 1999a) - revolutionary discourse against Soleimani’s world-destroying violence which provide insight into the atmospheric conditions which marked the news of Soleimani’s death.

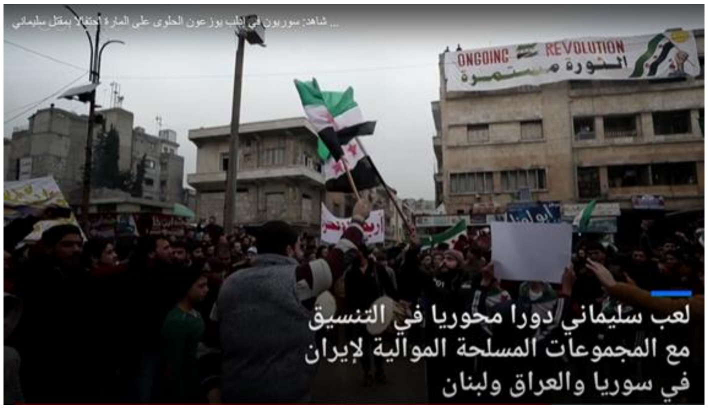
شاهد: سوريون في إدلب يوزعون الحلوى على المارة احتفالا بمقتل سليماني ...
ONGOING REVOLUTION
الثورة مستمرة
لعب سليماني دورا محوريا في التنسيق
مع المجموعات المسلحة الموالية لإيران
في سوريا والعراق ولبنان

Figure 2: Celebration in Idlib on Soleimani’s death (Euronews, 2020b)

Capturing the buoyant construction of this moment, a man rhetorically asks the camera: “I mean, a man who kills children, what do you expect our reaction will be? Aside from happiness and pleasure?” (Orient TV, 2020). The activist and former detainee Hanadi Zahlout mirrored these sentiments in rhythmical Arabic, “if our eyes could see the spirits of cities, we would have seen this morning Aleppo in her glorious long dresses of silk dancing” (Zahlout, 2020).[7] Across these voices, the assassination was divine karma for an individual who had long acted with impunity and a promising omen for the new year. One man prayed “God would attach the rope to the bucket,” a local proverb which sketches a rope tied to a bucket that has reached the bottom of a proverbial well, conveying the hope that the next criminal in line would find a similar end (Syria Plus, 2020). Another prays “Hassan Zemmera” (i.e., Hassan the Horn) and Bashar Al Assad follow.[8]

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[7] This private Facebook post is shared with permission and translated by myself from the original Arabic.

[8] Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary-general of Hezbollah, supported the Assad regime’s attack on Syrian civilians (Khatib, 2015). “Hassan Zemmera” is a satirical reference playing on his once popular title “The

Satiric subjectivities also inscribed the response to Soleimani’s death. Yakeen Yaser Bido, a prominent female journalist in Idlib and former *Orient* reporter, refers to President Trump as “Abu Ivanka al helweh,” i.e., father of pretty Ivanka, as she appeals to him in an ingratiating tone to bring their joy to its climax:

> صايرة و صايرة [i.e., “it is happening and it is happening,” i.e., you are already in the heat of the action). Continue your good deed with aircraft over Damascus…complete our joy, as we have become strangers to something called joy! (Bido, 2020)

In response, her friend, the Idlibi journalist Salwa Abdel Rahman, congratulates her, envious that they both missed out on the Baklava:

> They all ate sweets on the killing of Soleimani, but Yakeen and I did not…! And so, we decided to drink maté instead and to pour on the sugar. And, we are postponing our celebration. We said perhaps we wake up in the morning and sweeten ourselves with the news of the killing of the animal Bashar. (Flowes, 2020)[9]

Ali Ferzat, founder of al-Dumari (The Lamplighter) and known for his anti-regime caricatures which utilize cartoons to laugh at the absurdity of life under authoritarianism, also published several caricatures of Soleimani after the assassination.[10]

Hero of the Resistance” against Israel. In the belittling of Nasrallah as a little toy horn which makes a “toot toot” sound is an insinuation of the emptiness of his rhetoric and tendency for frivolous speeches.

[9] Maté is a traditional South American caffeine-infused drink made with the dried leaves of the banyan evergreen tree. Served in a small glass jug (gourd) with a metal masassa (straw), it was common along the coastal cities of Syria, but has become popular across the country and in the diaspora. It is usually enjoyed in social settings, with a lemon slice to clean the straw between users. Sali Flowes is a pen name for the Idlibi journalist Salwa AbdelRahman.

[10] These cartoons are said to give agency to those who able to laugh with him at their own misery (cooke, 2017).

In one, a man kicks Soleimani to the skies, only to find Soleimani being kicked back down to earth by a foot, presumably God's, looming from a cloud (Ferzat, 2020a). Aside from the obvious politics of insult and black humor, the message is unapologetic: Even the heavens do not want Soleimani (see Figure 3).

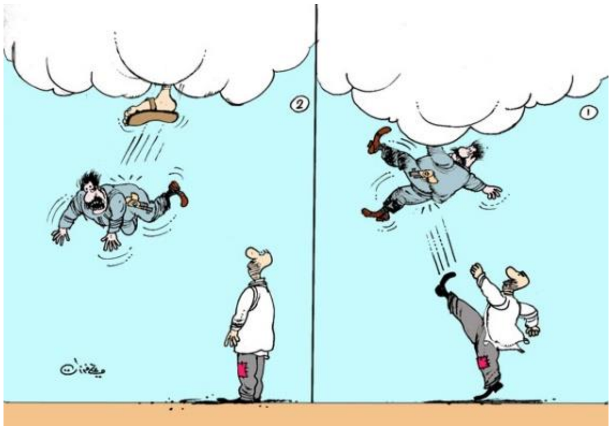

Figure 3: Soleimani kicked down from the heavens (Ferzat, 2020a)

A few days later after Soleimani had been buried in his hometown of Kerman, Ferzat published another cartoon of President Trump urinating on the headstone of Soleimani's grave (Ferzat, 2020b, see Figure 4). In the comments, Ferzat writes, "I wish I could do the same, but sitting."

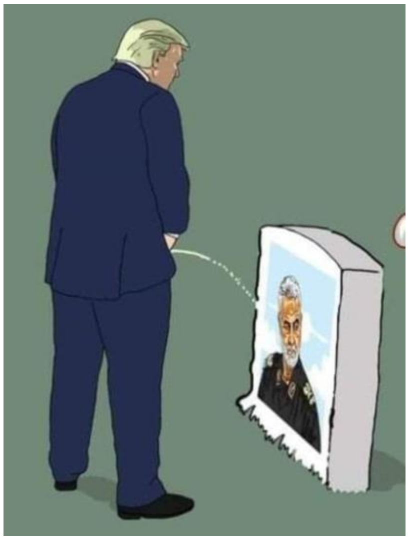

Figure 4: Trump urinating on Soleimani's grave (Ferzat, 2020b)

The communal singing, dancing, drinking, eating, and sarcastic overtones drawing on Soleimani as now buried “below the land,” as emplaced rhetorical practices, all indicate the mobilization of Syrian revolutionary heritage and celebratory rituals on Soleimani’s death. These practices, once harshly curtailed by the state, also lay exclusive claim to the land. After years of repression, the unrestrained congregation and expression within public spaces reject Soleimani’s ownership and plundering of their lands, whilst endorsing another message: *This land is ours*. In shared space of protest, radical subjectivities are impelled not only by the severing of people from their subsistence base and the expropriation of their lands, but by an ontological relation that draws divine ownership and leadership from the land.

Resistance and Loss

Another prominent theme was a rhetoric of invective against Soleimani while reclaiming agency as victims laden with the emotional intensity of loss. In this performative space, radical subjects testified to Soleimani’s gratuitous violence and war crimes. Dramatic urgency and haunting specificity accounts for his legacy, with an attendant framing of the assassination as offering a modicum of relief for Syrian suffocation. For instance, internally displaced refugees in Idlib are interviewed in makeshift camps, channeling and amplifying the effect on actual bodies in crisis. With brute physical reality of harm unmistakable, one man lies down as the camera glazes over metal implants protruding out of his injured leg (see Figure 5).

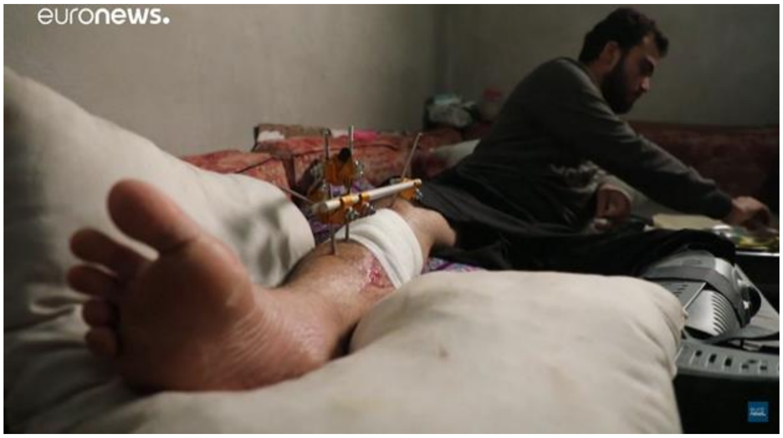

Figure 5: Refugee recalls trauma (Euronews, 2020a)

The assassination triggers a carceral recalling of trauma, injustice and memory as the man places his hand on his heart as grief furrows his face:

> We didn’t even know what was happening before a bomb fell on us. My wife died, my son’s leg was cut off, and I was hit in both my legs. My brothers were both martyred. We had a lot of casualties. All of this is because of Qasem Soleimani. But, we would have wished that his killing would have been at the hands of our revolutionaries. At the hands of the opposition. (Euronews, 2020a)

As the video unfolds, another man claims Soleimani’s killing a “victory” for Syrians. In this ownership of the assassination is a centering of narratives of revolutionary resistance to oppression, rather than the intervention of the United States, whilst positioning Soleimani as a quotidian and structural cause of anti-Syrian violence. Beyond massacres as episodic violence, Soleimani’s use of starvation sieges as a military tactic and sectarian cleaning mechanism are recounted. These “starve or bow” sieges are brought to the attention of the audience as having wreaked famine and death in the Damascus suburbs of Ghouta and Yarmouk (AlJumhuriya, 2020). This speech seeks to interpellate the addressee at the most basic level – the need for sustenance. In this context, the language of famine is not metaphoric or disembodied, but an embodied expression of harms undergone. Depictions of harms were also grounded in ethotic arguments foregrounding the release of emotion triggered by the event. Joman Hasan, a Syrian activist and former detainee elucidates the cathartic moment in which she heard of Soleimani's assassination:

> I heard the news of Soleimani's assassination at 1 a.m. I got up, turned the lights on, and wept for all of the kids in Madaya who died of starvation. I wept for the siege of Yarmouk. I wept for the rubble of Aleppo. (Huneidi, 2020)

Elsewhere, radical subjects directly juxtapose the hyper-technification of legality within the rhetoric of the American Left with their own discourses of legality, i.e., the argument cuts both ways. For example, an article highlights the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres' condemnation of Soleimani's visit to Syria and Iraq as at variance with an international travel ban imposed by the UN (Jamal, 2020). In the same spirit, the acclaimed Syrian journalist Ahmad Aba Zayd likens Qasem Soleimani to a drug cartel, Daesh or Nazi leader operating outside of the law:

> [Soleimani acted] not as a state but as a gang…the concept of assassination originated in the first place because states do not authorize the killing of leaders of other states…he is a symbol of Iran's expansionist project…This is the naked Iranian project, such as Nazism, Zionism and Assadism, just a project of extermination, the dissemination of killing. (Aba Zayd, 2020)

Here, Soleimani is not a political statesman, but a man operating outside of international law. In a report on *Orient TV*, Syrians on the street describe Soleimani in harsh terms, without the filtering of allegory or illusion, as a "terrorist," "sectarian criminal," "militia man," "najes" [i.e., a religious reference to an impure being] and "child murderer" (Orient TV, 2020). Direct parallels are stressed between the infamous terrorist Osama bin Laden and Qasem Soleimani: "[t]he terrorist actions of Soleimani far outweigh that of Al Qaeda and Daesh together. The crimes of Iran in Syria alone, are beyond the imagination in terms of the destruction, displacement" (Alloush, 2020). Hence, concomitant with the profound festivity in the streets is an invitation to critically reflect on the assassination as an overdue public reckoning for Soleimani's illegal actions in the region.

Moreover, Soleimani's absence offers restorative hope for the appeasement of the suffocation of Syrian life and the imagination of otherwise worlds. Activists such as Fared Al Hor and Mohamad Naser re-tweeted images of billboards and monuments of Soleimani in Lebanon wondering how one might make these spaces "livable and bearable, to both sides?" (Safwan, 2020). In an analogous vein, the language of breathing and suffocation speaks to the clashing politics of justice and oppression in the persevering struggle for self-determination:

> [w]hile his demise is not sufficient retribution—nor does it provide his victims justice—it has nonetheless offered a modicum of breathing space, even cheer, to the survivors of the hellfire, death, and devastation of which he was among the chief architects. (AlJumhuriya, 2020)[11]

In connecting breathing to an attempt for justice, there is an ontological discernment of breathing as a fundamental human right which Soleimani abused. The language of breathing advances material and symbolic meaning, similar to "a breathing-centered conception of responsibility for justice” in the African-American context (Houdek, 2021, p.4; Ore & Houdek, 2020). In the fleeting return of this condition of nature to the radical subject, the capacity for breath, and for justice, however short lived, is created.

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[11] This English translation from the original Arabic AlJumhuriyah article can be found on multiple websites online.

Heterarchical Structures of Colonization

Another theme in the rhetoric of radical subjects is an uncovering of the triple rhetorical exigency of Soleimani as a foreign invader coterminous with the authoritarianism of the Assad regime and other colonizers. This speaks to colonization as existing in a heterarchical structure, where multiple power hierarchies are entangled with one another.

Firstly, the reader is invited to consider the legacy of Soleimani as a colonial presence in his own right through his “constant presence…on the ground” in Syria. Soleimani is chronicled as a colonial figure strutting seamlessly about indigenous lands (AlJumhuriya, 2020). A spatial and temporal analysis of Soleimani’s movements over the years is documented with meticulous enumeration of the cities and dates in which he was present in Syria (AlJumhuriya, 2020; Jamal, 2020). This included an accumulation of photographs of Soleimani in Daraa, Deir ez-Zour, Hama and Aleppo published by pro-regime media outlets, including one of Soleimani strolling in streets of eastern Aleppo after the displacement of its people. The discussion surrounding this photograph (which went viral among Syrians) outlines its re-traumatizing affect for those in exile: hundreds of thousands of Aleppans had either been killed or forcibly displaced from the city after four years and five months of battle before the city fell to regime forces due in no small part to Iranian bombardment campaigns (Azizi, 2020). Elsewhere, an opposition figure makes the syntactical association of genocide with the act of walking on land: “he is a massacre walking on legs!" (Alloush, 2020). Inhered within this is Soleimani as a colonial figure who abuses inhabited memories and not just the material geography of the land. The activist Khalil Al Haj Saleh engages in a "willingness backwards" (a Nietzschean term) to change the past: "I wish he had died in Aleppo or Deir ez-Zour, where he had desecrated its soil" (Alloush, 2020). Again, land is a physical geographic space connected to the ontologies of this space for the radical subject.

Secondly, radical subjects recognize the contours of the mutual fortification between Iran's regional power and the Assad regime. For example, Iran is believed to be secretively imbricated from the very early days of the revolution with the Assad regime before its presence became "openly visible" in 2013 (AlJumhuriya, 2020). In one instance, the alliance of Soleimani with the Assad regime is contended through the symbolism of a photograph of Soleimani with a regime solider (Jamal, 2020). In another article, mutually reinforcing signs strengthen the larger claim that Soleimani was embroiled in the colonialism of the Assad regime. It is brought to the audience's consideration that Soleimani had Syrian currency in his pocket when he died and that he had just arrived in Baghdad airport on a "Wings of Damascus" airline owned by Rami Makhlouf, a vilified regime figure and first cousin of Bashar al Assad. In this narrative, Soleimani is not just a foreign invader, but an enabler of the abiding colonization of Syrians by Assad.

Thirdly, Soleimani is implicated as a causal factor in other colonialisms in the region as the "quid pro quo" between colonizers is brought to bear. It is postulated that only after Soleimani travelled to Moscow in 2015 was "the map of Syria [put] on the table," and did Putin intervene with air power to save the Assad regime from collapse

(AlJumhuriya, 2020). The same article argues that Iranian imperialism in Iraq was "permitted" in exchange for silence on United States imperialism in the region (AlJumhuriya, 2020). In these discursive articulations, various colonizers are diachronically, spatially and conceptually fused, juxtaposed and connected. Further, there is direct riposte to the lionizing perception of Soleimani an anti-imperial figure faithful to the Palestinian cause. Osama Abu Zayd, a leading Syrian opposition spokesperson and former detainee, invites listeners to re-think the persona of Soleimani as an anti-imperial figure challenging the Israeli occupation:

> If support [for Palestine] is the standard on which our values stand, then the Syrian people are ahead of Soleimani and his country. This people have offered solidarity to Palestinians, and this is only their duty. It would have been more befitting if you had thought of the displaced Syrians who had to leave their destroyed cities. The blood of their sons from the rockets of "the martyr of the Quds" [i.e., Soleimani] has still not dried…they forget that this "martyr," in his quest to "liberate" Palestine, displaced hundreds of thousands of the children of the Syrian people who were true supporters of the Palestinian cause. (Abu Zayd, 2020)

Here, the language of blood and displacement are not "negative affects" so much as a positive expression of Syrian grassroots solidarity and anti-colonial resistance.[12] The rhetoric pulls the rug of "anti-imperialism" from under Soleimani's feet and claims this mantle for itself. Revolutionary resistance transcends the chaos of nested colonization -

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[12] Iran justified its support of the Assad regime based on its anti-Israel and anti-American credentials (Bishara, 2012).

putting forth revolution as an existential struggle at odds with all oppressors. Importantly, these are not different revolutionary struggles, but are nested within the *same* struggle.

Rhetoric of the American Left

In what follows, I present the response from the other side of the line, so to speak. I contemplate the rhetorical framing of Soleimani's assassination by the American Left. As Syrians rejoiced, the American Left foregrounded competing concerns for making meaning of the assassination. Within exceptionalist logics, their rhetoric constitutes a narrative of apologia devoted to order over justice and mired with convictions of guilt toward Soleimani. Endemic to this rhetoric is the understanding of the United States as an unprecedented imperial aggressor and outlier to other nation states in its propensity to colonize others. By this same token, all non-white state actors are inherently colonized and by extension, colonial brown actors emerge as apolitical victims. Consequently, an epistemic closure occurs on a host of other issues, foremost of which is the radical subject and their non-normative articulations of liberation. This invites a consideration of the dialectical relationship between a hyperbolic identification with one's imperial self ("I") and the alienation of radical subjects, who are at once non-apprehendable and non-grievable.

The Rogue Aggressor

First, a narrative of apologia is devoted to the United States as a uniquely imperial aggressor which oversteps its bounds and is responsible for all that has befallen the region. Whereas discourses of exceptionalism usually convey loathing toward a demonized enemy, in this case, the loathing is targeted at the United States. While contesting the United States as an exceptional *moral* actor, exceptionalism still permeates through it. It myopically, simplistically, and egotistically positions the West, or the white colonial power of the United States, as a singular source of evil in the middle east. For instance, Davison (2020a) articulates the United States as responsible for all the "instability that's gripped that region." Shupak (2020) directly compares Iran and the United States to suggest Iran is morally superior given its lack of colonial acts. The text is worth replicating here:

> Iran hasn't overthrown what passes for American democracy, forced a dictatorship on it, aided an invasion of the country, participated in chemical warfare against the US [United States], or destroyed the US economy. The American military has fifty-three military bases…Iran has no bases or soldiers in Canada or Mexico. (Shupak, 2020)

From the vantage of the radical subject, the above statement is incredible to read, effacing Iran as a colonial actor which forced a dictatorship on the Syrian people. Iran *has* invaded Syria, in what could be called an "annexationist, predatory, plunderous" manner (Lenin, 1939, p. 9). Iran retains several multiple military bases across Syria (Azizi, 2020; Memri, 2018), even if it has none in Canada or Mexico. For the colonized, the histories of oppression are embodied, tangible and not forgettable. As situated subjects impelled by their experiences with military bases in their country, the suppression of the radical subject under the western gaze is unmistakable in the text.

Consonantly, narratives of apologia are remorseful for the "profound harm" of United States imperial aggression (Lazare & Arria, 2020) and the "warmongering" of the United States (Allen, 2020), with no concomitant allusion to the quotidian realities in the region which are arguably far more complex than the unitary assumption of American guilt. As Syrian activist Leila Al Shami states, “everything that happens is viewed through the prism of what it means for westerners – only white men have the power to make history” (Al-Shami, 2018). When the United States is the only “rogue state” worthy of reference (Davison, 2020b) and dichotomies of innocence and aggression employed, we foreclose a recognition of “complex victims” such as Soleimani (a term from Bouris, 2007). Cartesian “either-or” logics allow for United States military force and abuse of power to be the axes around which blame galvanizes. In merely deliberating United States empire, undivided allegiance to the United States body politic is intact. Edward Said aptly describes the problem which occurs when only the West is seen as able to exert dominance on others (though in reference to the orientalist Joseph Conrad):

> All Conrad can see is a world totally dominated by the Atlantic West…He could neither understand that India, Africa, and South America also had lives and cultures with integrities not totally controlled by the gringo imperialists and reformers of the world, nor allow himself to believe that anti-imperialist independence movements were not all corrupt and in the pay of the puppet masters in London or Washington. (Said, 1981b, p. xvii)

Indisputably, the American Left’s acknowledgment of the United States as an imperial power is admirable. To an extent, situationally appropriate considering the United States has been embroiled in the historical legacies of imperialism and colonial domination in the region. As Escobar (2004) states, the United States illustrates a *willingness* to enforce dominance with unprecedented violence globally. However, in this instance, centering the United States produces an enervation of the lived experiences of revolutionary subjects. Indeed, in the inability to perceive of “alternative(s) to….[its own]

cruel tautology" (Said, 1981b, p. xvii), the United States as an exceptional evil actor is just another form of colonialist elitism. "Assumptions of superiority" dominate "all forms of contemporary knowledge" (Battiste, 2013, p. 33).

In the ferocity of the adherence to its own anti-imperialism, the United States occupies the full space-time of imperial aggression, always and already in "a criminal act" (Shupak, 2020). Reverse moral exceptionalism becomes rotten with its own perfection, masking the operations of others who might share their racist ideology of imperialism. An apocalyptic occupation with United States aggression in the region which simultaneously does not attribute agency (or accountability) to brown actors for aggressions on other brown bodies encourages a surficial discernment of the realities in the region. As Smith et al. (2019) state, "not all settlers are white" (p. 31). In the passivity toward non-western colonizers and authoritarian regimes, the American Left becomes inadvertently complicit in a system it theoretically opposes.

At this juncture, I draw a direct analogy to how reverse moral exceptionalism functions as "mise en abyme," a technique of placing copies of an image within the image itself in an infinitely recurring sequence. "Mise en abyme" (i.e., "put in the abyss") refers to the literary phenomenon where one places oneself in the center of works of art. While this might be lauded as self-awareness, it is also a form of monological textual reproduction in which self-expression becomes ahistorical and fundamentally asocial. The narrative fulfills its desire to be displaced and its totalizing intent achieves its search for convergence. Mise en abyme makes the narrator "an enemy of himself" (Silk, 1992, p. 283). Importantly, this maneuver is "blind to the discursive decentering" of others (p. 284). Through over-identification with the weight of its own imperialism, events cannot be explained in terms of more than one set of determining factors. The United States' original sins are so all-encompassing that nothing escapes it. In denying the possibility of multiple exigencies, Soleimani's crimes are a discursive impossibility, and Syrian subjectivities effaced.

Oppressors as Apolitical Victims

Secondly, Soleimani is constituted as a victim through an ethotic negation of Soleimani as a "bad" figure. This ethos rehabilitation occurs through prolepsis, i.e., either potential objectionable facts are not conferred or they are passed over precipitously to caution the reader against them. In the incomplete crafting of Soleimani's character is a preference for testimony which fits stable configurations of meaning. Instead of acknowledging Soleimani as an agent of historical violence in his own right, he is manipulated into a victim within a narrative of United States exceptional aggression. Soleimani becomes a moral fulcrum under attack, freed of responsibility or volition, and removed from politics. This rhetoric employs a closure on the character of Soleimani, exempting Soleimani from his acts, to accomplish ideological and political ends.

Michael Moore, the Oscar-winning documentary filmmaker, in several tweets, apologizes to the state of Iran and Ayatollah Khameni, expressing admiration for the thousands who came to Soleimani's funeral (Moore, 2020c). He warns against being "trained to hate him" (Moore, 2020a) and sarcastically asks if anyone knew him or remembered what this "bad guy" had done (Moore, 2020b).[13] Likewise, in a CNN interview, Democratic senator Bernie Sanders draws an analogy between the assassination of Soleimani and Russia's assassinations of political dissidents (CNN, 2020). Davison (2020a) hails Soleimani a "martyr to US bullying." Without Soleimani, the reader is notified that the middle east is "certainly…less safe" (Davison, 2020a). Soleimani may have "lost some of this sheen," but endures as "one of the most popular" figures and a "war hero" in Iran (Marcetic, 2020). Terms such as "dissident," "martyr," and "hero" are epideictic praise constituting Soleimani as of good character. Adding to this, Featherstone (2020) gestures to Soleimani's popularity as an indication of the questionability of United States actions. He raises doubts as to whether Soleimani's death was greeted with "elation" [quotes in original article], proceeding to let the reader know that "most other news outlets reported that tens of thousands of mourners filled the streets of Tehran, many demanding vengeance." Notwithstanding the outpouring of mourning at Soleimani's death, in all these discourses is a maximization of precariousness of the aggressor whilst disregarding the precariousness of his victims.

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[13] Syrian activists responded to the tweet, affirming that they did know him. For example, Assad Hanna, a former spokesperson for the White Helmets (the Syrian Civil Defense organization), asked "Do you know that man is responsible for death of half million Syrian people? The displacement of millions of Syrians? Do you know that he created the mechanism of besieging the cities to starve until death? Do you know that in a month in Iraq he killed 500 people in demonstrations?" (Hanna, 2020).

Prolepsis deflects anticipated objections to one's stance by not entreating the reader to consider that deemed irrelevant. Rhetorically speaking, the meaning of the event is controlled by discounting certain truths and trafficking in a "gaslighting" of sorts. For instance, in the string of articles published by *Jacobin* in the days after the assassination, none mention Iranian imperialism in Iraq, Syria or Yemen (e.g. Davison, 2020b; Shafiei, 2020; Marcetic, 2020; Uetricht & Day, 2020; Featherstone, 2020; Shupak, 2020). In *Current Affairs*, the public is cautioned against admitting Soleimani was a murderer as a "needless concession" (Robinson, 2020). Fernández (2020)partakes that "some things are better left unsaid" as concerns Soleimani's wrong doings in the region. Altogether, there is a deliberate downplaying of Iranian aggression and a refusal to lay bare Iranian's colonialism in several countries in the middle east. Narratives of Soleimani's aggression do not fit into hegemonic anti-colonialist epistemologies nor within the boundaries of anti-war activism. Underneath all this is a plain subtext: the simmering anxiety that a fuller admission of the full measure of Soleimani's character would contaminate neutrality or one's intellectual asepticism to the illegality of United States' actions.

Prominent social justice activist NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick tweeted objecting to the killing of Soleimani, stating "there is nothing new about American terrorist attacks against Black and Brown people for the expansion of American imperialism" (Kaepernick, 2020). In this depiction, all brown subjects are radically homogenous as victims of American imperialism, despite the fact that the "global South cannot equally be seen as one single sphere of vulnerability" (Chouliaraki, 2013, p. 2).

The assassination was a "US-engineered calamity for the middle east" (Marcetic, 2020), as if the United States is responsible for all the bloodshed in the region. When all is done and said, reverse moral exceptionalism exhibits the tendency to decline a recognition of the agency of other evil actors in a blithe predetermination of meaning. As Syrian activist Sarah Huneidi titled her op-ed, *Iran's Wars Kill Innocents Just Like America's Do* (Huneidi, 2020). By excluding aspects of Soleimani's character which break down recognizable frames, exceptionalism renders (the persecution of) Syrian subjects unintelligible. When Syrian lives exceed recognizable frames, they trouble our established sense of things. We become "oblivious to the fact that people in other parts of the world have agency too, and that they can exercise it both to oppress others and to fight against oppression" (Hensman, 2018, p. 12).

Absent Radical Subjects

Thirdly, and following from the above, in the blurring of the lines between the victim and the perpetrator, the specific density of the torment of Syrians at the hands of Soleimani are impermissible. Soleimani is “present” as a victim at the expense of the presence of *his* victims. As Butler & Athanasiou (2013) say, “presence is constantly haunted by its spectral absence” (p. 17). In this case, the radical subject is camouflaged behind the macropolitical rhetoric of nation states and nation state leaders, as opposed to the intimacy of testimony and the micropolitics of grassroots resistance of the absent subject. There is not even the impersonality of the “there is” (in the words of Levinas, 2001, p. 83) - there is *no* “there is.” The radical subject is by and large not invoked, not a part of the scenery, let alone a compelling subject of pivotal concern. Radical subjects, many of them Soleimani’s victims, are not rhetorically constituted and their agency is evacuated. In the stifling of the radical subject is a withdrawal from their social movement as a terrain of meaning. Their testimony is hollow in the face of the righteous cause of “anti-imperialism” and the martyrdom of Soleimani. The “imperial presidency” (Marcetic, 2020) is mobilized to absolve Soleimani.

In a bifurcated rhetorical function, an attachment to the mythos of United States colonial/imperial exceptionalism divorces one from the material struggles of the radical subject. In the absolving of Soleimani’s sins is a Manichaean refusal to consider that which threatens one’s own ideas about how the world is ordered. One of the ramifications of the suppression of the phenomenology of the radical subject is an “avoidance of narrative.” Edward Said called this a “surreptitious mixing in of hierarchies, doctrines, and unadmitted prejudices in the text” (Said, 1983, p. 193). An apprehension of the

Syrian subject is averted and their lives are not registered for fear of the "unanticipated results" of this recognition (Butler, 2009). When all brown subjects are victims of American imperialism, the specific density of the individual experiences of Syrians is impermissible. They can *only* be a victim of America, and if they are not, then we should not hear from them. America's imperiality and the realities of suffering at the hands of another are impossible to reconcile. From this epistemological simplicity, a preference for certain kinds of testimony is inculcated. In its uninventiveness, an unwillingness to apprehend the radical subject is incited – an "incapacity to take [one's] imagination" where others demand it go (Power, 2002, p. 113). The inability to entertain complexity means anything outside of pre-established knowledge has no space to go.

In the rhetorical fidelity to the United States as an unparagoned aggressive nation, Syrian existence is impermissible. Berlant admits to the risk of the overt focus on the United States as a nation state in her writings: "when the nation form [is] at the center of the history of the present tense…[we] underdescribe the experiences and political struggles of persons across the globe" (Berlant, 1997, p. 13). The assessment of the assassination is a "hot take" of sensationalist moralizing rather than a more thoughtful analysis (Saffour, 2020). One falls on "already completed meanings…instead of remain[ing] open to an 'impossible' answer" (Rayner, 1993, p. 19). No rhetorical individualism or subjectivity is offered to those who are not worthy of acknowledgment if not victims of American imperialism. To underline this point, reverse moral exceptionalism adheres to deeply entrenched values which take on a predictive quality. In the firm attachment to logics of right and wrong, a de facto dismissal of others and their truths is produced. This rigorousness usurps the space that might accommodate the unimaginable subjectivities of radical subjects.

Conclusion

"[T]hose of us positioned on the intellectual left are also (and often despite ourselves) creating outsides to our own desiring inclusivities" (Singh, 2018, p. 30).

This chapter skirts the uneasy tensions and competing narratives characterizing the subjectivities of radical subjects and that of the American Left. On the one hand, the grassroots gaiety, dilapidating sorrows, and anti-colonial discourse of radical subjects foster a remembering of the oppressor from the perspective of radical subjects. On the other hand, the exceptionalist logics of the American Left articulate narratives of apologia which remember the oppressor as an apolitical victim. Through the juxtaposition of these two "rememberings" an epistemic closure on the radical subject and their non-normative articulations of liberation occurs within rhetorics of reverse moral exceptionalism. Flipping the script of moral exceptionalism in this manner invites a consideration of the dialectic between a hyperbolic identification with the imperial self and its concomitant alienation of the radical subjects. In the anecdotal case of Qasem Soleimani, the coolness with which the sanctity of testimony is met within exceptionalist political imaginaries is revealed.

By looking at these cross-sectional "texts" which deal with reactions to the same event, we observe the unlikely ways in which we erase and efface others. Who is disposable within paradigms of reverse moral exceptionalism? The case of the response to Qasem Soleimani's assassination presented here is not anomalous, but rather emblematic. As I write, the response of segments of the American Left to Ukrainian oppression and Russian military assault indicates similar machinations at play.[14]

No doubt, a conscious location of actors, processes, ideologies, and master narratives which make one “capable of speech but incapable of listening” is in order (Fiumara, 1990, p. 112). Without this reckoning, we chafe the distinction between the victim and aggressor, between the freedom struggle of the oppressed and the tyranny of their oppressor. One person’s terrorist becomes another’s hero. Harms are unaddressed and color affective relations not only between the oppressed and the oppressor, but between the oppressed and those who care deeply about justice.

In the next chapter, I explore the implications of memory on those who have *historically* been closest to the oppressor, draw lessons on how this complicates how we value the testimony of radical subjects as the sphere of influence in meaning-making of revolutionary phenomena.

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[14] For instance, Jacobin dedicated a full article blaming the United States and which only goes as far stating that Russia “signal[led] less-than-benign ambitions” (Marcetic, 2022).

Chapter 5

On Syrian (Post)Memory: Our Hearts Haven't Been Quenched, Yet

Oh stories that are writing our names
in the time of the past, and erasing us
We came with our songs
and dancing lights our nights
Our nights, our nights
Oh stories, take us out of your mind
And in the heart of the present keep us
What do you want from the past?
We weren't created for our history
Our nights, our nights
Oh time with its forgotten stories
Or with flowery dreams
The prisoners of yesterday don't leave us
And we won't wait tomorrow at night
Our nights, our nights

Julia Boutros – Oh Stories[1]

When I first heard that Kenda participated in a women's protest in 1979, I was on a cloud for a few days. Kenda, the women who raised me, the epitome of propriety and gentility, was in her own way, revolutionary. Her stance of civil disobedience was instrumental to how I understood my stance against the regime.[2] The affective fabric of her memories, as her daughter Sara words it, "come out of the heart and fall into the heart (of the other)." When I asked Kenda about it over the phone, I could imagine her lifting her eyebrows to signal she could not talk. She told me, "we did nothing, close the topic." In spite of Kenda's denial, and the undisputed waning of memory, she did not suffer from amnesia. Remembering is not always a choice, the past cannot be exorcised. While she swallowed her stories on the phone, over her kitchen table, she would share memories which had survived the ravages of time. Despite the state's frequent infringement of her private space, she bore witness to her trauma. We were her community, providing succor, if not resolution, to her melancholy. By keeping the past in the present, she was able to tolerate "the complex and unbearable contingencies of living" (Good et al., 2008, p. 375). We were enchanted by her memories. Her temporary compliance with the authoritarian state would turn into an encroachment of the enforced order when she had the opportunity. Every time we visited her in Aleppo, Kenda would "repeat the whole story, in all its details. Every time. it's the same story. But she needs to tell it. And we listen" (Kenda's daughter, Sarah). She would remember, then repress, speak in broken refrains, then fall silent. When she was alone, she would take out the decades-old newspaper with her son's image on it, falling apart with holes and gaps, but somehow still intact, one of the few relics she has of her son.

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[1] This poem is a translation of the original Arabic song found online, with minor edits by the author. All the quotes from family members in this chapter were translated by the author from the original colloquial Arabic.

[2] The precise familial relationship I have with those in this chapter is anonymized for the sake of the safety of the family. "Sara" is the character that threads both stories in this chapter together, as the sister of Rafi and the wife of Suhail.

When the 2011 revolution erupted into vivid existence in Syria, the elderly were cautious, warning revolutionaries, "this movement will lead to your end. And they were right" (Najla AlSheikh in Kadi, 2016). Others were optimistic, such as a family friend who lost all her family to the regime, "we will be victorious, it is impossible for it to happen again and for us to not be victorious. It *will* happen means it *will* happen." Even with the knowledge of past traumas, the revolutionary Syrian spirit endured. This time, it was not into the unknown or with innocent gullibility, but with knowledge inherited from confessional ancestors. Revolutionaries had an "ethic of sacrifice" (Ismail, 2018, p. 6), innately aware of the incalculable risks they were assuming As expected, those that chanted 'the army and the people, hand in hand" while protesting were detained, imprisoned, tortured, mutilated, then left at their family's doorsteps as an after-thought (Amnesty International, 2011; Cucher, 2018).

With the above in mind, this chapter engages the historic spatialities and temporalities in which revolutionary identities emerge and are enacted beyond the performativity of public displays of memory. In doing so, I reveal how (post)memory, i.e., second-generation memories, impacts the latent credibility of radical subjects. Marianne Hirsch puts forth postmemory as how the "generation after" the Holocaust experience the personal, collective and cultural trauma of their ancestors by German leadership, crimes which reached an end point and were prosecuted in the Nuremberg Trials (Hirsch, 2008). In the case of Syria, the regime remains an oppressive power, allowing for postmemory to operate at various registers of spatio-temporality. In this sense, postmemory is employed in a way not perfectly analogous to its conception by Hirsch, which is why bracket placement is prudent, i.e., (post)memory. The regime *persists* in its oppression, exercising arbitrary detention, summary executions, torture, and enforced disappearance of Syrians as tools of repression and control.[3] I do not intend to slip into problematic competition over suffering, but rather to index the ongoing nature of Syrian trauma and the absence of atonement or reparations. This chapter explicates how viewing revolutionary subjectivity through the portal of intergenerational memories allows for an appreciation of radical subjects as the sphere of influence in how we interpret and make meaning of revolution.

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[3] There are currently at least 130,000 forcibly disappeared in regime jails and weekly incinerations of bodies (International Center for Transitional Justice, 2020).

This chapter visits the Events, a euphemism for the rebellion and ensuing violence which occurred during late 1970s and early 1980s.[4] In the aftermath of the Events, organized political opposition was weakened and civil society was quiescent - i.e., the Assad family was by and large uncontested for power. But, determinations of a paralysis of political activity, of Syrians as “politically dead” (Al Haj Saleh, 2017d, p. 222), obscure much. Indeed, the memories of the Events were so scorched into the minds of Syrians that in the initial protests of 2011, Syrians chanted “we will not let the massacres of 1982 be repeated!” (Bakri, 2011) (see Figure 6).

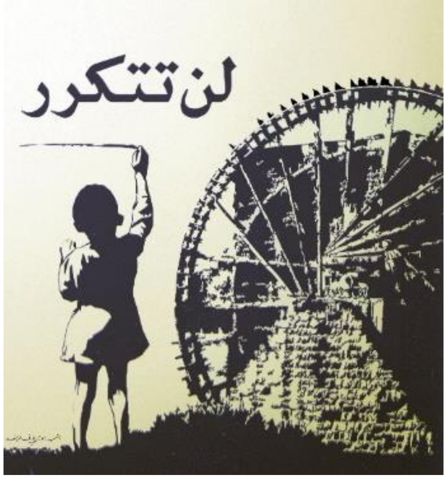

Figure 6. “It will not happen again” on the norias of Hama (The Syrian People Know Their Way, 2012b)[5]

Unlike the 9/11 Twin Towers Memorial, there was no public iconography or signification for the Events, nor was it taught in school history books. Entire urban destricts were bulldozed, along with the noncombatant citizens in it, and the rubble of the dead steamrolled over as if it were a parking lot (The New York Times, 2011). In Al-Kilaniyya, the place where the Hama Massacre occurred, the Afamia Cham Hotel, a vegetable market in the Hamidiyeh neighborhood and a garden near Bakr al-Sadiq mosque were built (Abouzeid, 2018; Ismail, 2018). The legacies of resistance were not state-sanctioned memory, but perdured in the private domain. In this sense, this chapter diverges from "the public" as the central realm of action and immortality and instead presents the private domain as a realm of action. As banished histories, there was a "gap in narratives…a puzzle of silence …it is as if Hama was forgotten," though on closer inspection, the memories were not only present, but were infused with an amalgam of meanings and feelings in Syrian life.[6]

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[4] In February 1982, Hama was levelled to the ground with infantry, armor, air assault and artillery. It was a deliberate decision to make an example of the rebellious city and show how the regime deals with dissent. In “irrational and disproportionate revenge” (Lefevre, 2013, p. 59), 10,000 - 40,000 people were slaughtered and buried in mass graves (Sardar & Yassin-Kassab, 2014).

[5] The waterwheels are the landmark symbol of the city of Hama where the Hama Massacre took place in 1982.

I share vignettes from oral histories of family members to probe how unresolved grief in the authoritarian context informs revolutionary subjectivity. Before now, these have been absent from the historical archive, not written on paper, stone, or brick, or in the ephemeral world of social media. The stories have been dulled, heightened and relayed in stitched fragments over the course of time. Their existence here in written form is testament to who has authority over memory, bringing to the fore questions of whether "the political street" is always the "ultimate arena to communicate discontent" (Bayat, 2013, p. 13). More importantly, they allow for consideration of how memory functions as a vehicle for confronting liberatory social movements when there is suppression of genocidal memory by an authoritarian state. To state it otherwise, limited as venues of remembrance are in the context of intense censorship, when personal freedoms are nonexistent and there is no public airing of grievances, radical subjectivities are constituted via generational memories inherited from those with ancestral power. This is not to say that all the constitutive elements of the Events resonate in our present, but nevertheless, the implications of memory on what I term the latent credibility of radical subjects of succeeding generations is noteworthy and warranties further examination.

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[6] Though the Baath army suppressed several uprisings across the years, Hama was the "most traumatizing" of these repressions (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami, 2016, pp. 13–14). As Sarah says, "they decapitated them."

In Part 1, I situate the reader with the stories I grew up with, which both precede and supersede my life: (1) Suhail's Story; and then, (2) Rafi's Story. The first is a "survivor's tale," of false accusations, borders, exile, and redemption by the state (Suhail's Story), while the other is a "sufferer's lament," of embodied resistance, armed opposition, and murder by the state (Rafi's Story). I relay both in narrative form with an attending emplotment of events and without critical analysis. Some of what is relayed is reiterative of other testimonials, whilst some are introspective contemplations unique to the prism from which they are shared. Each family story leans differently into various aspects of the formation of the radical subject, of their latent credibility across and through time. Suhail's émigré story sheds light on the subtle ways in which agency is compromised, resistance constrained, and power accommodated, while Rafi's sacrificial story speaks to the resistance of radical subjects and how agency is activated. Interwoven within both is the ways through which radical subjects are anchored in historical, political, and social location and the myriad of moments through which they acquire intimacy with patterns of domination and resistance.

In Part 2, I draw on the affective workings of these narratives as a form of (post)memory in my own life to argue for the radical subject's latent credibility. Suhail's forced exile and Rafi's revolutionary resistance serve as departure points for how my own subjectivity as a scholar is informed by ancestral memories. Through a critical contemplation of family histories, I unpack the autoethnographic dimension of these family histories and what they reveal about the (post)memory in the formation of radical subjects. Admittedly, I do not explore all the meanings which arise through a detailed analysis of these oral histories but limit my attention to how second-generation memories, or (post)memory contributes to theoretical understandings of the radical subject and the historied nature of the revolution.

Specifically, I outline how latent credibility is structured along the following two registers: (1) (Post)memory as Resistance; and (2) (Post)memory as Knowledge. The first register, "(Post)memory as Resistance" illuminates how memories about immemorial struggle instigate fantasy investment in resistance long before revolution is ignited. The second register, "(post)memory as knowledge" divulges how (post)memory "bites" radical subjects with historically uncirculated knowledge, inculcating a unique awareness of a set of historical problems related to systems of power. I illustrate how latent credibility is built on the onto-epistemological authority of intergenerational memories, saturating revolutionary practice and enriching the epistemic salience of the radical subject. Though lived experiences do not extend backwards in time, they carry with them the heritage of previous eras and intergenerational acts of witnessing become rhetorically resonant in how we apprehend the radical subject. Lastly, I am aware of the pronounced limitations, nay, the impossibility, of conveying lived experiences in these oral histories. As Sarah, the person who threads both of these oral histories together (as the sister of Rafi and the wife of Suhail), testifies, "no matter what you write about the struggle we went through (al mu’anah), it won’t be the same as the truth of what happened, the actuality of it.”

Stories from Memory

Suhail’s Story

Suhail was always a ‘isami,’ a self-starting man and the most promising of the family’s children, known for his intelligence, wit, and ambition. Perhaps this is why he was chosen to take the fall. His story is one of resilience, of gutsy irreverence, with his signature mixture of *carpe diem* energy and realism toward a society pregnant with conflict. His story hinges on a dispute he inherited from his brother, and is composed of several interwoven motifs, characters, and circumstances. In 1974, Suhail’s eldest brother was a young architecture graduate who had returned home to Aleppo after studying in Alexandria, Egypt. An old college friend offered him work as a consultant for the bank. His friend, the son of a prominent Damascene family, had ascended expeditiously in the ranks to become the director of a national bank specializing in home mortgages. He trusted his expertise and assigned him as chief assessment engineer in the bank’s Aleppan branch. It was a position of influence– he would assess the mortgage applications, determine whether the applicant qualified for a loan, and would assign the value of the loan as he thought appropriate. The head of the Aleppan branch, Abu Taha (Father of Taha), asserted absolute authority over the bank’s operations. It was not long before it became clear that Abu Taha was an opportunist taking petty bribes from clients to provide the home mortgage they wanted, brokering “sweet deals” for the mukhabarat or those in positions of power:[7]

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[7] For decades, Syrians have been repressed by the mukhabarat, the regime’s sprawling and intricate system of Syrian intelligence agencies which keep files on the population. Modelled after the Stasi, the German

> A mukhabarat officer would call and say, “Abu Taha, I want to build a house for 80,000 liras. دبرلي ياها [i.e., make it work].” Another from the security branch or an army officer would call, “ الله يخليك مشيلنا ياها [i.e., for the love of God, put it through Abu Taha].” Before my brother came, the buck stopped with Abu Taha. As my brothers hiring had come at the behest of the bank’s director, he was under no obligation to answer to Abu Taha. He was fair and honest to a fault. Abu Taha’s “wings were cut” and because of that, they clashed. (Suhail)

Suhail’s brother was not interested in partaking in any quid pro quo with clients or in being a partner to Abu Taha’s transgressions. When he refused to comply with his underhand way of doing things, Abu Taha held him in cold contempt. He was nonchalant about the confrontation, jesting privately to Suhail about Abu Taha’s seething anger and his barking and huffing at his loss of power. But his refusal to play along with Abu Taha was complicated by Suhail’s close friendship with Abu Taha’s son, Taha. Taha and Suhail had grown up together, in the same clique who would spend hours at each other’s homes and in the streets of neighborhood. In school together since childhood, they had even entered medical school together. From this proximity, Suhail knew of Abu Taha’s megalomania, as well as his reputation for intimacy with the mukhabarat:

> On the day of the final examinations in medical school, Abu Taha came to campus accompanied by a mukhabarat officer. He would stand outside the door with his son, and the officer would enter the room to have a word with the examining committee. His father wanted him to be the first in the cohort, so the mukhabarat officer would signal to the examining committee that Taha be

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Democratic Republic’s State Security Apparatus, the mukhabarat monitor every aspect of life in Syria. They are above the law and exempt from any form of judicial oversight (McHugo, 2014).

> assigned full marks. Taha had a weak personality, and his father inserted himself into all details of his life. When Taha fell in love with Maryam in college, his father didn’t approve. He didn’t want his son to marry a girl the same age as him and with little in the way of beauty. They fought about it viciously for a year, it was a saga. In the end Taha went to Saudi Arabia and married her. Till today, I remember when Abu Taha threatened his son with an oath to destroy the marriage: “even if this marriage occurs, I swear if there is a day left in my life, I will get you to divorce her.” That is how he thought about things. (Suhail)

Approaches to memory frequently encapsulate “multiple moving rhetorical agents” (Maldonado, 2021, p. 244), and now I present such a temporary digression in this story. Suhail’s cousin immigrated to Canada in the early 1970s. After acquiring Canadian citizenship, as newly minted citizens often do, he applied for family reunification to bring relatives to Canada. He was not only a cousin to the family, but Suhail’s mother had breastfed him as a child along with one of her sons when his own mother was ill. As such, he was a ‘milk brother’ and there was hope that one of Suhail’s brothers might qualify for visa sponsorship to Canada.[8] The judge in charge of the case asked for evidence that the cousins were milk brothers. By happenstance, Taha was in the car with Suhail when they learnt about the judge’s request, and in the whim of the moment, offered to testify as a witness. Later, it came to Abu Taha’s attention that his son had assisted our family. His response was one of visceral outrage:

> He stormed into our house and stood at the entryway. جن [He was unhinged, raving mad]. He asked we retrieve the paper, but it had already been sent to

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[8] In Islam, when children are breastfed three or more times by the same woman, a familial relationship is created, such that a man cannot marry his milk-sister or his milk-mother.

> Canada. He wanted it so he could rip it to pieces. His lips quivering, he said, "*I will show you. I will make you cry blood over this, you will pay for this in blood*." (Suhail, emphasis added)

In response, Suhail's brother told him with a smirk, "البيت االلك تفضل هبنا ياه" [i.e., it is your house, come, gift it to us]. This phrase is an insulting way of throwing someone out of one's house, by pointing out satirically that perhaps they should gift the house they are standing on to its rightful owner. And leave Abu Taha did, after which any vestige of civility between the two families was lost.

Social scripts of vengeance are not automatically transferred into malicious action. Though no doubt vindictive in nature, Abu Taha was also a product of a system which induces treachery and cynicism in its people. In his last year of medical school, Suhail discovered a report was written claiming he was an active member of the Muslim Brotherhood.[9] These written reports were based on hearsay, loosely framed to "include information on certain people, in the presence of so and so, for saying or doing something or refraining from doing something when they should have done it" (Al Haj Saleh, 2017d, p. 237). Typically, these were written out of fear of reprisals for not reporting, or out of greed for rewards for one's loyalty (Al Haj Saleh, 2017d). Other times, they were driven by revenge or deeply held grudges. During this time, an epidemic of report writing reflected the paranoia of the regime and the fear corroding it from within. At one stage, almost every citizen knew a mukhabarat informant, be it "a colleague, old school-fellow or neighbor" (Clark, 2014, p. 11). Even a "cup of tea with an oppositionist" might land one in prison (Dabbagh, 2007, p. 9). As a government informant with close connections with the mukhabarat, the family had underestimated Abu Taha's ability to wreak destruction in their life. The accusations were baseless – Suhail was not particularly devout and did not have any inclination to be involved with the Brotherhood. As he says, "their ideas were different than my ideas." He was indignant:

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[9] There is a protracted and bitter history between the Baath party and the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria. For some context, the Muslim Brotherhood was founded in Syria in 1942 as an extension of the main branch in Egypt. At one stage, they ran for elections and had four member representatives in parliament. They did not call for sharia law in the country, but rather their rhetoric centered around freeing Syrians from colonization (Kilani, 2017). The founder of the Syrian Brotherhood, Mustafa Al Sibai, who lead the organization from 1945-1961, authored the canonical book *The Socialism of Islam*, which argues that Islam is compatible with socialism. The Brotherhood's activities came to a halt when they were outlawed, once by Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1958, and subsequently by the Baath party in 1963, after which they operated in secret (Zakaria, 2013). The organization went through evolutionary cycles and had a "deeply heterogeneous geographical, cultural and ideological composition" (Lefevre, 2013). Generally, the organization was opposed to armed militancy and focused their energies on educational reform (Zollner, 2009). However, in 1979, there was an acute ideological shift towards armed struggle, with the conviction that it would be impossible to achieve their objectives of emancipating Syrians otherwise. In a Majlis al Shura meeting in Amman, the leaders decided to create a military branch and endorse violence as a legitimate response to state repression. This caused a fracture in the leadership (Abd-allah, 1983), but the decision was justified as appropriate self-defense in face of Baathist provocations: "we did not begin our jihad until…after having received the broken bodies of our brothers who had died under torture." (Lefevre, 2013). Like other political movements, "Islamism has never existed in a vacuum; it draws on the peculiarities of time and place" (Hamid, 2016, p. 137). Therefore, the endorsement of violence was as an option of last resort in light of the regime's military warfare (Batatu, 1999), rather than as a result of core beliefs in its ideological documents. Some claim the brotherhood officially split from the Fighting Vanguard (Kilani, 2017), while others claim this never formally happened (Al Romoh, 2021). In any case, there was a crossover of membership (Conduit, 2019). This chapter centers the Syrian Muslim brotherhood (considered the Syrian

> I had nothing to do with them [the Brotherhood], not from near and not from far. It was a false accusation. There was no evidence, but the accusation alone was enough.

A piercing fact used to murk the waters was that one of Suhail's friends in college was Ayman Abu Ghuddeh, the son of Abdel Fatah Abu Ghuddah who had taken the reins of leadership of the Brotherhood after Issam Al Attar in 1971. Their homes were not only

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right), arguably the opposition group that mounted the largest resistance to the regime. Admittedly, this focus risks minimizing the role of other currents of resistance, all representing diverse constituents in the political fabric of Syria. Nevertheless, the Syrian left never "had the preparedness and capabilities to possess power and confront the regime's violence [as the Syrian right]" (Shabo, 2021).

in the same neighborhood, but their balconies faced each other.[10] In April 1980, there was another report on Suhail. A mukhabarat officer came to his brother at work, cautioning him under his breath: "be careful, your brother is on the wanted list. There is another report on him."[11] As Suhail studied for his medical exams on the balcony, he was being surveilled by an unfamiliar car driving back and forth on their street. However, a brief trip Suhail took to Jordan at the end of the school year was the final straw:

> I finished my last exam in college on a Monday. I had booked an American medical exam the next day in Jordan. I was already on the observation list and my crossing borders triggered them. By the time I returned Wednesday night, my brother's connections in the mukhabarat called, "they are coming to get him tomorrow. Get him out today.

Suhail's visit to Jordan was taken as a confirmation of his involvement with the Brotherhood. Jordan was the host of several exiled leaders of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood until the late 1990s. The Majlis al Shura meetings (the Brotherhood's consultative body) were held in Amman, and at one stage, their training camps took place in the Jordanian desert (Lefevre, 2013). A few hours after his arrival in Aleppo, the neighborhood chieftain (mukhtar) knocked the door of their house: "the mukhabarat came asking about your son." Suhail didn't sleep that night. Leaving before he knew whether he had passed his final year of medical school was a gamble, but he could not afford to wait. With an unknown future ahead, he departed Aleppo in a trip which had the exaggerated feel of a dream. By five in the morning, he was at Bab Al Hawa, the "Gate of the Winds," a border crossing on the Syria-Turkey Border, an hour's drive from the city. He left with a small bag, a passport that would expire in three months, and 4,000 Syrian liras. Inexplicably, his name hadn't been distributed to the borders yet, and he escaped.[12] From Bab Al Hawa, he took a bus to Antakya, then a train to Istanbul, crossing the Bosphorus to the European side, before taking a train to Austria. Fortuitously, he had a visa in hand to Europe which he had applied for with plans for summer fun after graduation.

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[10] Abdel Fatah Abu Ghuddeh established the Aleppo branch of the Brotherhood and secured the recognition of the Syrian branch by the international parent body in 1972 (Batatu, 1982). Though he was exiled from Syria at this time, he was active from afar.

[11] This incident reveals the ways in which the mukhabarat themselves are at times in concert and other times at cross-purposes.

Early the next morning, there was a search blockade as Suhail's neighborhood was sealed off. Sirens blared, the street's electricity was switched off, and forty armed officers with military vehicles occupied the street. They banged at the door with their fists as their pounding filled the air. The family was at home playing barjees in their pajamas.[13] The officers barged in, interrupting their game. They raided the house with their rifles, asking for Suhail. His sister, present that day, shared what transpired:

> You would say they were Zionists coming in! They swarmed the house, searching up and down, opening the closets. They searched the attic. We told them he left the country, legally and with a valid passport. They asked for a picture of him, "even if from elementary school! We want a picture." When they could not find him, they left.

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[12] Decades later, that same border would become the most important crossing for Syrian rebels during the revolution. It is the same crossing thousands of refugees used to reach the refugee camp of Reyhanli in Turkey. Today, it is the only source of humanitarian aid into the last opposition stronghold in Idlib.

[13] Barjees is a traditional middle eastern game made with a dark velvet fabric and colorful embroidery. Cowry shells are thrown by each player to determine the number of moves, depending on whether the shell falls on its open or closed side.

Suhail was weary to the bone, his nerves frayed, but he had fled with his life. The day after he arrived, his family sent him a message: “Don’t think of coming back. Forget about Syria. ما في رجعة (i.e, there is no return).” If he had slept at home, delayed his exit, or paused to collect his belongings, his destiny might have been entirely different. At his arrival in Graz, his dispossession settled in, but the journey ahead would entail every instinct for survival he had:

> When I arrived, I was lost. I had to look for work, I had to look for my future. There was a student association where I slept in the basement with three others. I worked at the hospital, and they would give me food vouchers. I would wake up at 4 am, sell newspapers till 7 am, then go to the hospital and work till 5 or 6 pm. Then, I would sell newspapers from 6-9 pm in another spot. It was almost impossible to transfer money from Syria, so it took me a year to save the money for the last leg of my journey.

In testament to his risqué methods of resisting the regime’s control of his life across borders, until he was able to secure receipt of his original diploma, he worked with a fabricated graduate medical certificate. In his mind, necessity justified the questionable act to maintain a life with dignity. When he found out he had passed all his coursework, making him officially a Doctor of Medicine, he encountered another dilemma: his degree would not be released until he returned to serve military service in Syria, an impossibility. In a surge of bravado, his brother falsified documents to show that he was the only son of the family and therefore exempt from military service. His original diploma was mailed to him, ironically making him the first of his cohort to receive it.

For fifteen years, Suhail was not able to return to Aleppo. But his life is marked by incredible kismet. In 1994, Suhail's path crossed with an Alawite family closely aligned to the regime, namely the Lieutenant Assad Merrah, a Major General of the Defense and Acquisition Branch of the Military. Merrah was not only within the inner circle of the President, but one of the backbones of the Baath party. Abu Zaid, as he was known, reported directly to Hafez Al Assad. As Suhail puts it, "his connections reached all the way to The Presidential Palace." He was a member of the inner state, the private, sectarian officials in the state who have sovereignty over people's fate yet who are invisible to the public (Al Haj Saleh, 2017d). As a 'regime man,' he was firmly inside the political-security-financial complex that "owns and rules Syria" (Al Haj Saleh, 2017d, p. 230). His son was at one point engaged to the daughter of Dr. Rifaat Al Assad, the younger brother of Hafez and the (former) commander of the strongest security formation of the regime, the Defense Companies.

The lieutenant was a calm man, with an unassuming demeanor, but it was his wife, Um Zaid, who was famous in Aleppo for the manner in which she wielded her husband's influence. Dubbed the "Mother of Gold," she accepted bribes in gold for her services. Her habitual pricing was two gold twisted-rope bracelets popular for which she would carry out favors for the wealthy merchants and landowning notables of Aleppo. She might ensure their sons would have comfortable placements for military service (for instance having them assigned to an air-conditioned indoor space in the military headquarters inside the city, rather than in the desert or in rural areas far from their families), or iron out any "issues" they might have in the capital. She would also act as a conduit for families frantic for intelligence on their forcibly disappeared children in the regime's prisons – giving intermediaries a cut of her pay to find out a detainee's whereabouts or to secure a family visit. One of her clients was Suhail's aunt, who was searching for her son who had been forcibly disappeared by the regime. Her son was a simpleton, with no interest or capacity for any of the political happenings at the time, but he spent twenty years in prison for being in the proximity of a protest. Um Zaid reaped a fortune through these underhand services, gathering an estimated two kilograms of gold a month. She also used her authority to extort goods and services in other ways. In her visits to the Old Souq, she would order the shopkeepers to take down any items she fancied - "that table cover, that coffee set, this brocade, and that." Without batting an eyelid, sweeping gesture with her hands would signify to the shopkeeper to load the goods in her car. The shopkeepers would acquiesce, and no one dared ask for payment.[14]

The temporary co-existence between my family and that of Abu Zaid's was due to the recent marriage of Abu Zaid's daughter to a man who lived in the same city as my parents. This man, a young doctor who had left Syria to advance his education abroad, had written details on his visa application that made him ineligible for work. Suhail was consulted on how to navigate "the system" so he might work legally and circumvent his dilemma. When Abu Zaid came to visit his daughter, Suhail was asked for his guidance on other matters. They were in an unfamiliar land, and Suhail's resourcefulness and gregarious nature were appreciated.[15] Suhail took care of them, and with time, gained their respect. This is not uncharacteristic of Suhail – who till this day, is generous to a fault with his time, expertise, and resources. His attitude toward Abu Zaid hinged on a principle of moral relativism – to him, people like Abu Zaid were honest about who they were, unlike Abu Taha. A warm acquaintance, if not friendship, developed between the two families. They visited for dinner a handful of times, and Sarah, the wife of Suhail, found herself in conversation with the infamous Um Zaid about her life in Aleppo.[16] In hindsight, Sarah's conscience is haunted by the relationship:

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[14] After the revolution, Syrians would call this seizure of private resources through direct or indirect intimidation "tashbih" (the literal translation of which is "ghosting"). The ancestral origin of this phrase comes from "ghost cars." When cars of high-ranking regime officials passed by in the street and detained people, they would say "they went in a ghost car." This car tended to be a Mercedes Benz S600 model which was battered in appearance despite being new (Al Haj Saleh, 2017d). My mother asserts the cars often had curtains on the windows so no one could see the inside, hence the "ghost" term.

> When I look back, if it comes to me now, I wouldn't let them enter my house. But in those days, she was coming from Al Sham, and I was so happy to see a Syrian. I was naïve. Today, I consider it stupidity. It was عيب [i.e., an ethical fault] for us to even talk to them. They were criminals. It was a mistake for us to deal with them in the first place.

As a Sunni Syrian wanted by the regime,[17] it was improbable, if not entirely implausible, that my father would have access to a world of blood kinships and allegiance which operates on a principle of scarcity and mutual exclusion. Strikingly, his presence outside of the regime's space-time continuum allowed him to accrue privilege which positioned him as a recourse for assistance to the very regime that had ousted him. Even within totalitarian regimes, power systems are liable to rupture, if only in atomistic fashion. Two years after they had met, after subtle nudging from a friend, Abu Zaid mediated with the regime on behalf of my father. His father was bedridden with liver cancer and calling to see Suhail. The Presidential Palace was petitioned to permit Suhail entry into Syria, irrespective of any military service owed to the state or any security concerns.

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[15] One of the comical stories related is one day when Um Zaid wanted to go grocery shopping by herself. She told the taxi driver to take her to "Tesco," (a grocery chain in England). He nodded and took Um Zaid to a disco instead.

[16] Um Zaid must have let her guard down in front of Sarah. When Bashar Al Assad married Asma Al Akhras, Sarah recalls Um Zaid was incensed, telling her husband in her presence, "See! He married a Sunni in the end."

[17] When I refer to Sunni, Muslims, Alawites, Christians, or others in this text, it is invariably as a marker of identity and belonging, rather than as an indication of religiosity. Alawites are members of a secretive Muslim sect which predominates in the mountainous areas of Lattakia. Only a select few are initiated into their core dogma and rituals. Though they are minorities in Syria, after the Baath party took power, they displaced the Sunni majority for domination of the country.

In January 1995, early in the morning, Suhail received notice of the approval for his return. His name was removed from security lists, but the order had not been distributed to the borders yet. A few hours later, he received another call, this time with news that his father had passed away. By the time the ‘green light’ was given to book his tickets, it was too late. He arrived the day after his father died. The Merrah family sent a limousine to welcome Suhail from the airport. He went straight to see his father, who was wrapped in a white shroud in preparation for burial while prayers were being recited. The fear that leaped like a brushfire within him after long years of absence was overcome by a dazed heartache at the reason for his return. Sarah, listening as Suhail recited his story to me, with a faint snicker and righteous disdain, told me the Merrah’s did them no favors – “it was an injustice, a false charge your father was innocent of, and now they were fixing it. And after what!? After his dad died? أوسخ منهم ما في [i.e., a dirtier regime never existed].”

Rafi’s Story

I never met Rafi, the brother of Sarah, though I revered him for much of my life. A cynic might say there is a naïveté and sentimentalism in this remembrance. I share this story with trepidation about mischaracterization. And even more so, an acknowledgement that there is a danger of oversimplifying his story to that of uncomplicated heroic resistance. He is far from an “ideal victim” within normative scripts of resistance, indeed he could be characterized as a complex political victim (Bouris, 2007). But what can be said with certitude is that he had a vision for resistance and liberation. The mechanisms by which he sought to achieve this liberation can certainly be critiqued, but here, I reclaim his story and proceed with the conviction that this story is conducive to fathoming the legacy of resistance to the regime.

I have only seen a handful of photographs of him, but I can picture him clearly: He was handsome, tall and slender, olive-skinned, with straight brown hair and hazel-green eyes. Kenda tells us how beautiful his lashes were, long and luscious. I do not know why this detail is important to her, but it is. Much of how we remember him is fixated on his love for his mother. He was مرضي [i.e., a son who was kind to his parents], so much so that they would say Rafi was like a butterfly around Kenda, always in her service. She would be behind with chores when out of nowhere, Rafi would appear telling her class had been cancelled and he had left early, knowing she would need help: “Mama, what can I do for you? What can I get you? Should I take things to the attic? Should I carry that large pot for you?”

He was born in 1962 in Aleppo, inside the family home, as were his siblings. He was given a Kurdish name which his father took a fancy to, though he never liked his name. A few months after his birth, the Arab Socialist Baath Party took power after a coup d'état led by Hafez Al Assad and his comrades. Assad became the de facto head of the Syrian Air Force, though he would not become the President of Syria until an intraparty coup a few years later. Despite frequent “democratic rhetorical flourishes” (Batatu, 1999, p. 204), Assad forced himself into the presidency and drafted a new constitution placing all executive, legislative and judicial powers in his hands. His “Corrective Movement” preached a leftist manifesto based on Arab nationalism, but his rule was authoritarian, implementing intense restrictions on media, free speech, and trade.

Rafi came from an eminent Aleppan family of high religious standing. His father’s cousin was the venerable Islamic scholar Sheikh Abd Allah Siraj Al Din Al Husayni, a direct descendant of the Prophet Mohamad known for his karamat (saintly miracles). The family took great pride in that the reclusive sheikh had visited their house, one of the few in the family who had had the honor. Unlike other prominent Sunni scholars (ulama) acquiescent to the regime, such as Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro (the Mufti of Syria) and Sheikh Mohamad Said Ramadan Al-Bouti, Sheikh Abd Allah refused to partake in any way with the regime, preferring to leave the country than succumb to pressure to submit a state-facilitated Islam to the masses. When he returned for a visit to Syria ten years later, the regime sent a limousine to pick him up at the airport and offered to have him stay at their expense in one of the luxury hotels in the city. It was an attempt to gain his goodwill, but he declined.

In line with the family legacy, Rafi was genuinely devout as a child, completing his morning prayers in the mosque and spending hours huddled in a corner reading the Quran. He would wake before dawn, in pitch darkness, and tiptoe out the house, but Kenda would hear the scrape of his slippers on the floor. After the click of the door, she would wake up and watch him from the balcony till he reached the door of their neighborhood mosque. Ever vigilant for his safety, she would wait for the front door to latch before she went back to bed. He committed Al-Nawawi's Forty Hadith to memory, a collection of the prophet's hadith valued over the centuries for being the foundations of Islamic sacred law. When he won third place in a local hadith competition, he was awarded a cutlery set which is in Kenda's kitchen cabinets till this day. Kenda swears, "I can't find contentment in any meal except with those spoons." Kenda would tell us stories about Rafi, and my cousins and I would write them down. Looking back today at my diaries, much of my writing is flushed with the rosiness of Kenda's remembrance of him, the innocence and bravery of Rafi which prevails in remembrance of him.

It was around this time that Hafez Al Assad was taking steps to engender loyalty and fear of the regime in the youth. To this end, the Baath Vanguard Organization was created, targeting elementary students and drawing from the ideological predilections of the Baath Party. As such, when Rafi went to Al Fateh, an all-boy public school, he had to wear a khaki military style jacket, a cap, and a scarf around the neck. Students would sing the national anthem every morning, write essays about the 8th of March "Revolution" (i.e., the military coup in which the Baath party took over), and take Nationalism (qawmeyyeh) classes. Students were taught to love Baba Hafez (Father Hafez), memorize his sayings and life story, and emulate his pioneering achievements (Al-Maaloli, 2016). Sarah recalls how as a young child, the tropes of the eternal leader Hafez Al Assad were internalized by her and her siblings:

> You know, I swear to God, Noor, in school, all day they would teach us, Al Assad! Al Assad! I reached a stage in 5th or 6th grade when I started to love him. In summer, they would take all the students outside of Aleppo for a week of military camp (futuwweh) teaching us how to be "good citizens." The students

> would live in the outdoors and camp overnight. I cried because I desperately wanted to go, but my parents wouldn’t let me. We began to love Hafez in earnest. I feel sorry for myself when I look back – they brainwashed us. *If it wasn’t for my family, and the people around me, I might not have woken up.* (emphasis added)

In her words is an anger at how her existence as a child teetered between the moulding of those holding coercive power and the protective envelope of family. By 1978, her older brother Rafi was fifteen, but far from an aimless teenager. Despite efforts to cultivate an emotional bond between the people and their leader, these coercive practices were not capable of evoking true commitment (Wedeen, 1999). At home, he would overhear snippets of conversations by his parents in response to the news, “Hafez, هل مجرم [i.e., that criminal]!” He became a student of Sheikh Taher Kheirallah, attending his classes at the mosque with university students and young scholars. He was greatly taken with Sheikh Taher, whose charismatic persona and eloquent sermons about the state of the Ummah and possibilities for reform were so popular they attracted students from all over Aleppo. Rafi also became close to Sheikh Mujahed Shaaban, an Islamic scholar of great repute in Aleppo. The family only knew about this when to their astonishment, their teenage son was invited to Sheikh Mujahed’s talbeesa, a Syrian folklore festivity in which a groom is celebrated by his nearest male friends, undressing him and then re-dressing him in his wedding attire before he accompanies his bride to the wedding. These scholars were dissidents of the regime, and their ideas filtered through to Rafi. His political consciousness was awakened about the deepening corruption of the regime and stifling of personal freedoms. The seeds of discord had been planted.

About that time, opposition to the regime was being stirred by the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood was intent on waking people from their “deep slumber” calling for the freedom to assemble, protest, and form political parties and trade unions (Shurbaji, 2010). They condemned the arbitrary decrees and inhuman police practices of the regime, stressing “the need of the nation to regain its freedom is as vital as its need for air, water and food” (Batatu, 1982). Membership in the Brotherhood drastically expanded. Numbers in the Aleppo branch ballooned from 800 in 1975 to 5000 -7000 members by 1978 (Batatu, 1999).

And so, Rafi became a member of the Brotherhood in Syria. He was barely sixteen years old and still in high school.[18] Though many had relatives or friends who recruited them into the movement, Rafi joined of his own volition. Years later, Rafi was told by his mentor Waleed Al Attar in front of his friends in the Brotherhood:

> All of you had someone who brought you here (to the Brotherhood). You had your brother, ابن خالتك [i.e., your cousin from your mother’s side], ابن عمك[i.e., your cousin from your father’s side]. Except Rafi. He came to us alone, with his own two feet.

Rafi’s membership became official when a Brotherhood leader visited my grandparents’ house to ask their permission. After they departed, his father had a stern talk with Rafi: “I have no objections. I am happy if my son is religious and diligent in prayer, but don’t hold religion from its ass.”

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[18] Most members tended to be university undergraduates (mostly from medical or engineering backgrounds), members of the professions, and generally from the middle class or old bourgeoisie (Abouzeid, 2018; Shurbaji, 2010). The majority of those arrested by the regime from 1976 to 1981 were students (Lefevre, 2013).

The details of Rafi's political activity are sparse, as his goings about were mostly clandestine.[19] Though I do not know this for certain, there are indications that he was one of the armed insurgents against the regime, a member of the Fighting Vanguard (al Tali'a al-Muqatila).[20] The Fighting Vanguard was the only armed faction of the Brotherhood, made up primarily of its youngest members. He was discernably being prepared for an insurgent role within their nationwide network, sent to a training camp in the mountains and forests of Ras al-Bassit near the coastal city of Latakia. The archives suggest that in these camps, members were taught crucial combat skills, such as how to throw grenades and operate light machine guns. Each camp constituted of 30-40 insurgents from Aleppo, Damascus, and Hama, led by a handful of leaders (Shurbaji, 2010). Rafi would cook for the members of his team, making them mamounia, a semolina pudding breakfast, topped with cinnamon, cream, and string cheese. Rafi also took two jars of Kenda's home-made apricot jam with him to share. They must have enjoyed the jam, as he returned to her with empty jars: "طارو [i.e., they flew]!"

In 1976, the Brotherhood carried out sporadic assassinations of key Baathist figures. Political figures with decision-making power in the regime apparatus were targeted, including members of the military and the mukhabarat, as well as individuals such as the Deputy Prison Director Hamed Abbas who tortured Brotherhood members in prison (Shurbaji, 2010). The Brotherhood's rebelliousness toward the authorities emboldened others to follow their lead (Batatu, 1982). In 1979, a major escalation took place with an armed assault in the Aleppo Artillery School in which Alawite cadets in training were killed (Batatu, 1982; Conduit, 2019; Lefevre, 2013). Unlike the assassination attempts of key Baathist figures, the cadets were considered innocent, and their killing had a sectarian flare. The Brotherhood denied involvement and accused the regime of using it to tarnish their image. The Brotherhood leader, Issam Al Attar called it a "barefaced lie unsupported by any fact or proof" (Batatu, 1999, p. 266). Some believe the Brotherhood were infiltrated by Baathist members, i.e., co-opted (Conduit, 2019), or as Sarah claims, "it was fixed." It remains a controversial matter to this day. There is evidence that the regime knew the Brotherhood was not responsible (Lefevre, 2013), but it is also conceivable that insurgents acted independently from leadership (Shurbaji, 2010). In any case, the event was a pretext for a brutal crackdown on the organization. Indeed, just days after the massacre, 8000 of the Brotherhood were detained in Aleppo (Mansel, 2016), and the regime slayed, in succession, the leaders of the Fighting Vanguard.

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[19] There has been much internal debate around the Brotherhood, their leadership, and ideologies, even from those supportive of the revolution. Many have been critical of the Brotherhood's leadership, suggesting leaders left the country for safety when they knew matters were falling apart and abandoned younger members on the front lines. Some argue that critique of members in combat is unfair, given they have "done the bulk of fighting against the regime" and have paid the highest price for their resistance (Lefevre, 2012).

[20] This is my educated guess through piecing together events in family memory with the literature.

By March 1980, anti-regime demonstrations were taking place in the major cities of Aleppo, Hama, and Homs, as well as Idlib and Deir ez-Zour. These were organized by a medley of dissident organizations, including the Brotherhood, labor unions, communists, and socialists (Seurat, 2015). A Women's Protest demanded the release of several scholars and intellectuals who had been disappeared by the regime, including Sheikh Taher Khairallah and his brother, the prominent dissident Dr. Zein Al Deen Khairallah, the General Secretary of the Arab Medical Association.[21] Kenda participated, after confronting my formidable grandfather to let him know with a ‘humph’ that she would be going. He didn’t like it, nudging his shoulders in disapproval, but he didn’t prevent her.

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[21] I have not seen this protest referred to in the literature and cannot place its exact timing. It was conveyed to me by Syrian activists from that time, as well as by Sarah.

A turning point for the family was Rafi’s arrest during these protests. In an unforgiving offensive, army units were dispatched to quell the protests and hundreds of those participating were forcibly collected and thrown in prison (Lefevre, 2013). Rafi was incarcerated, and his father scrambled to find a wasta (i.e., connection) to get him out. But Eid came, and Rafi was still in prison. The family was distraught. As was the ritual on Eid day, Rafi’s father visited his father’s grave. When he arrived at the tombstone, he called out in anguish “my son (ibni)!” and crumbled on the grave. For a man who never revealed his emotions, this scene is engraved in Sarah’s head:

> My father was حازم [i.e, a harsh man]. He was tough. His words were orders. He wouldn’t say things twice. It was hard to see a strong man cry. As they would say, Abu Najm was رجال [i.e., a man]. But Rafi knew what he wanted and there was no convincing him otherwise. (emphasis in original Arabic).

A month later, Rafi was released and returned home to great fanfare and merriment:

> I remember when he opened the door and came in. Mama was sitting on a rug near the window in the living room. She was folding the laundry. I hadn’t slept yet. We didn’t even notice, until we heard the click of the door, and Rafi came in. يي, يي, يي [i.e., “yey, yey, yey,” a sound to express the magnitude of joy]. It was a wedding! Rafi came! Rafi came! We enveloped him, kissed him, and hugged him. Kenda called her parents and they came. We opened the formal living room, put all the lights on, and we were all together. We served each other rice pudding.

> Rafi sat there happy. Jeddo told them, “Oh people, get the boy some food! He was inside, oh people, feed the boy! Get up and feed the boy.” My mother was so happy, she was flying. From her happiness, she couldn’t sleep. She stayed awake till the morning. (Sarah)

Once things settled, Kenda asked him, “ حبيبي [i.e., sweetheart], what did they do to you?” He was reluctant to share details: “a hit, a prod, something like that.” He refusal to expand on what happened to him may have been to not cause anguish to Kenda, though Sarah believes the indignity of what happened to him was too much to put in words.[22] The euphoria of his release did not last long - he persisted in his political activities notwithstanding pressure from the family to cease. Now, he was on the regime’s radar, and they had his name. One day, when they were alone at home, his father had a tête-à-tête with Rafi:

> Listen, I don’t have it in me to endure this misery. I am worried about your sisters and what they [i.e., the mukhabarat] might do to them. I can’t tolerate the repercussions of what you are doing.

It was a half-hearted attempt to goad Rafi into leaving the Brotherhood, but there was air of resignation and lack of force in the request. It was uncharacteristic of my autocratic grandfather to plead, but it was too late to change Rafi’s mind. Rafi was unswerving, “that’s it. This is the path I have chosen. I won’t go back. It is done, خلص [i.e., I am committed].” He was ardently attached, to the point of foolhardiness, to the cause of resistance. When his father died unexpectedly a little while later, there was hope it might change his calculations. My eldest uncle quit his studies to work in Saudi Arabia and take over as breadwinner for the family. They were left without a male protector in the home. Even then, Rafi was resolute.

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[22] The prisons of the Assad regime are more aptly named human slaughterhouses. The regime is notorious for its techniques of protracted torture to annihilate political dissidence. Inmates are forced to strip naked, have their nails ripped out, have their flesh plucked with scissors and pincers, or are beaten with Kalashnikovs or tank belts (improvised tools made of leather from a tire tread and attached to a wooden handle). The mechanisms of torture have nicknames, such as the “Black Slave” – in which the inmate is strapped into a metal chair (with a hole in it) to sit while a hot metal skewer is shoved up the anus until it reaches the intestines; the “Flying Carpet” where the inmate is strapped to a foldable board which is closed in half into them; the “Wheel” where the inmate is forced into a vehicle tire and beaten; the “German Chair” in which the inmate is tied to a flexible chair with hinges and the back of the chair is bent to stretch the spine and neck; or the “The Crucifixion” in which the inmate is tied to a cross while their reproductive organs are beaten (Amnesty International, 2017; Friedman, 1989; Syrian Network for Human Rights, 2019), among others. There are other forms of torture, such as forcing prisoners to rape each other (Amnesty International, 2017, p. 31).

> All he could see was الغاية [i.e., the purpose]. He was ready to sacrifice himself for it: انا نفسي بايعها[i.e., I am ready to give myself up for this]. It is not that he wanted to harm the family, but all he could see was that the corruption needed to stop, that the injustice needed to stop.

The Fighting Vanguard took their activities up a notch, carrying out attacks on government buildings, army units, and police stations (Batatu, 1999). In June 1980, there was an attempted assassination of Hafez Al Assad almost succeeded.[23] The day after the botched assassination, Rifaat Al Assad gave orders for the killing of Brotherhood inmates in Tadmur Prison. Rifaat was the head of Saraya al-Difa (the Defense Companies) - an elite heavily armed guard, dominated by Alawites whose only responsibility was to protect the Assad regime from domestic enemies (Friedman, 1989). In the space of half an hour, around a thousand inmates were machine gunned to death in their cells in what is known as the Tadmur Prison Massacre (The Syrian Human Rights Committee, 2003). Detainees were defenseless, none had been arrested or charged on any legal basis. A month later, Law No. 49 passed which declared membership in the Brotherhood a crime punishable by death. The mukhabarat received decrees that they had impunity in dealing with all "suspects" (Armanazi, 2017).

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[23] Two grenades were thrown at Al Assad while he awaited an African diplomat in the presidential palace. He kicked away one which landed at his feet and his bodyguard threw himself onto the second grenade and was killed in the explosion (Seale, 1988).

The environment of suspicion was at an all-time high. One day Sarah's cousin, a boy of seven years, was walking in front of his parents' house. A military officer stationed in a kiosk directly below their home (qabooseh) who kept watch for a regime-figure living nearby grabbed him. He held his arm, "Lad, come here! I have a question for you. When your father watches the TV and the President comes on, what does your father do? Does he close the TV or does he listen?". It was a ruse of course, and the child, not comprehending what was being asked, responded honestly: "Oh, he shuts the TV." The mukhabarat intensified "cleansing raids" of homes in search of "criminals." The family home became a site of contestation with the authorities and they were the recipients of many such visits:

> They would go to every house, every house, every house, one after the other, and break in by force. We were at home. May your eyes never see such a thing. Thugs, from the streets, they come in like they own the place, shouting "Go here! Come here! Check here." Cursing, swearing. My mother was still in عدة ["iddeh," i.e., a religious practice of isolation after a woman's husband dies]. My grandfather was worried about us - we were women alone in the house and the mukhabarat would rape girls or take them, so he started sleeping in our house. He told them not to enter, to respect his daughter's iddeh, to which the military officer responded with a sarcastic drawl: "What iddeh, ختيار الجن [i.e., crazy old man]! Go from here! What a joke." They opened and went to see her. (Sarah)

Arrests by the mukhabarat skyrocketed. They would visit their home at night, and so as a measure of safety, Sarah and her sisters would leave the house every night after dusk to sleep at their grandmother's house and would return the following morning. Anyone could be arrested, on a whiff of suspicion for being adjacently connected to the Brotherhood. Several of Rafi's friends were killed, and in a matter of days, the regime increased surveillance of public spaces and those in the movement. His best friend Waleed Al Attar was murdered, for which Rafi was heartbroken. On learning the news, he came home with red shot eyes, got into bed, covered himself under the bedsheets and cried and cried for days. When his siblings asked him what had happened, his mother shooed them away, "leave him, leave him be." His heartbreak over his friend steeled his resolve to persevere:

> The death of his friend made him more adamant on his path. He loved him to death, he was so attached. There was not a single [bad] word you could say about Waleed. أخلاق ادب و علم [i.e., beautiful character, manners, and knowledge]. He was an engineering student…he was the one mentoring him, his teacher. But they hunted him down and shot him.

Rafi soon realized he was being surveilled by the regime, as they began to ask about the friends of those who had been killed. The atmosphere became saturated with dread and Rafi decided not to sleep in the family home anymore. When he was not at hide-outs, he took sanctuary at family members' houses and the basements of friends. He would knock at their door, "can I sleep here tonight?" A few refused him shelter, such as his own grandmother from his father's side, who refused to have him stay in the house out of fear for her other sons. Kenda never forgave her for this – "this is supposed to be

ابن الغالي [i.e., the son of her precious son].” Others took him in at considerable risk to themselves and their families, fed him and took care of him for weeks, treating him like one of their own. He shared the same bed with their own sons, legs side by side - if the mukhabarat had entered, both would have been killed. One time my elder uncle from Saudi Arabia came home to visit from abroad. He headed straight to his grandparent’s house, instead of his parent’s house (which he feared the regime might be monitoring). It so happened that Rafi was hiding there that night:

> He knocked the door at the crack of dawn. Rafi was sleeping, but when he heard the sound of someone, he jumped one floor down from the window into the garden. He thought it was a كبسة [i.e., an unexpected visit from the mukhabarat]. Out of nervousness, when his uncle opened the front door, he slammed the edge of the door right into his forehead and bled. To their relief, it was Najm standing there. (Kenda)

They were expecting the regime to visit them at any moment. Rafi was in a blaze of hiding and hairsbreadth escapes, on the run for a period that lasted about a year. He would pass by intermittently to see Kenda for fleeting unannounced visits. Other times, Kenda was called by those sheltering him to visit her son. On one of these visits, Rafi lead them in prayer:

> They told me he came, he is here, come. I couldn’t see him for more than half an hour, these visits were stolen from time, خطف. I went, and the time for prayer came. He was our imam and I prayed behind him. I remember he read a verse I hadn’t heard before. He was reading with تجويد [i.e., the rules of recitation], so

> deeply and so intently. From my pride in him, I cried and cried as we prayed. That is what I remember. (Kenda)

When he did not appear for a period of time, Kenda would be frantic: “she was distraught without news of him. He is hiding here! He is hiding there! يي على قلبي [i.e., oh my poor heart!].” After a long absence, Sarah saw Rafi by the mosque near their house. The image of this encounter is lodged sharply in her memory:

> I was going up, returning from school or my grandparents’ house, I can’t remember which. He was on the opposite side of the street, going down. I saw him – my brother, of course I knew him. He was in disguise as a “don juan” – looking “cool” with fashionable shades. I know he doesn’t dress like that, and his hair was different too. He saw me but he didn’t talk to me. Someone was following him.

She ran home to let her mother know she saw Rafi, but that would be the last time they saw him alive.

In November of 1981, the youngest child of the family, just ten years old, was playing with his neighborhood friend on the street. His friend asked, “We saw your brother’s picture in the newspaper. Isn’t this him?” He grabbed the paper and ran upstairs to his mother, screaming “Mama, mama, this is my brother! رافي مات رافي مات [i.e., Rafi died, Rafi died!]” Kenda looked, “son, I don’t understand. What happened?” She looked again. Her voice would not come out, “she looked at it and couldn’t speak. The same thing happened to her when my dad died. She would try to speak, but she couldn’t” (Sarah). In her refusal to speak was a refusal of to bear witness, and a refusal to “substitute[e] words for experience” (Allan, 2014).

On the front page of the paper was a photograph of eighteen-year-old Rafi, lifeless, his eyes open and unblinking, his mouth gaping ever so slightly, on the slab of a house in al-Jamiliyeh. He was with three or four others, and the heading celebrated, in black and white terms, the capturing of “armed terrorists” and “criminals” who formed a threat to the state. Kenda called her sister, Ibtisam, gasping for air, from the landline in the living room:

> All the lines were being surveilled, specially us, we were certain we were being watched. How was she going to tell her? My mama thought he had just died, this day or the day before. I still remember the scene. She called her, breathless, her words stumbling over each other, “Ibtisam, انا ابني! ابني! ابتسام ابني! [i.e., my son, my son, my son, Ibtisam, my son!]” But she couldn’t say he had died over the phone. Ibtisam listened, but she already knew. She told my grandparents, اومو اومو [i.e., rise, rise], she found out.” They all knew, but no one had wanted to tell her. (Sarah)

The paper had been printed two months prior, but Kenda hadn’t noticed the date. She summoned the strength to rise and make the ritual washing before prayer, performing two rukas of prayer in the living room. Kenda disciplined her body to stay still and perform the movements of prayer, but she was shaking. She prostrated, and then, the tears released themselves. In that moment, “it is as if she submitted that this was his destiny, this was what God wanted.” In a way, his death was a relief from the painful extremes of constantly worrying about him, of what would happen to him, of whether they would take his siblings in his stead. The sorrow of his death and the repercussions on the family have been long-lasting and immeasurable:

> He was the dearest of her children. She would tell us, “I felt sad when my husband died, but Rafi, he seared my heart. I feel something burning in my heart, حرق, حرق, حرق [i.e., burning, burning, burning].” Her heart was attached to his. Sometimes, I look at my mother and I see her laughing. And I wonder, how can she laugh? You know, it has been thirty years, and I still wonder how she can laugh. I think I would have lost my mind if I were her. I probably wouldn’t smile all my life. (Sarah)

At this point in relaying the story to me, Sarah could not move her tongue. Her body was tense. Some details about those last days were unspeakable: “You are reminding me of situations I don’t want to remember, Noor. You don’t know how much it takes from me. I don’t want to be sadder than I already am.” The enormity of the memories left her incapable of speech, and I was sensitive to the enduring effects of death. For years after Rafi’s death, the security forces would visit Kenda to ask about Rafi’s whereabouts and why he did not sign up for military service. She learnt ways to appease the mukhabarat during these visits:

> To this day, we cannot make sense of their visits. They would terrify my mother. Did they not know they had killed him? Were they trying to test us? Was it a trick? Had they not documented that he had died? But they must have known. We would pretend he was still alive: “we don’t know where he is! He went to Lebanon and never came back. We haven’t heard from him.” For these random visits, Kenda kept a china plate with Hafez Al Assad’s picture on it. Whenever

> she felt them coming, she would take it out to show her allegiance and love for Hafez.[24] (Sarah)

In this calculated intimidation campaign to deter involvement with opposition activities, the private realm of the home became a site of struggle:

> We were living in terror, we were afraid to sleep at night. Imagine you are in your home and at any moment they could fall upon you at night, open the door and take you. احساس رهيب [i.e., an unimaginable feeling]. For a while, we would sit dressed and ready, with our socks and clothes and scarves on, waiting. They could come in and say "we want that girl, give her here" and no one could say a word of no to them. We were expecting someone at any second. That feeling of security, the lack of it, no matter what you write about it…it was terrifying. Especially when you hear what they did to that girl, and that girl. A friend of ours had the most beautiful mane of long hair. When she heard what they were doing to girls, she went and shaved it just like a boy to zero, like a garçon. They were seven girls. Her mom told her, "What have you done to yourself?" She told her, "You want them to take me?"

The family never recovered Rafi's body and dared not ask. Family members of the executed did not receive remains and were rarely informed of their death.[25] Later, Kenda met the mothers of the men who had died with Rafi. From them, she learnt the bodies were dragged, thrown in a mass grave and covered with dirt, but they could not pinpoint exactly where. We recently learned from another family member that his body was thrown from a five-story building, likely after his death, though I am not certain the rest of the family know this. They never found his name published in lists of the dead, either in regime accounts or those of the Brotherhood. It is as if he never existed. Except of course he had.[26] Tens of thousands of Brotherhood members fled the country (Zakaria, 2013), but Kenda still sees Rafi in her dreams.

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[24] Sarah recalls how a family friend who also lost her son served the mukhabarat rice pudding when they came, as if they were long lost sons. The tactics through which the mukhabarat would be appeased were numerous.

[25] Victims of executions are not recorded in death certificates by the state, though they are secretly documented (Amnesty International, 2017). Other times, death sentences are signed after the death had already taken place as official cover.

The Radical Subject's Latent Credibility

Drawing from the oral histories presented earlier, I trace the interstitial positioning of the radical subject at various crossroads in the terrain of (post)memory. This chapter is structured around the affective and cognitive workings of (post)memory along the following registers: (1) (post)memory as Resistance and (2) (post)memory as Knowledge. In doing so, I parse though how (post)memory elevates the latent credibility of radical subjects.

At the same time, I reflect on my own memories to elucidate how my own political subjectivities are constituted via generational memories inherited from those with ancestral power. In doing so, I make narrative space for my scholarly subjectivity regarding my family's oral history and my apprehension of those with a "Syrian revolutionary identity." Through unfolding these histories, I expound on (post)memory in my theorization of the radical subject and the ways in which cross-generational memories seep and leak into my own investments in liberatory subjects. By their very nature, these writings disclose my romanticization of resistance and enamorment with revolutionary subjectivity. I am not a passive inheritor of legacies from my ancestors, as the infusion of my *post*-memory and *living* memory stands for a mode of rhetorical invention. I end by pausing on the implications of this turn in vocabulary for how we think of radical subjects.

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[26] After this squelching of the unrest, the rebellion did not spread further. Other leftist opponents and rival Baathist comrades were also neutralized (Halasa et al., 2014).

(Post)memory as Resistance

Years before the revolution, when I was a teenager, I was walking along a stretch of smooth pavement between my grandmothers' houses when I saw two parallel columns at the outdoor entryway of a building. On one column was a poster of Bashar Al Assad, and on the other, his father Hafez. In an instant of wrath, I ripped one of the posters from the nail that was holding it in place and threw it on the street. I came to my mother excitedly relaying what I had done. She was appalled at my idiocy. I was told I was lucky no one saw me and to never contemplate such a thing again. It was a silly gesture, but today, I reflect on the powerful nature of memories in empowering a fantasy of resistance, the underlying attachments which may be in tension with conscious desires (Wedeen, 2019). I was young and excitable, but I had yet much to learn. I was a "second person," an heir defined and formed in relation to their accounts (Baier, 1985). Though I was born in exile, long after these events in my family history had "ended," I was implicated by their memories. (Post)memory extended an "umbilical cord" of resistance in my life.[27] In June 2007, I penned the following in my diary, evidently eager for revolution, though I did not have words for it yet:

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[27] Nevertheless, at times, memories act as lessons in preservation, rather than resistance. Within a dominant ecology of fear, not everyone actively resists violence (Das et al., 2000). Some understand their place within or contra to particular histories – in other words, either with relationality or rejection (Maldonado, 2021, p. 245). Some are reticent to involve themselves publicly in the revolution:

> The one who has been scalded, it is hard for them to take even a one percent chance that they would be burned again. We learnt our lesson. It was enough for us. Our brother was in and out of jail…we had two to three of the most strenuous years. We were afraid to sleep at night, that they would come knocking at our door. It was to that degree. So, anyone can come and posture that

> I myself have the utmost distrust and hate of the Syrian government, which sadly has not changed since those days [the massacre in Hama]. They rule by force and abuse not only the common rights of their fellow citizens but launder the country's money into the bank accounts of a few rich supposedly elite men in power. They all work for the president…Syria is poor and ravished. One man once told me the Syrian soul has died, they no longer fight, just complain. Bashar, the former president's son and who somehow inherited the title, is lauded not because he has achieved any tangible change or improvement in the economy or given people their rightful due, but simply because he has not yet ordered any large-scale massacres as his father did.

A critical dimension of Syrian (post)memory is the *active component of individual domination* present in the intergenerational transmission of memories. Through their affective intensities, generational memories ideologically interpellate revolutionaries into resistance in various ways (to borrow Louis Althusser's term) – i.e., "hailing" radical subjects into opposition from a position of power. Though "interpellation" as presented by Althusser is by those with political power, I contextualize interpellation as emanating from those with custodianship or ancestral authority. In this sense, I diverge from Hannah Arendt's understanding of the public as the realm of action and immortality and instead present the private domain as the realm of action. The recipient exists a priori – they are "already there" and constituted. Subject constitution is

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> [family members] should have done more – but they haven't tasted what we have tasted. (my mother)

They are not "gray people" (ramadiyyin), the ambivalent middle which vacillate between desire for reform and attachment to order (Wedeen, 2019). Rather, they are "burned" by previous eras of resistance and opt on self-preservation, "a curling in on oneself to protect one's body from harm." (Al Haj Saleh, 2017, p.227). Sometimes, oppression subdues the rebellious spirit.

informed by togetherness with those with whom one has organic bonds, rather than by coercive state power. Organic bonds exist with one’s family, tribe, or sect (Al Haj Saleh, 2017d, p. 227), but here, I narrow this to intimate family members, spouses, siblings, children, and grandchildren. The uptake of ideology is secured intersubjectively between families, who are the only audiences who can listen to what has been endured and the only trusted venue of testimony.

Despite attempts to interpellate radical subjects into the dominant ideology, evident for instance from the regime’s efforts to teach school students nationalism (qawmeyyeh) classes or send them to military camp (futuwweh), the trusted spatiality of the family circle, as worded by Sarah, “wakes them up.” The memories shared earlier shed light on the subtle operation of ideological interpellation within the family circle. Amid teetering between those holding coercive power and the protective envelope of family, indeed Sarah was at the precipice of “*starting* to love him (i.e., Hafez Al Assad).” Eventually, affective family investments prise radical subjects from this clasp, making the landscape fertile for later transgression and resistance at the opportune moment.

There is not always an originary moment in which this hailing occurs – it is an inchoate obscure knowledge, though the unpacking and decoding transpires at a later stage. I invariably *knew* the memories relayed above, so much so that I cannot remember when I first learnt them. As Subcomandante Marcos declares on ancestral legacies, “these people *were born* dignified and rebellious” (Marcos, 2001, p. 33). This is the potent nature of the transmission of traumatic memories from forefathers which interpellates before one even is aware of it:

> Nor was it exactly memories that were expressed at first by the survivors themselves. Rather, it was something more potent and less lucid; something closer to the enactment of experience, to *emanations* or sometimes nearly embodiments of psychic matter – of material too awful to be processed and assimilated into the stream of consciousness, or memory, or intelligible feeling. (p.7)

And so, memories are a site of subject formation for radical subjects. They are abstract emanations, perceptible, not necessarily literal, but always rhetorical. They have a tangible issuance which differs radically from ordinary language conversations in their vulnerability and intensity, where the hidden, the unspoken, and the unspeakable is entrusted. The rhetorical device of "emanations" mentioned above invocates the clandestine and forbidden nature of memories in the realm of private discussions with those held in trust. (Post)memory is more than a spoken word: it is a plate of Hafez Al Assad in your grandmother's kitchen, it is the cutlery of her dead son, it is the tone of her voice when she tells you to "close the subject." It is in all the silences and moments which make themselves present:

> [Memories are] both more direct and more ruthless than social or public speech…there is a chaos of emotion that emerge(s) from their words…The memories - no, not memories but *emanations*…kept erupting in flashes of imagery…in that most private and potent of family languages – the language of the body…The past broke through in the sounds of nightmares, the idioms of sighs and illness, of tears, and (the) acute aches that were the legacy…of the conditions…endured" (Hoffman, 2003, p. 9, emphasis added)

In this respect, (post)memory is a threat to those in power. Ahmad Aba Zeid, a Syrian journalist, voices the regime's attempts to eviscerate the memory of radical subjects: "We are in front of a regime which does not only want to demolish cities and to demolish humans, but also to demolish memory. The memory of Syrians, aside from the fact that is being disfigured (tatashawah), bit by bit, it is also being re-written (Syria TV, 2018). (Post)memory as resistance illustrates how memory interpellates from positions of interiority, moving us away from the clasp of interpellations of power to the inviolable private space.

Private commemorative practices remain rhetorically powerful in inculcating a pre-disposition to revolution, an animating force for a seemingly "impossible" revolution (Haji, 2016). In his writings, Subcomandante Marcos talks about the generational nature of resistance: "we looked inside ourselves, and we looked at our history. We saw our eldest fathers suffer and struggle, we saw our grandfathers struggle, we saw our father's with fury in their hands…courage and valor came to us through the mouth of our elders, who were dead but lived again in the dignity that they gave to us" (Marcos, 2001, p. 41). Native American activists protesting and blocking the highway to prevent the government access to the sacred Black Hills at Mount Rushmore, cry out: "We got this power from our ancestors" (Huber & Woodiel, 2020). Even with the self-soothing declaration, "he will not rule us forever" is a resistance to life under repression (Hanano, 2014), if only in the domain of the imaginary. Suhail, when sharing the story of his escape, references the احتقان [i.e., congestion] in Syrian life, and the closure of the "mouth." Here, his term, "mouth-opening" is a form of resistance against forced suffocation. The act of memory-sharing is a threat to a regime rattled to the core from the memory of its own people:

> All these massacres were *built over time,* of intimidation and suppression of people who *cannot open their mouth*. Any *mouth-opening* means you are separated and murdered, حجر و قتل (Suhail, emphasis added)

The mouth functions as a passing of the torch, an invitation to resistance when "having a voice is a crime worth killing for" (Hanano, 2014, p. 90).

I am careful here not to position myself as a radical subject, as I have defined them in this dissertation. I recoil at any narcissistic indulgence in my own work as a form of embodied resistance and cognizant of the tendency of the "knowledgeable researcher" to aloofly position themselves above the subjects of study. As scholars, positioning oneself *below* liberatory subjects allows us to learn *from* and theorize *with* them. Indeed, it is my own (post)memory which has humbled me with regards to the reverie of grandiosity many scholars unwittingly slip into when superimposing theory onto "ethnographic evidence." Nevertheless, through my own (post)memory, I am an active witness to the radical subject, with connective historical, ancestral, relational tissue to their lives and beings. From this positionality, I am expressly intimate with the "research subjects" of this dissertation.[28]

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[28] Still, it would be a repudiation of the regime's own human rights record if I was to deny the repercussions to my writing. I take some calculable risks, however minuscule, to write in resistance to the regime. For the immediate future, I have foregone my ability to return to my country, but principally, there is an uncertain cost this might entail for my family. There is apprehension about whether regime informants, following my social media pages, have taken vindictive action. A family member had spoken to my mother a few months back, "so, do you never want to come to Syria again?" That call jarred her. The constant negotiation with family about my writing has been a source of freight about whether I should limit my scholarly inquiry to other topics.

In the process of collecting the family's oral history, the recorder itself was an intruder into entrusted spaces, a reminder of the omnipresence of the regime. The recorder is a quintessential symbol of resistance, of confrontation with the stifled past. My interlocuters were open to sharing their histories –but to record intimated the stories would be irretrievably "out." *I* became an intruder, an agitator, at times - in jest, Sarah would tell me, "I feel I am being questioned by the mukhabarat," "close this topic, there is no need for it" or "please don't get us into problems! For the sake of God." At one stage, I was asked to use a pseudonym. Frustratingly, it was too late for that.

In a tense conversation one day, Sarah told me I was "sacrificing others" in my quest to write. I remember thinking in that moment of Rafi's sacrificial journey, and how I had angstly responded that perhaps I should write about Cambodia instead. All this was compounded by my wrestling with the privilege I have been afforded as *a very consequence* of the resistance of my ancestors. But, the legacy of my (post)memory is unavoidable: if my weapon was my pen, no matter how feeble my voice is in the shadow of exile, I decided that would be my path of resistance. Eventually, we came to agreement under what terms I would be recording.[29] Then, the memories would overflow, articulated with the certainty of knowledge and the assurance of a trusted space. Other times, in litanies of sorrow, there would be tears, and I couldn't differentiate mine from theirs. The weight of the densely packed emotion was at times too much to absorb:

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[29] The names in this chapter have been anonymized, as well as the familial relationship I hold with them, and other details which might betray identities.

> This subject is heavy, I feel it is heavy, heavy, heavy. Specially that we haven't had relief, the people haven't had relief, their hearts haven't been quenched. Until when? [sigh] (author)[30]

I say all this to signal to the nature of (post)memory and the contemporaneous implications of intergenerational testimonial sharing on the recipient. In contrast, the centrality of protest and public displays of resistances serve as a mobilizing social movement frame. All too often, our conceptualizations of revolution are framed in narrow terms of loud sound after years of blanket silence, of grievance expressed in exterior spaces, be it neighborhoods mosques, public parks, city squares, back alleys, or streets. A case in point is the extraordinary juncture at which schoolboys in Daraa graffitied the walls of their school calling for the end of a dictator, or the scenes in which the revolutionary icon Abdel Baset al Sarout lead thousands in protest and dance, with his signature tender and stirring voice, "longing, longing for Freedom" capturing the heart of millions of Syrians thereafter.[31] In these rhetorical performances of public theatricality, the political street becomes the "ultimate arena to communicate discontent" (Bayat, 2013, p. 13). These moments are the *immediate* catalyst for revolution, speaking to its abruptness and explosive essence –a "tornado" undeterred by the mythology of a powerful state (Ismael, 2013). The "awakening" of those in slumber (Hanano, 2014, p. 93). Undoubtedly, the Syrian revolution marks a rupture in time and space – revolutionary grassroots rhetoric speaks to a radical *shift* in Syrian consciousness around this time (Aziz, 2013).

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[30] From an audio recording of the author's interview with family members for this chapter.

[31] Abdul Baset al Sarout was known as the "Bulbul (nightingale) of the revolution" for his beautiful voice and powerful ballads.

While I do not negate these interpretative frames of revolution, there is much truth to them, they valorize public resistance in implacable opposition to 'power' in areas under the observation of the oppressor, whilst displacing subversive forms resistance which occur in the intimate spaces where radical subjectivities are provoked. Without going beyond the purview of the public resistance paradigm, we deny the forms of familial resistance which are not “watershed” or “floodgates bursting” events, in spaces, such as Kenda’s kitchen, or our apartment in London where Sarah recapitulated her story with me, which are relatively dislocated from the oppressor. We do not capture forms of resistance, which due to their inconspicuousness, are irrelevant to our conceptions of liberatory social movements. These spaces are not out of the reach of the state, but are separated by “two, or three or more, spaces” (Pile, 2013, p. 16). Eating at Kenda’s kitchen table, we were raised eating with the spoons Rafi had brought home, the one’s she could eat a meal without. My cousins and I would listen to her stories about Rafi and would write them down in our diaries. (Post)memory has none of the exhilaration of protest or the devastating violence which follows but is a potent catalyst for what is to come.

(Post)memory as Knowledge

Another pivotal dimension of Syrian (post)memory is its “biting” of radical subjects with historically uncirculated knowledge, inculcating a unique awareness of a set of historical problems related to system of power. “Bite” depicts the involuntary nature of knowledge acquisition when radical subjects are chosen as “designated carriers of awesome knowledge” (Hoffman, 2003). Knowledge, to borrow a gory phrase of Hirsch, “bleeds” over from one generation to the next (Hirsch, 2008, p. 34). As “receptacles of a historical legacy" (Hoffman, 2003), radical subjects inherit knowledge which is exclusive and bounded in nature. This is where the radical subject's testimony acquires its ça-a-été, i.e., having-been-there quality, reminiscent of Roland Barthes' depiction of the affect of the photographic image (Barthes, 1977). When we are told "nobody knows" the number of the dead (Abouzeid, 2018, p. 21), they articulate hidden knowledge as the keepers of knowledge bequeathed to them as descendants and next of kin:

> *We have been bitten, we were the target for spreading this knowledge*, we have been infected with the trauma of what has happened, and we seek out others as yet unharmed (or ignorant or coldhearted) so as to build a larger community of the aware (or the diseased, or the traumatized). (Tsacoyianis, 2021, p. 156, emphasis added)

Such knowledge of power comes about through positions of interiority, by way of memories transferred inter- and trans-generationally in which the intersecting and conflicting structures of power are understood:

> The same people who lived in the 80s, they are still here now. We tasted the bitterness of loss, the bitterness of deprivation, the bitterness of oppression. It wasn't the first time the regime engaged in this kind of behavior; it wasn't the first time the regime was oppressing us. منعرف الوضع [i.e., we know the situation], we *know* what they do, how they behave, how they go into homes, how they take women. We *know* their injustice. People had tested them - *they have priors with the regime*. (Sarah, emphasis added)

The radical subject is endowed with knowledge only revealed to them. They are privy to the concreteness of the lived pain of family. They are singularly positioned to grasp their meanings, positioning them at the forefront of truth calculations. Through living connection with the past and the habitus of embodied conditions of knowledge, they know the ways of their oppressor, where others might apprehend irrationality and bewilderment. They know the intricacies of domination, the symbolic and instrumental, the ideological and behavioral tendencies. Importantly, they know the *patterns and repertoire of domination*, be it the gradations in politics of repression, the spatial strategies of the regime to control the population (i.e., intrusions into the integrity of the home), the unmaking and remaking of subjects in political prisons, circumscribed mobility across borders, mechanisms of societally embedded surveillance, and the necropolitical politics (i.e., the "scales of death" or the politics of killing which would allow for my father's intransigence to be subjected to less repression than that of Rafi).[32]

Simultaneously, they are familiar with *patterns and repertoires of resistance* in the "perpetual death dance of control" (Pile, 2013, p. 2), i.e., the spatio-temporalities of safety and danger; the limits for what is thinkable or sayable, and to whom; how one might avoid inspection, conscription, detention, stoppage at borders; and the power of relaying memory to one's grandchildren. They know how to compromise and placate when needed, be it with Hafez Al Assad's plate on their kitchen counters or with the lie that their sons deserted them to appease those in power. They are knowledgeable the art of disguise, be it in the heat of escape from the regime, or decades later, when determining how one's descendants should anonymize their scholarly writings to avoid repercussions. They are aware of the moral dilemmas and degrees of complicity required to face the exigencies of life under totalitarianism, be it employing the mukhabarat to their own ends, as Suhail's brother in the bank once did, or falsifying documents to avoid military conscription, as Suhail did.

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[32] See Munif (2020) for more on the "scales of death" of the regime (p.30).

At its most extreme, memory is incapable of transitioning into a "discursive formation" –part of the lacuna where human language collapses due to the impossibility of bearing witness to that which has no language (Weheliye, 2014). This is palpable in the moment when Sarah, in relaying to me the story of her brother's murder, could not move her tongue. The air was heavy, and though my heart willed her to talk, she could not: "You are reminding me of situations I don't want to remember, Noor. You don't know how much it takes from me." The enormity of memory left her incapable of speech. Though untranslatable into "discourse," the transference which exists in the realm of private moments with those held in trust reaches, be it through whispers, objects, sounds, silences, heaving, or the lingering affect which fills the air.

Lina Sergie Attar, under the pen name Amal Hanano, writes about the surreal temporality of "*knowing well*" what has happened and knowing "*what would happen,"* as the radical subject's sense of time is distorted when the past enters the present:

> So we watched the events of March 2011 while in our hearts we were watching the events of February 1982. The YouTube videos projected the present but they also replayed the past. Finally, we had the evidence, the images of what we had never seen but only imagined. Though it happened in another time, in another city, at the hands of the son instead of the father, *we watched and remembered*. We were split in half, *dealing with our past by watching our present*. We watched *knowing very well* what is means for a Syrian city to be sealed, *knowing very well* that what was happening in Dara'a- *and what would happen* over the next years in

> cities across Syria – had already happened before. (Hanano, 2014, p. 89, emphasis added)

The latent credibility of these subjects disavows the separation between the past, the present, and the future of revolution. There is no elision, no caesura or interruption between them– “it’s as though Syria is locked in a recurrent curse” (Yassin-Kassab, 2014, p. 144). In areas with a history of repressive rule, when revolution surfaces, it is for revolutionaries as if they are falling through a pocket in time, spinning backwards into the past. Just as when Rafi was killed in 1981, I noted that when Abdel Baset al Sarout (a leader of peaceful demonstrations who later became a rebel fighter) was killed by the regime in 2019, the regime opted for politics of erasure:[33]

> An additional anguish piled on top…obsessed as they are with destroying any and all meaning, memory, and thought outside their fevered accusations of “terrorism” …This was not any sort of discussion about the meaning and symbolism of Sarout, nor an examination of any objectionable positions or indefensible remarks he may have uttered here or there. It was a war against every version of history inconsistent with the regime’s absolute insistence that all who rose against it were “criminals” and “terrorists.” (AlJumhuriya, 2019)

Indeed, it is my own *(post)memory as knowledge* which inspires this dissertation’s argument for the radical subjects’ testimony as born of the epistemic relevance of social location, the boundedness of knowledge and latent credibility. The truths of these oral histories are existential, complex and non-transmutable to those outside the family circle. In observing temporal reiterations of resistance, echoed in the *same* erasure of the memory of Rafi to Abdel Baset, to endless others, comes the conviction that knowledge-legacies must be elevated in our meaning making mechanisms surrounding liberatory social movements. To those who had lost them, the victims did not recede into oblivion, hardly “a cipher or empty number in that memory” (Morris, 2004, p. 20), but instead their memory imbues our lives with an amalgam of meanings in the intimate knowledge of what once happened.

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[33] See de Velasco (2019) and Chávez (2011) for case studies of how memory resists the erasure of social movements from the pages of history.

A final point: though the past spills into the present, and the present into the past, the radical subject is not a passive inheritor of legacies of their ancestors – the infusion of their *post*-memory and *living* memory stands for a mode of rhetorical invention. Notwithstanding that their political ontology is viscerally predicated on knowledge inscribed from the “past,” their subjectivity is multi-valent in its temporality, dealing with the present through making meaning of the past. In this context, my argument traces the possibilities of what (post)memory means for radical subjectivity and the radical subject’s analytical retrospection. Their knowledge is bound at the rhetorical touchstones of the past, the innovative qualities of their political subjectivity, and imaginative iterations of resistance to a historical oppressor. Within them is a multitude of internally fragmented subjectivities and differentiated grounds which unfolds the potential for freedom.

Conclusion

In February of 2020, the Arabic hashtag #it_will_not_leave_my_mind #ما_بروح_من_بالي went viral. Syrians shared memories of what had happened to them at the hands of the regime. One was about a young medical student attending her anatomy class at university to find that the cadaver they we were dissecting that day was that of her brother who had been detained by the regime (Al-Zayat, 2020). Another was the haunting visual of a man holding his two dead young daughters after a chemical weapons attack in Ghouta. He held them to his body, one on each arm, imploring them to wake, يا ابي قومو قومو مشان الله قومو [oomoo, oomo, i.e., my girls, rise up, rise up, for the sake of God, rise up] (Idlbi, 2020). I could barely watch - their little hands tied in plastic rubber bands, and next to them, a line of other lifeless children. His cries of devastation, قومو قومو [oomo, oomo] evoked the moment Kenda's sister had decades earlier listened to Kenda's coded phone call, knowing full well what she was saying, and pleading with those around her to get up, "oomo, oomo, she found out about Rafi."

Joman Hasan, a dissident who was detained and electrocuted in prison by the regime, in a private conversation with the author, deliberates on the power of wielding her (post)memory as a form of resistance and knowledge. Her memory lends her, and one day, her descendents, latent credibility which combats the regime's insistence on erasing memory of the past:

> I worry about my psychological state. For me to be well, I need to believe what happened to me was real. The regime told me they did nothing to me, that they were just investigating [tahqeeq]. Ofcourse, my memory is excellent. For months, I would keep thinking, was that an inpsection or was it torture? Until I was able to put things in perspective, I *knew* it was torture. Till this day, when someone denies what happened to Syrians, I think profoundly about it, what if they are not lying? But we need to keep telling them they are liars, for our own protection not

> theirs. *We will fight them with our memories, with our stories.. Our silence gives space for their lies.* (emphasis added)[34]

Syrians are still in the throes of their generational battle for freedom. (Post)memory offers a point of view to those whose actions and deliberations have been historically closest to the oppressor. The prodigiousness of (post)memory pervades our rhetorical sensibilities, in what is a larger conversation that complicates and extends how we conceptualize social movements and the testimony of social movement actors, their latent credibility, *their acts of generational witnessing*, should be more powerful, more persuasive, and closer to our hearts, than the "logical" arguments of those bracketed from resistance. We would do well to heighten our sensibility to the radical subject as a historicized social actor with stakes and magnitude in informing our political commitments.

In the next chapter, I examine how Syrian radical subjects engender a consciousness of their messages of truth to the world in their revolutionary calls for solidarity.

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[34] Author's translation. Quote is from private communication with author and shared with permission.

Chapter 6

“Syrians are Palestinian, Syrians are Black”: Revolutionary Calls for Solidarity in the Peripheral

“I am Palestinian until de-colonisation; Syrian until the triumph of the revolution; Saharawi until liberation; Kashmiri until independence; Kurdish until full freedom and equality. I’m a Darfurian in Sudan, Shi’ite in Bahrain, Ahwazi in Iran, Asian housemaid in Lebanon, illegal immigrant in the US and aboriginal in Australia. The cause of every oppressed people, every indigenous minority and each unprivileged group is my cause.” (Budour Hassan, 2013)

On the night of the 28th of December 2011, after an eventful year of revolutionary awakening, thousands of Syrians gathered near the clock tower in Homs, their hand on each other’s shoulders in unison. Charismatic football goalkeeper Abdel Baset al Sarout, nicknamed “the nightingale of the revolution,” was at the helm, singing “heaven, heaven, heaven, my homeland is a heaven, sweet-hearted homeland, with sweet soil, even your fire is heaven” (Al-Khalidiya District Coordination in Homs, 2013). The old Iraqi song took on a new dynamism in al Sarout’s melodic and soulful voice, becoming a signature of the protests –if not *the* revolution’s anthem – while its lyrics testified to the revolution’s aspirations for self-renewal and social change. Originally sung with valences of joy and hope, it was a fixture in the early days of large-scale peaceful protests. With time, the song took on macabre overtones, sung with استامتة, an Arabic word denoting an ethics of sacrifice and selflessness where one risks their life for their struggle. al Sarout would sing it with the melancholy of mourning to suture the wounds of protestors pining for those killed. Soon, the song became “a siren warning to all those attending [protests] that everyone attending would be dead. And it was as if the people were out to attend their own funerals” (Sowt Podcast, 2021).

The folkloric song was first performed by the Iraqi artist Rida al Khayyat, with lyrics by Karim Al Iraqi, a song-writer famous for his poems encouraging Iraqi soldiers to fight in the

Iran-Iraq war. This song however, with its simple and repetitive lyrics, was never intended as a revolutionary song. Syrians would reappropriate the song into multiple variations, making it specific to the ontologies of those in resistance. For instance, some insertions were "revolt, revolt Darra, in our eyes, you are a torch." Elsewhere, "Homs is calling فزعة ["faz'aa," i.e., get up], oh the stance that has our back." After al Sarout's assassination, the song became associated with his martyrdom and took a life of its own.

Three years after his death, protests would erupt in Palestine over the threatened expulsion of families from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah by Israeli police forces, waving Palestinian flags as they sang their own version of "heaven, heaven, our homeland is a heaven." Amid the forced evictions of Palestinians, demonstrations took place in front of the Damascus Gate (Bab Al Amud), one of the gates of the old city of Jerusalem. One Palestinian protestor held a hand-written letter of solidarity from Syrians which established an intimate relationality between the two liberatory struggles. I copy part of it here:[1]

> Borders kill us and our diaspora kills us, as they stand in the way of our actual presence with you.
>
> That is why we are writing to you…in the hope that it will convey the slightest hint of the feelings of pain, anger and burning that rage in our hearts because of your great suffering and pain.
>
> In your revolution, we saw our revolution, and in your steadfastness our steadfastness, and in your displacement our displacement…we know like you the meaning of the oppression.
>
> We faced it at the hands of the Assad regime, as you faced at the hands of Israel.

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[1] The letter was never formally published and is no longer available online. I have a copy of the letter which I translated from Arabic. The full letter can be found in the Appendix.

In your liberation from the occupation, we see our liberation from tyranny, and in your chants, we hear the chants of our martyrs, and in “heaven heaven,” we remember our voices and our revolution.

Greetings to you from the revolution of freedom and dignity,

The undersigned, the Sons and Daughters of Syria

As I will demonstrate, this was not the first-time resonances between the two struggles surface in a manner outlining what I term the “elastic peripheral.” As a rhetorical form of argument, the elastic peripheral underscores how radical subjects, be they in Syria, the United States, or Palestine are transcendentally peripheral, i.e., facing imposed marginality by the nation state. It subverts a geo-political focus dedicated to a capillary analysis of violence to instead anchor the local ontologies and embodied rhetorics of those in resistance. In doing so, it leans into the “peripherality” of those under various forms of oppression, be it settler colonialism, colonialism, authoritarianism, and/or white supremacy through making their struggles relational in urgent and compelling terms. Notwithstanding the complexity and internal diversity of struggles, the peripheral constructs an imagined spatiality in which the radical subject is central to a global revolutionary project. Though not negating the remarkable heterogeneity of ontologies, the elastic periphery is able to achieve this without resorting to a universalizing liberal humanism (i.e., we are all humankind).

As a rhetorical invention, the elastic peripheral reflects a cosmopolitan realm of concern among those at the peripheries of the globe. However, it also provides insight into how those in revolutionary struggle demand recognition to overcome a lack of receptiveness to their struggle. In contesting constraints of visibility, the elastic peripheral does not emphasize identification through intersectionality, or a common “enemy” with linkages across states or borders, as much as establish relationality between those in liberatory struggles to elicit rhetorical scaffolding for solidarity.[2] In this rhetorical strategy, a panoply of events and social actors are configured and weaved together to exert affective pressure on those from whom solidarity is requested. As a site of elucidation, elastic peripherality identifies eclipsed possibilities for solidarity via the kairotic placement of "situations" that are interpreted separately on the same critical geography. It impels energy into utterance by capturing the intensity of audience attention and stretching itself toward where the world's attention is centered.

Instead of didactic exhortations for "help," this rhetorical maneuver indicates an "interestedness" in various movements on the world stage and the strategic channeling of tensions and discourses clustered elsewhere. Modulating the "weight of rhetoric" or how one might make "things matter" has been defined as the affective energy of discourse that creates the potential for audiences to care about and act on an issue (Farrell, 2008). The sensational quality of rhetoric institutes the "response-ability" of the audience (Abel, 2007; Hawhee, 2002). In other words, the elastic peripheral utilizes affect to "induce(s) a variety of collective affective responses to the shapelessness of the present" (Berlant, 2011, p. 8). Approaching rhetoric's affective register is particularly important during periods of revolution and conflict when the oppressed are negligible in the "mass sensorium" of discourses (Berlant, 2011). Due to the subdued and subduing features of "war rhetoric" (Ohl, 2017, p. 197), acquiescent public(s) suffer from compassion fatigue and become content with inaction, "passivity and numbness" (Engels & Saas, 2013, p. 231). Extensive footage of atrocities induces the "non-sustainability of grand emotions" toward humanitarian causes, especially the longue-durée kind (Chouliaraki, 2013, p. 70). These dynamics are no doubt present in the Syrian revolution, which as explicated earlier, has been invisibilized and misapprehended in a myriad of ways. Without institutional power and access to traditional spaces of oratory, radical subjects must be creative in how they generate attention to, and present, their cause. It is therefore imperative that we elevate their affective and politically productive arguments to overcome such "negative solidarity" (Combahee River Collective, 1977).

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[2] Intersectionality, as a feminist theory, speaks to the manner in which different forms of discrimination intersect within social identities, not just in an additive manner but as a wholly separate layer of domination (Crenshaw, 1991; Ghazal Aswad, 2021b) On the other hand, the intersectionality of struggles (rather than the intersectionality of identities) is an approach which goes beyond a focus on individual perpetrators of oppression to take on larger questions of imperialism, structural racism, and state violence (Davis, 2016).

The adjective "elastic" in the elastic peripheral thus speaks to bolstering the salience of an issue, its importance, hierarchy, and significance through the provocation of sensation. In its ethos of attunement with those at the peripheries, rhetorical punctuation drives interest by virtue of attentiveness and making present 'events' which the audience has been seen to respond to morally.[3] As I will show, because it does not exist in a pre-defined or settled manner, the elastic peripheral is able to expand multi-directionally from one milieu to another to establish relationality. As such, the elastic peripheral is a critical invention which situates the radical subject in relation to human geographies which are more familiar in their operations of domination and oppression. As it is not affixed to any region or geo-strategic bloc, it modulates itself at an opportune moment in relation to consequential dynamics on the world stage. As a translational move, it is motivated by the rhetorical exigency of rendering the unimportant important and making present that which is outside the "corner of one's eye." This "conceptual stretching" encompasses one's liberatory struggle within frameworks of movements (and their attending sensory channels) which are deemed to fall outside its purview.[4] I show for instance how the elastic peripheral translates the language of revolutionary consciousness into a language of anti-colonialism. Within the elastic peripheral is an implied re-thinking of hegemonic framings of colonization as inevitably tied to the racial hierarchization of human species, considering reverberations of the colonial that might otherwise remain obscured.

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[3] Punctuation is a form of endowing certain argumentative elements with "presence' at the level of perception of the audience (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969).

In this chapter, I consider the rhetorical potency of calls for solidarity and the modes of deliberation which they provoke on the anti-colonial and anti-racist reverberations of the Syrian revolutionary struggle. Specifically, I consider the following questions: How do radical subjects engage with liberatory struggles of different traditions and genealogies, of different futures and emergences, and of different temporalities of "revolutionary time"[5] ? How do they ask the audience to reconsider their revolution amid "the tragic predicament" of the erasure of their revolutionary teleology (Bardawil, 2019, p. 178)? What constitutive imaginings are forged in their instrumental aspiration to raise the visibility of their struggle?

This chapter develops over two sections. In Section 1, I offer a critical review of the "Global South" as the lens which situates contemporary transnational social movements. This section proffers the rationale "the elastic peripheral" as spatializing a competing set of concerns from the "Global South" which eschews hemispheric or geographic logics to oppression – of "global linear thinking," of global south versus global north, West versus non-West, with the aim of remedying injustices of recognition. In Section 2, I draw on the field-based rhetoric of Syrian radical subjects, including social media posts, posters and artwork, to examine the contemporary solidarity politics through which the Syrian revolution is promoted. To expose how and why alignments are drawn to legitimize claims to solidarity, I frame this in conversation with two reference points: (a) the Palestinian liberation and (b) the Black Lives Matter movement. I conclude by contemplating the prospects for rhetorical scholarship of such trans-local calls of solidarity with differently situated subjects.

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[4] This "stretching" mirrors Fadi Bardawil's reading of Césaire's letter of resignation from the French Communist Party (addressed to the party's secretary general Maurice Thorez). Cesaire proposes that "critical practice should be...attuned to the world, by inventing new forms that enable solidarities. This inventive labor of critique can take the form of stretching, a concept to encompass practices that previously fell outside of its purview" (Bardawil, 2019, pp. 183–184, emphasis added).

[5] "Revolutionary time" is a term by the Syrian anarchist Omar Aziz (Aziz, 2012).

Defining the "Global South"

The "Global South" as a Geographic Marker of Inequality

As a mode of framing, the "Global South" enjoys increasing popularity as a transnational space encompassing "darker nations" and continents of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania (Dados & Connell, 2012; Prashad, 2008). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, it took the place of its pre-Cold War predecessor "the Third World," though for some it still retains the term's fraught history of backwardness and underdevelopment (Pinheiro, 2013). In this section I describe more prevalent understandings of the term.

Primarily, the term is employed as a geo-political marker of inequality for countries negatively impacted by capitalist globalization, where the "Global North" is the center of the world, and the "Global South" is the periphery. The "Global South" was cemented as a category in the 1970s with the formation of groups facing economic disadvantages in the international finance system, such as the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of Seventy-Seven. For the South Commission established in 1987, the "South" was not only an economic descriptor, but suggested exclusion from international decision-making (The South Commission, 1990). Regardless, the term is inextricably tied to enduring "consequences of the colonial wound" by the European conquest of the Americas and colonial domination of Africa, parts of Asia, and the Middle East (Levander & Mignolo, 2011, pp. 184–185).

The "Global South" as an Epistemological Marker

A second definition of the "Global South" is as an epistemological move that counter-imposes the epistemologies of the South with the dominant epistemologies of the "Global North." Here, the "Global South" strategically enhances the visibility of the histories and knowledge production of certain landscapes. In this conception, the "Global South" is an epistemological solution to the "Global North's" enunciation of universal knowledge from a standpoint of "objectivity without parentheses" (Levander & Mignolo, 2011, pp. 183–184). This arises in the increased recognition of the uneven weight placed on Northern academic theorizations and the authority conferred to scholars of the "Global North" (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012; Conway, 2013; Rao, 2006; Sousa Santos, 2014). When Northern nations are the main sites of theory production, the "Global South" is only a superfluous source of ethnographic extraction (Weheliye, 2014). Hence, the "Global South" creates a geographically distinct source of intellectual production and of "'epistemologies of the South' (Sousa Santos, 2014) which question Northern epistemologies.

The "Global South" as a De-territorialized Geography

A third definition of the "Global South" is as a deterritorialized geography which blurs the lines between North and South. Transnational globalization (evident in the emergence of the "Big Four," i.e., Brazil, India, China and Russia) complicates the ease with which one may refer to an oppressed South and a hegemonic North. Accordingly, some differentiate the "South from above" and the "South from below" to allow for greater recognition of grassroots social movements within the "Global South" (Prashad, 2012). Another incarnation of the term also extends to the North's geographic Souths and the Souths in the geographic North, the so-called "the internal periphery." This phenomenon is apparent in the intersectional struggles within the

"Global North," such as African American, Indigenous, and Chicano/x struggles (Anzaldúa, 1987). By way of illustration, African-Belgian protests demanding the removal of statues of King Léopold II (a colonial figure responsible for the death of 10 million Congolese) in Belgium's squares, parks and university campuses, makes tangible the ways in which a "Global South/Global North" rubric falls short (Rankin, 2020). Global migrations and shifts in economic power also problematize the dichotomous dialectic of the "Global South/Global North," though of course "the distribution of power and wealth in the global economy remains disproportionately in the countries of the "core" in the global north" (Conway, 2013, p. 164).

Limitations of the "Global South"

As may be deciphered form the above, the term has several conceptual limits, not least of which is that is has functioned more as a "question" with a notoriously "abstract set of spaces, programs, and actors" (Palomino, 2019, p. 24). The territorial underpinnings of the term as married to the "South" also contribute to its inherent "spatial and metaphorical limitations" in capturing the "global and transnational dimensions" of certain subjectivities (Palomino, 2019, p. 22). By virtue of the term's origins in histories of Cold War decolonization, it is ingrained in colonial histories when the "Global South/Global North" as an organizing principle became popular. Alternate geographies which precede colonialism are not accounted for. By way of illustration, the maps of Al-Idrisi, the Moroccan geographer and cartographer of the early 12th century, the world of today would be skewed or even upside down – the map is oriented with the south at the top and Mecca as the focal point. Even the term "Bilad of Sham," (the region of Greater Syria) translates to "Land of the Left," pointing to an alternate geography in which a person standing in the center of Arabia facing north, had Sham to his left.

In this vein, another critique of the term is its suggestion of a structural subjectivity principally opposed to Europe and its hegemonic forms of knowledge, reinforcing an ethnocentric focus on non-western peoples subordinated to the "Global North" (Palomino, 2019). The term's attachment to histories of colonization arguably makes it unable to account for other transnational (and local) imaginings of the globe. Its relative inutility is evident in its insufficiency in apprehending competing movements to capitalism, such as the anarchist movement's "animat[ion] by people and ideas from multiple languages and ethnic origins" across heterogeneous social formations across the world. Palomino (2019) wonders:

> Where was the "south" of this movement? What would "global south" add to the study of the anarchists' own understanding of capitalism, state violence, and class struggle? The same question is posed by the global history of gender oppression and imperial imposition over native cultures: what does "global south" have to add to the study of these forms of inequality, compared to "patriarchy" and "colonialism"?" (p. 32).

In its loyalty to "old colonial boundaries" centuries of local dynamics and indigenous relations between peoples on the ground are neglected (Pinderhughes, 2011, p. 248), potentially stifling alternative visions to the present order. Greater labor is needed to excavate other traditions of theoretical inquiry beyond just "a process of filling a void…to actually do labor, not on one isolated thinker or two, a concept or two, but rather to immerse oneself in… these traditions" (Bardawil, 2021).

These critiques of the "Global South" proffer a rationale for the rhetorical features of what I propose as the "elastic peripheral," a term I derive from the "locus(es) of enunciation" of liberatory struggle (Levander & Mignolo, 2011, p. 176). This locality offers an important vantage point for alternate conceptions of global cartographies. In this tenor, I heed the Syrian radical subject and their explications of sub-altern positionalities to global networks of power. As I show, the elastic periphery is not at odds with the varied meanings associated with the “Global South,” but as its conceptual kin, evokes a specific set of spaces, concerns, and actors to overcome the circumvention of hegemonic frames which cast certain struggles within a deficit. The elastic peripheral stresses relationality with the ontologies of those in resistance elsewhere to harness rhetorical scaffolding for solidarity. The elastic peripheral’s “work” extends beyond kairotic “timing” or the opportunistic raising of an issue to revive the anti-racist and anti-colonial reverberations of the Syrian liberatory struggle. In what follows, I draw on (a) the Palestinian Liberation movement and (b) the Black Lives Matter movement as theoretical touchstones which illuminate the modus operandi of the elastic peripheral.

The Elastic Peripheral in the Palestinian Liberation Movement and Black Lives Matter

“Syrian Palestinians”

On the eve of the Sheikh al Jarrah expulsion of residents, I was in an online discussion with a group of Syrian activists when one exclaimed: “before the revolution, Palestine was our sick child. After the revolution, it is like we have two sick children.” The allegory of the child serves as a reminder of the intimate attachments held toward Palestinian and Syrian liberation. The rhetorical coupling of the two movements occurs both organically and strategically as a performativity of belonging to both causes. Though one is a struggle against authoritarianism (Syria) and the other a struggle against settler colonialism (Chomsky & Pappé, 2015), these twin foci envisage and claim a common cause along the periphery. In this section, I explore the ways in which the Syrian revolution and Palestinian liberation are discursively construed through animating relational ontologies and common fantasies of anti-colonial resistance.

Of note in this section is the work of the anonymous Syrian collective الشعب السوري عارف طريقه [i.e., The Syrian People Know Their Way] comprised of fifteen artists who created art to disseminate knowledge about Syria. Their ambition was to “find a different way” to transfer news which propagated their own “political and theoretical views” about daily events (The Syrian People Know Their Way, 2013). In their rich archive of over 200 anti-Assadist posters, one of the central themes was the conceptualization of the Syrian revolution vis-à-vis the Palestinian liberation movement. This is exemplified for instance in the name of the collective’s Facebook page *The Syrian Intifada*. Though the literal translation of “intifada” in Arabic is “tremor” and the term generally refers to a legitimate uprising against oppression, today, the term is almost exclusively associated with the armed uprisings of Palestinians against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1987 and 1993.[6]

One of the collective’s posters shows a young man throwing a stone against a pale orange background, under which is written “the Palestinian spirit is in every revolutionary.” The stone-throwing is a nod to the powerful emblem of the first Palestinian intifada, but the body is hazily echoed into two, one presumably Palestinian, the other presumably Syrian (see Figure 7).

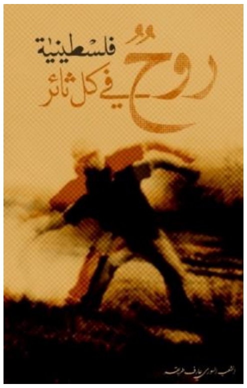

Figure 7. The Palestinian spirit is in every revolutionary (The Syrian People Know Their Way, 2012d)

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[6] This can be surmised by a search of the term in the Oxford Dictionary, Brittanica, and other encyclopedias which define the term exclusively in relation to Palestine.

In another poster, the collective re-produces “Zaytoun, the little refugee” – a Syrian-Palestinian refugee-child video game character forced to flee his home in Yarmouk camp (a refugee camp in the suburbs of Damascus) after it was demolished by the Assad regime. The character, originally created to bring awareness about the life of Palestinian refugees in Yarmouk, is lightly sketched in black and white. Central to this drawing’s impact is the tension between Little Zaytoun’s slingshot and his aiming at the Arabic words “Baba Amr.” The minimal narrative content insinuates a reference to the Baba Amr massacre which took place in Homs, a city which was once the symbolic enclave of Syrian resistance (see Figure 8).

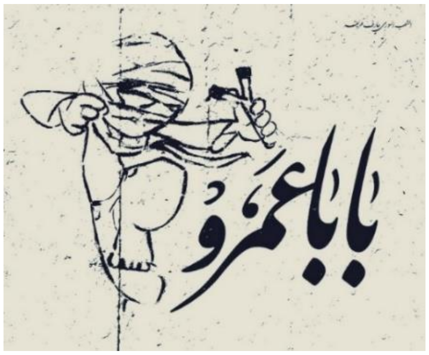

Figure 8. Zaytoun the Little Refugee in Baba Amr (The Syrian People Know Their Way, 2012a)

Elsewhere, the Occupied Kafranbel Banner group posted an image of “Handala,” the refugee child-character designed in 1969 by the Palestinian political cartoonist Naji Al-Ali. In his kufiyah and darned clothing, an effect of layering embeds Handala inside the geographic border of Syria, a composition which is then embedded inside the stripes of green, white and black of the Syrian revolution. Instead of his hands behind his back, as distinctively fashioned by Al-Ali to gesture to the rejection of colonial solutions to the Palestinian Nakba, Handala triumphantly clasps the flag of the Syrian revolution whilst his other hand is to his left side Initially symbolizing the affective resistance of Palestinian children who refuse to bow to Israeli might, the image constructs refugees as revolutionaries rather than destitute humans depending on the international community for survival (see Figure 9).

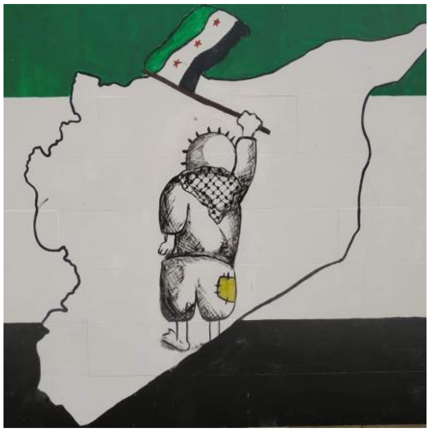

Figure 9. Handala with the Syrian revolution flag (Occupied Kafranbel Banners, 2021)

Drawing on a similar vein of resistance to tyranny, Aziz Asmar drew the Dome of the Rock on the wall of a destroyed house in Idlib. Underneath is irreverently written, “we won’t leave.” In a rhetorical twist, the “right of return” of Palestinians and the “refusal to leave” of Syrians are juxtaposed onto one another. Recounting his motivation for the composition, Asmar contemplates the reciprocity of anguish between Syrians and Palestinians: "the pain of the Syrian & Palestinian people is one" (Asmar, 2021b). Like the manner in which the emotional registers of suffocation are drawn from the African American context (explored in the next section), the loss of indigenous lands and the analogous experiences of forced displacement of Syrians and Palestinians are brought to bear (see Figure 10).

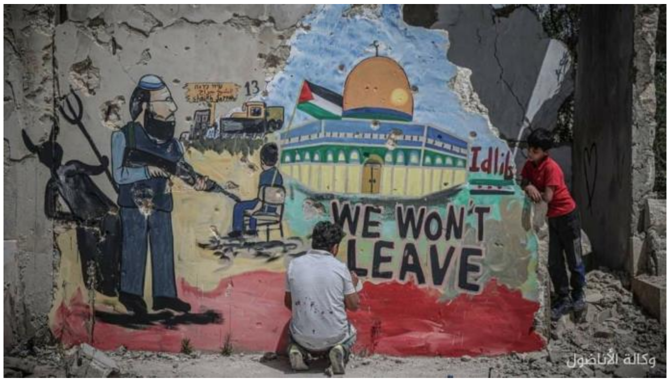

Figure 10. We won't leave (Asmar, 2021c)

Clearly, in form and composition, there is a direct effort to lean into the rhetorical identity of Syrian revolutionaries as Palestinian. The transposition of quintessential Palestinian symbols into the Syrian context indicates the derivation of revolutionary inspiration from the Palestinian liberation struggle, but also a recharacterization of the coordinates of the Syrian struggle. Semiotic juxtapositions extend Palestinian ontological identity to other histories and currents of resistance. This experimental suturing reveals an aesthetic and intellectual labor to capture the ontological dynamics which make the relationality possible along the periphery. Alternately stated, a spatiality is produced through the shape shifting of ontological understandings of the self through the gaze toward others. The readily available "assets" of Handala, Little Zeytoun (in his keffiyeh and slingshot in hand), and the Stone-Thrower, are instrumentally appropriated into the Syrian context as an object of contemplation for the audience

In a close mimesis of this rhetoric, the collective also designed a poster on which was written: "Palestinian until Freedom" Interestingly, the caption argues for the de-territorialized nature of Palestinian ontologies as spanning to other human geographies: "Palestine is not a fixed identity or a nationality or a status of belonging to a certain geography, but it is the cause of the liberation of the human, every human." The profile of a Palestinian revolutionary in his chequered kufiyah adds a prophetic touch to the writing (see Figure 11). In all these discourses, the relationality and virtue of those in liberatory struggle is prioritized over liability and reckoning with those responsible for injustice. By inverting the audience's angle of vision, the peripherality betwixt and between those in liberatory struggles is discerned.

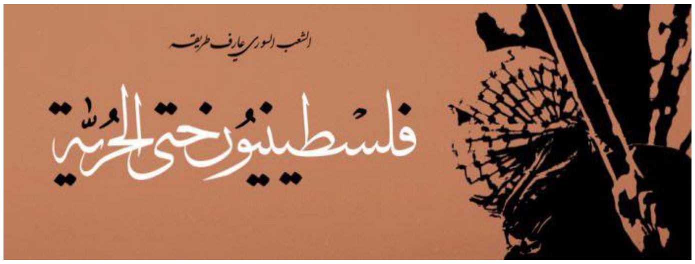

Figure 11. Palestinian until freedom (The Syrian People Know Their Way, 2012c)

Furthermore, aside from the ontological relationality of these struggles, a particular political interpretation of the Syrian revolution is advanced. Here, the elastic periphery re-inscribes anti-colonial politics into the emancipatory movement in Syria, a subjectivity largely borne by and readable in the Palestinian context. As a grand term, "colonization" is used to describe the invasion of foreign countries driven by capitalistic, militaristic, and racist ideologies. This historiographic tendency foregrounds the temporal origins of colonialism in the European and American domination of overseas cultures and peoples (Adas, 1998). Colonial discourse operates within a paradigm of difference or "ontological face-off" (Weheliye, 2014, p. 26), i.e., the contrast between "white and non-white, civilized and backward, Western and non-Western" (Tuathail & Agnew, 1992, p. 194). Settler colonialism, as a variant of colonialism when the colony is converted into a home (and not just pursued for labor and resources), falls into similar racializing top-down dynamics of indigenous peoples (Glenn, 2015; Veracini, 2011).

These conceptualizations of colonization, inherited from the dualisms of a Cold War framework, have at times diminished the standing of liberation struggles against local oppressors (Young, 2006, p. 6). Anti-colonialism (along with secularism) are the "theoretical first principles" which ease the "brush(ing) off" of the Syrian liberation struggle as "not properly revolutionary" (Fassin, 2012, p. 176). While colonialism is the critical force that defines our modern age (Adas, 1998), authoritarianism is localized as "a form of Oriental civilization whose historic immobility contrasted with the restless innovation of Europe" (Lieberman, 1997, p. 463). When the "misère of the Arab masses" is only attributable to "evil external forces" (Postone, 2006, p. 101), local liberation struggles fall outside the anti-colonial orbit and into a "political deadlock" which maintains them as marginal, if not squarely in the domain of sectarianism and humanitarianism (i.e., on the refugee crisis) (Bardawil, 2018; Ghazal Aswad, 2019a, 2020b).

On the other hand, the Palestinian resistance has more easily cohered into anti-colonial frameworks. The Palestinan question is "at the heart of anticolonial struggles in the region," (Bardawil, 2020, p. 36) but has moved beyond this today as a "vital…part of a wider left-wing project of anti-imperialist liberation" (Halasa et al., 2014, p. 74). This can be adduced for instance in the caricature of Handala, whose initial location was as a "metonymic marker" of the over 750,000 Palestinians expelled during the so-called War of Independence. Though once constitutive of Palestinian identity, Handala has evolved past "a national [Arab] horizon" to a transcendent symbol for anti-colonial resistance around the globe (Al-Ali et al., 1997, p. 10; Najjar, 2007, p. 265). The anti-colonial politics of Little Zaytoun, Handala, and the Stone-Thrower situate and align local emancipatory politics in Syria with discourses of settler colonialism as the focal point of oppression and instigator of resistance. For Syrians to be "in the political with others" in this fashion may be read as an attempt to bring attention to those who have not been the object of "sustained political analysis and critique" (Postone, 2006, p. 103). The Palestinian movement's "standing" in relation to other anti-colonial and revolutionary movements (Halasa et al., 2014, p. 74) is careened to refract grand emotions into the low intensity affectivity of local struggles that do not always enact the same constellations of emotion or political acuity. By diverting Palestinian symbols from their original compositions, the audience is given contextual clues, a sort of lingua franca, for situations in which they are less certain and less univocal about making moral judgements. As such, coupling the two movements leans into the prominence of the Palestinian liberation movement and its substantial and immediate anti-colonial reverberations on the world stage.

Within this rhetoric is an implied re-thinking of hegemonic framings of colonization as inevitably tied to the racial hierarchization of human species. Indirectly, the rhetoric questions dominant assumptions of colonialism as tethered to “foreignness,” “externality” or explicitly racialized forms toward a more elastic conception which draws on the clear-cut distinctions of anti-colonial struggles. That is to say, peripherality considers reverberations of the colonial that might otherwise remain obscured. This reading takes note of the translation of a language of revolutionary consciousness into a language of anti-colonialism. The boundaries between “internal” struggle and anti-colonial movements are made fluid through mindfulness to similar conditions of precarity, in particular how tenancy to land is in someone else’s hand. Thereby, the elastic peripheral takes its cue from internal (or domestic) colony theory devised by the Communist Party International in its philosophical and affective articulation of colonialism’s heterogeneity (see Pinderhughes, 2011). Analogously to his comments about “Black Syrians,” Al Haj Saleh also talks about the Palestinization of Syrians by an “internal Israel” (i.e., the Assad regime) and the alienation of a “tasteless geopolitical approach” which dismisses Syrian political and physical annihilation (Al Haj Saleh, 2017f). Thought of in this manner, “Assadist colonization” (Al Haj Saleh, 2017f) is fostered through the spectrum of Palestinian resistance to settler colonialism.

The self-conscious implication within discourses of colonization echoes the recognition of the Syrian revolution as an anti-colonial “land revolution” committed to territorial integrity (Rizk & Al-Shami, 2021). One of the ideographs which appears repeatedly in the rhetoric of Syrian radical subjects is that of احتلال roughly translated as colonization. For example, on the eve of the fall of Aleppo (which fell to regime control in 2016), activists named the city حلب المحتلة i.e., the colonized/occupied Aleppo. Inherently, the regime made Syrians غرباء [i.e., strangers in their own land] (Hashem, 2020). In the documentary *For Sama*, the journalist Waad Al Kateab similarly employs the rhetoric of “ihtilal” for the regime’s slow encroachment on liberated territories in eastern Aleppo: “the regime forces are colonizing one neighborhood after another” (Al-Kateab & Watts, 2019). Wa’el Alzayat, a Syrian American grassroots organizer, unpacks the metaphor of the Assad regime as an occupying force in a direct analogy to the state of Israel:

> When we talk about occupation, I think most Syrians would rather it [Syria] be occupied by anybody but the Syrian regime. And they would open their doors to the Israeli forces probably at this point if it were to save them from the barrel bombs of Assad, not because they support Israel or Israeli forces, but…some would say the *Assad regime itself is an occupation force of fifty years* (The Middle East Institute, 2019, emphasis added)

Though this pronouncement may be purposely hyperbolic, it provides a morally polarized discourse that condemns Assad as a colonizer. Here, the ontologies of emancipatory politics produce an identification with “Syrianness” distinct from national state identity and tied to ontological ownership of ancestral lands. In this narrative, “Syria” is the land where indigenous people live and resist in an embodied act of decolonization. In the documentary *The Revolution is Being Televised* about the besieged town of Al-Qusayr in Homs, cameraman Trad Al Zahori confronts questions of the colonial when he corrects his mistaken equivocation of the national army as Syrian. After his slip, he rhetorically and incisively strips "Syrianness" from the Syrian national army: "Indiscriminate shelling continues on Al-Qusayr and its surrounding fields…God save us, God save us. *The Syrian Army, no excuse me, the Assad army,* is shelling the town of Al-Qusayr and its surrounding fields" (Pletts, 2014, emphasis added). In this context, 'Syrian' is marked by a re-awakened attachment to ancestral lands amid a land revolution. May Scaff, the actress renowned for her public stance against the regime in the early days of the revolution, in her last Facebook entry prior to her death, made a similar stylistic choice: "I won't lose hope... I won't lose hope... It's the great Syria, not Assad's Syria" (Scaff, 2018).

Taking this point further, the adoption of the Syrian revolution flag was not just aesthetically motivated to differentiate the opposition from the regime's flag, but also taps into the anti-colonial ethos of times past. The Syrian revolution flag in fact had a previous life as Syria's official flag from 1932 to 1963 as a symbol of Syria's liberation from French colonialism.[7] The flag symbolized autonomy and its three stars are said to refer to the three revolts against the French Mandate — that of the Alawites, the Druze, and those in northern Syria. It was hoisted on government buildings on April 17, 1946, the day after the evacuation of the last French soldier at the conclusion of the French mandate. The decolonial politics of the Syrian Revolution are impelled not only by the historic severing of radical subjects from their subsistence base and the expropriation of their lands, but by an acknowledgment of the land's theophanic qualities as inspiring liberatory struggle. Promoting the political valence of the land (and its colonization) therefore not only reflects a shared investment in land and place, but a shaping of an otherwise dissimilar analysis to expand the audience's political and moral obligations. Invocating the Syrian struggle as decolonial intentionally subjects it to the performative power of anti-colonial theorizing.

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[7] There was a short 1958-1961 interruption during the unity between Syria and Egypt when another flag was adopted. The "independence" flag was in use until a year after the Baathist party took power (Moubayed, 2012; Sergie, 2003).

To bring this full circle, I argue that the counterhegemonic value of these readings must be critically weighed in face of the regime's pro-Palestinian rhetoric and authentication strategies. The regime used Palestine as an ideology of legitimation, making claims to national sovereignty under the guise of protecting the nation from imperialist encroachments. Part and parcel of this narrative was the smearing of the revolution as an "imperialist conspiracy against a progressive, anti-imperialist regime" (Al Haj Saleh, 2017f). Indeed, the regime has historically presented itself as embodying nationalist principles of Arab unity, the "existential" struggle with Israel, and social progress (Al Haj Saleh, 2017e). In actuality, the regime instrumentalized the Palestinian cause for its own benefit. For instance, it instituted the Military Intelligence Branch 235 in Damascus ("the Palestine Branch") which purported to collect information for Palestine but which was notorious for its torture of Palestinians who opposed Assad (Human Rights Watch, 2012). A case in point is Tal al-Mallouhi, a young woman detained in 2009 and later charged with "disclosing information to a foreign country" for blogging poems about Palestine (Oweis, 2010). Palestinian-Syrians carried out demonstrations with Syrians, despite attempts of the regime to neutralize their participation by kidnapping Palestinians and blaming Syrian revolutionaries (Munif, 2020). Though the entwinement of the Palestinian and Syrian liberation struggles, even their intersections along structural and genealogical lines, is outside of the communicative structure of elastic peripheral as outlined here, this facet certainly makes calls for solidarity ever the more acute.

“Syrian Blacks”

After watching the footage of George Floyd pleading for his breath while a police officer pinned his neck to the ground in Minneapolis, Aziz Asmar had flashbacks of Syrians gasping for breath after sarin gas attacks by the Assad regime in the suburb of Eastern Ghouta. He was inspired to paint Floyd’s portrait on the remains of his family’s kitchen wall in the town of Binnish, which had been destroyed by the regime’s airstrikes. The vividly colored eight-foot mural features Floyd’s face and is appended with his last words, “I can’t breathe” (see Figure 12). In an interview, the painter brings to life the experiential trajectory of the scene of George Floyd’s murder and how it evoked memories of Syrian suffocation he had witnessed: "In those hospitals, the victims were crying and they were asking to breathe. I saw George Floyd pleading with the officer to let him breathe and it reminded me of the way they were killed” (Hincks, 2020).

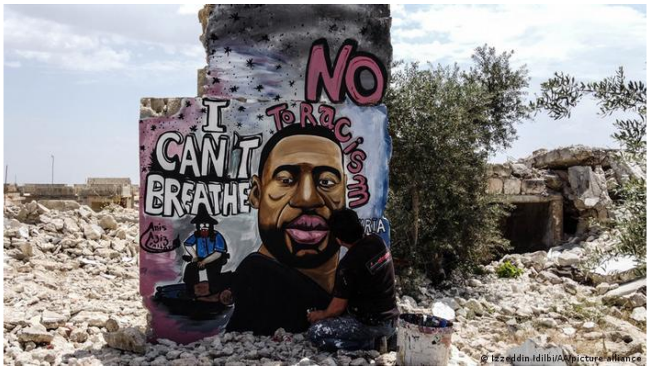

Figure 12. Aziz Asmar’s portrait of George Floyd (Asmar, 2021a)

Breath, and the lack of it, cannot be easily textualized. As a site of rhetorical invention, painting George Floyd’s image on the scarred landscape of a ravaged home is significant for the space on which the “compass of suffering” is mapped. Amid habitual images of extinguished Syrian cities, the theatricality of the canvas creates discord with audience expectations. The location of the painting dramatizes the significance of bodies in crisis. Asmar constructs the act of painting as a purposeful political action with considerable corporeal costs: “there are logistical problems. We draw on walls destroyed by bombs. Because of that, it is difficult to draw on them. Sometimes rocks fall on us, and sometimes planes return to bomb the areas in which we are drawing” (Asmar, 2020). A razed home in a small town in Syria become the literal and ideological backdrop for remembering George Floyd in a potent reimagining of the landscapes of resistance on which solidarity might be built.

As the video of George Floyd’s murder went viral, activists in Kafranbel were also taking notice. Kafranbel, a northern town in the Idlib countryside, the revolution’s “musical note,” became an international sensation after global news agencies, such as the Independent and the Washington Post, caught wind of their weekly Friday banners and demonstrations. The group created witty, simple, yet piercing banners to raise awareness about the liberatory struggle in Syria.[8] By pulling on new techniques and vocabularies, the eye-catching banners hoped to reverse “waning attention” to the Syrian cause (Griswold, 2018). Instead of only covering events in Syria, the banners engaged in an “unprecedented level of interaction with world events” (Dibo, 2013), such as the Boston Bombings, the war in Ukraine, UN vetoes, Black Friday Sales, and Caitlyn Jenner’s coming out as transgender. In their intersection of aesthetic experimentation and political activism, the banners exemplify the “embodied process of making solidarity itself” (Berlant, 2011, p. 260). Each banner was hand-made, staged, and authored with the date by the activists who would stand in dense unison behind and around the banner. Ahmad Jalal was the cartoonist, and a calligrapher and translator would design and translate the text from Arabic into multiple languages, including Turkish, English, Russian and Chinese. The locations in which the banners would be held were meticulously planned, often in public sites of protest or in front of bombed-out buildings. Eventually, when the activists became the target of regime airstrikes and barrel bombs, the photographs were taken in inconspicuous side streets. Because of weak internet service, the activists would take pictures of the banners with a Nokia flip phone and send them to a friend living outside of Syria to circulate online (Karam, 2014). The people of Kafranbel would plead with the activists to stop creating the banners due to the conviction that they were the reason for the regime's intense air raids of the town. The behind-the-scenes machinations of the banner-making reveal a discernable teleological drive to initiate a trans-linguistic and transnational affective encounter with the world, at great risk to the activists and the people of the town.

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[8] The archives of the weekly banners are on the Facebook page *The Occupied Kafranbel Banners*.

On the occasion of George Floyd's murder, the Kafranbel activists decided to re-post a banner made a few years prior to stand in solidarity with Eric Garner, a black man who was killed after being locked in chokehold. The banner, designed by community organizer and mastermind of the Kafranbel banners Raed Fares in 2014, states in bold letters: "we stand in solidarity with the oppressed who cannot breathe" (see Figure 13).

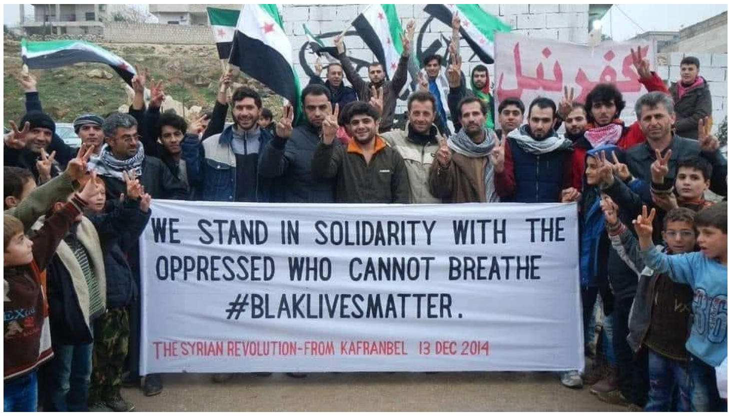
WE STAND IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE
OPPRESSED WHO CANNOT BREATHE
#BLAKLIVESMATTER.
THE SYRIAN REVOLUTION-FROM KAFRANBEL 13 DEC 2014

Figure 13. Black Lives Matter banner in Kafranbel (Occupied Kafranbel Banners, 2020)

In this case, there was a new caption attending the image which brought the assassination of Raed Fares in 2018 and the assassination of George Floyd in 2020 into conversation with one another:[9]

> Six years ago, Raed wrote this banner from his city which was under daily bombardment to express his solidarity with a black young man who was killed by the police in New York while he was not armed. Before he was killed, the man was saying, "I cannot breathe." Today, another black man is killed by Minnesota police, as a policeman put his knee on the neck of the man who was lying on the ground and unable to move, and unable to breathe, and he did not remove his knee until that man had taken his last breath. Our hearts are in solidarity with those in a far-off continent despite our own catastrophes. It burns out hearts and it will not be repeated. (Occupied Kafranbel Banners, 2020)[10]

The death of George Floyd was an optimal moment to draw attention to and bring to bear the unexpected yet significant dimensions of relationality with the Syrian liberatory struggle. By coding their "Global South" liberation struggle into the localized political discourses of others, an interpretive and evaluative assessment of the relationality of the two movements is offered. Through this juxtaposition, Syrian revolutionaries seek meaning in the African American struggle and construe its relevance within the tapestry of the Syrian liberatory struggle. Though the political heritage and trajectories of the Syrian revolution and Black Lives Matter could not be further apart, the "disinterested spectator" is asked to recognize a diffuse and heterogenous set of subjects based on a shared experience of suffocation. In the absence of racial, ethnic, or geographic kinship, the emotional registers of death are channeled to indicate the ways in which

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[9] Raed Fares was abducted and targeted numerous times. He was eventually gunned down with fellow activists Hamoud Jneed just before Friday prayers by Daesh on 23 November 2018.

[10] Author's translation.

Raed Fares and George Floyds' killing are ontologically connate. The narrative estrangement of the two assassinations is evident in the sentient admission of frontiers and distance from those in a "far off continent." Nevertheless, there is the imperative of transcending this space, "despite our own catastrophes." In this narrative, analogous experiences of suffocation, their pervasiveness and persistence, are drawn amid the "ontological understanding of the fact that we are beings that breathe" as a fundamental human right (Kleinberg-Levin, 1984, p. 9). The theme of suffocation has in fact inspired several public awareness campaigns in Syria, such as the "Do Not Suffocate the Truth" campaign on the anniversary of the Ghouta chemical attacks which stresses the simultaneous denial of breath and memory of those who suffered these attacks (Ghouta, 2021).

The existential experiences of suffocation are stretched to name a manifold experience which unites these subjects at a site of peripherality. Such a rhetorical strategy jettisons the specificity of one's struggle amidst the potential for political mobilization. Indeed, there is willingness to relinquish particularistic ontologies by contemplating the material consequences of oppression at a kairotic moment. Despite the remarkable heterogeneity of ontologies, the elastic periphery affirms the intertwining of experiences without resorting to a universalizing liberal humanism (i.e., we are all humankind). New avenues are unfolded for audiences to overcome the stress on their sensorium whilst exhibiting situational timing and responsiveness to happenings in the periphery.

Though centered on a discrete recent act (i.e., the killing of George Floyd), there is indisputably a diachronic dimension in which the historical moorings of racism and slavery that frame Floyd's killing is signaled. The signifier "black" locates the event within its historical, racial and cultural contexts. The audience is invited to take on the intellectual task of reconsidering the faraway Syrian subject within the history of subjugation of racialized others, African Americans. Yassin Al Haj Saleh makes a direct analogy to the African American struggle for civil rights: “ours is a struggle against racism, though without races” (Naprushkina, 2020). This oxymoronic statement reveals the inherent tension in the Syrian revolution’s conceptualization as anti-racist, namely in its composition of a homogenously imagined collective of two historic struggles against racism, but in which one is “without races.” In the same article, he makes this analogy explicit: the sovereign state is “busying itself killing Syrian blacks” (Naprushkina, 2020).

The affinity of the Syrian revolution with the questions of race and racism, and the entanglement of Syrians within racial hierarchies, is thus carefully construed. Though Black Lives Matter does not lend itself to a facile translation to the Syrian context, the rhetoric ventures beyond a shared humanitarian concern with the suffering of others and an anti-racist critique of the United States toward an implication of oneself within the narrative of others. The road to the elastic periphery here is *in and through*, rather than over and against, race and racism. “Syrian Blacks” implicates Syrians within the hierarchical racialization of the planet and its people, in particular the construction of “race” within the dialectic of white supremacy and its colonized “other.” In this light, another reading of the rhetoric indicates the entanglement of Syrians in racial structures without necessarily drawing on any causal structures of racialized oppression. The divergent “phenomena” of Floyd’s murder by a white police officer in Minneapolis and Fares’ murder by Daesh are foregrounded to establish racialized significance for a public which might make meaning of the events in relation to each other.

Though the rhetoric does not take on the complexity of racial categories in the Syrian context, race is arguably enunciated as a non-fixed category attached to bio-political apparatus rather than one shaped by ethnic clashes between civilizations or racial/colonial difference. Biopolitical racism operates in Syria in a complex and multi-faceted manner. Though it is beyond the scope of this chapter, suffice to say, Syria is marked by “tyranny” toward “the majority” – in which by and large, Sunni Muslims who form the majority of the population and are not known for their “otherness” are oppressed by a minority sect (Al Haj Saleh, 2017d, p. 41). Added to this, ethnic racism does exist against Kurdish Syrians, who have been historically exiled from the public space and systematically discriminated against by the regime.[11] In this sense, racism, in various manifestations, is intentionally made significant within and adaptable into the Syrian emancipatory struggle. The ontological coexistence of Syrians with differently situated subjects is asserted through exposing the pertinence of racism to their struggle.

Finally, we might also read the rhetoric as harnessing the affective “excess” centered on certain social movements, namely those with an identifiable racial element and relative situational privilege. Relating struggles in this way may be a precarious endeavor, but it does extend conceptual contiguity in a manner conducive to solidarity building. Here, I draw on Weheliye (2014), who considers how the colonial outpost, the slave plantation, and the concentration camp are “neither exceptional nor comparable, but simply relational” (p.37). He argues that to the public, racial slavery does not “seem[ing] as great an abnormality both in its historical context and in the way it is retroactively narrativized” as the Holocaust. In essence, he is noting how various modes of extreme brutality and directed killings are weighted differently among audiences and conjure different forms of bare life in “more prevalent version(s) of finitude" (p.37). He laments the fact that slavery is not included in "conceptualizations of this category" in scholarly discourse or by the United Nations (p.38). Simultaneously, he is wary of the Third Reich as being the "paradigmatic example" of the full reach of biopower, preferring the "conceptual contiguity" between Nazi racism and other forms of biopolitics, such as colonialism, indigenous genocide and racial slavery (Weheliye, 2014, p. 59).[12] In a similar vein, Césaire observes how class struggle robs the colonial question of its singularity and renders it "subordinate" (Bardawil, 2019, p. 183). In this respect, the elastic peripheral might be said to operate within an economy of scarcity "where the emotional wealth of one agent necessarily comes at the expense of another" (Gross, 2006, p. 75).

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[11] As a minority, the Kurds are “a key target of the ‘Arabist’ regime” (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami, 2016, p. 22) and “the primary scapegoats of rising Arab nationalism in Syria” (Daher, 2019, p. 149). Aside from the 120,000 Syrian Kurds stripped of citizenship in 1962 (as stateless individuals, they had no access to benefits such as healthcare or higher education), even Kurds with Syrian citizenship face “institutional racism” (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami, 2016, p. 22). They cannot publish in their language, have cultural festivals, or teach in their language. Admittedly, “ethnic tension” between Arabs and Kurds eventually resulted in a splitting from Syrian (Arab) revolutionary groups and an increased marginalization from the wider uprising (Daher, 2019).

As such, I am less interested in the actualities of forms of biopower, but rather in perceptions of relationality, the "weights" of various struggles and arguments for solidarity within this schema. In this sense, this "relational" rhetorical strategy banks on the legitimacy of other movements with a priori centrality on the world stage. The affective registers of outrage at the death of George Floyd are the entry-point into an explicitly political conversation from which Syrians have been excluded. Indeed, Black Lives Matter has served as a powerful mise-en-scène for reflections on solidarity, coalition building, and legal, moral and political responsibility for injustice within contemporary politics (Binning, 2019). As the "social justice yellow brick road" of social movements (Binning, 2019, p. iv), this arguably offers Black Lives Matter a moral clarity which orients the audience toward the Syrian emancipatory struggle in a way in which it is easy to identify the perpetrator and the oppressed. By projecting a 'mirror structure,' the Syrian revolution is invoked within the social-political radicalism of Black Lives Matter, remedying injustices of erasure of revolutionary teleology through enriching an understanding of the registers in which race might be advanced.

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[12] He also critiques Foucault for not making an ontological differentiation between ethnic and biopolitical racism.

Conclusion

This chapter is hardly the first-time productive links between various traditions of struggles have been made. Recent scholarship and media attention has brought to light the dynamic intersections between the Hong Kong pro-democracy marches, anticolonial resistance in North Dakota, Palestinian Liberation and Black Lives Matter. In this chapter, I have extended this work by identifying a distinct character of discourse which underlines how solidarity is crafted and how transnational networks are facilitated through the symbolic landscape of the radical subject and their geographies of knowledge. The elastic peripheral is not just a turn in the grammar of political claims-making from the default lexicon of the "Global South," but instead captures purposeful political alignments made with those who match one's liberatory ethos with the intent of dismantling systems of oppression. As a rhetorical form of argument, it does not emphasize struggles as intersectional or combine them underneath a theory of homogenized oppression in so much as make them *relational* in urgent and compelling terms. Within the elastic peripheral, the heterogenous experiences of the oppressed coalesce around a single axis of differentiation, indirectly demanding awareness of unexpiated crimes which do not enact the same constellations of emotion or political acuity. Acknowledgement is provoked through the implication of oneself within the narrative of others.

Adduced in the two disparate examples of "Syrians are Palestinian, Syrians are Black" is a project(s) of worldmaking which emanates from the anti-colonial and anti-racist sensibilities of those in revolutionary practice. The theoretical power of the elastic peripheral lies in the weaving of transcendently peripheral human geographies without falling into a banal equation of histories. Admittedly, such visions of “internationalism” have limits and come at the expense of a more profound understanding of the specificities in the case at hand. The political efficaciousness of the elastic peripheral is also unclear. This “echo chamber” reality was cuttingly stated in an op-ed by the Syrian writer Lina Serjie (under her penname Amal Hanano): “the world read the banners, and did nothing” (Hanano, 2013). But reducing this phenomenon to an instrumentality misses the constitutive effects on those in liberatory action and on the audience which bear witness. Arguably, the peripheral constructs a spatiality, a site of investment, in which radical subjects around the world are relational, and together, central, to a global revolutionary project. Though not implicating the audience as complicit or collectively responsible, a space of reflection is opened which exceeds the solitary focus on the perpetrator or the ‘over-emotionalized” spectacles of bare life (Chouliaraki, 2013, p. 76), to gesture to the possibilities which occur when those at the periphery are in concert.

In the final chapter of this dissertation, I accentuate radical rhetoric’s potential to alleviate realities which oppress and invisibilize struggles through *belief* in the radical subject and their embodied articulations of hope. I end with a contemplation of radical rhetoric’s ability to shift between temporalities and geographies to defy confinement, death, debilitation, and disappearance.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Reclaiming the Space that is ours
Forgetting
the Fragility of being alone
In this rose-colored existence, I am enchanted at the world's wondrousness
Yet, the flesh is tender to the touch
Memory lingers long
The Syrian is a refugee
She has left the watan, the Land of Jasimine and Pistachio
The Land of Honking taxis and Salted Butter Corn on the Street
Cracked Shells, Broken Windows, and Sarin Gas, drove her out
She sits on the curb, staring at the stars
She Longs. For. Home.
Staring at the stars, I am wondrous again
Memories of wrought-iron balusters on an Aleppan veranda with a minty breeze
Where nana drinks hot chai with sugar cubes
Basking in her warmth, in the Togetherness, in the Belonging
Of that Transient Immortal Place
Scrolls, write down this prayer
Take me back to the Land of the Citadel, to Halab, to that Moat
And let me sit by the curb with those that yearn too.
(Ghazal Aswad et al., 2020, p.39-40)

In a fascinating moment in the documentary *Our Memory Belongs to Us*, three activists, Yadan, Odai and Rani, now refugees in the city of lights in France, stand on an empty stage to watch footage from سهرة ثورية , a revolutionary late-night congregation of activists in Daraa. The event was broadcast live on Al Jazeera and the activists were completely masked to maintain anonymity, only their eyes peeking through black, white and green balaclavas of the revolution. Side by side on the floor of an undisclosed location, they are flanked by wall-sized flags of the Syrian revolution. Arabic coffee is served in a coffee pot on a small table draped with the revolution's flag. Hands are raised resolutely in the V-shaped sign of victory by those present (see Figure 14).

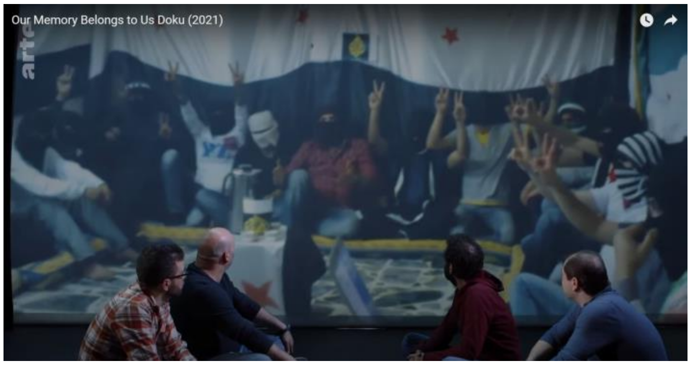
Our Memory Belongs to Us Doku (2021)
arte

Figure 14: Movie still from *Our Memory Belongs to Us* (Farah, 2021)

With a tenacious tonality of voice, a man in the background bellows an earnest call for democracy:

> Our revolution is a revolution for all Syrians, not just for one sect. Syria is not a place for states to work out their sectarian differences. We demand a country of civil society, where all Syrians have the same rights and responsibilities.[1]

After locating themselves in the footage, the men reminisce sentimentally about that night but the discussion takes a heated turn when an argument ensues between them:

> ***Director:*** "How do you think this footage was perceived by those watching Al Jazeera? How did people see it?"
>
> ***Yadan:*** "Ugly, ugly (bashe'a). An ugly picture."
>
> ***Odai*****:** "It was not ugly at all! Not at all! It was not ugly at all."
>
> ***Rani*****:** "No, no!"
>
> ***Yadan*****:** "Well, we understand something and the people understand something else."
>
> ***Odai*****:** "First, the flag behind us was the flag of the revolution. That's the first thing! I am identifying my identity through my flag!"

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[1] All quotes from *Our Memory Belongs to Us* are the author's translation.

Yadan**:** “But only you know what that means!”

Odai**:** “No, people know it too! The flag of the terrorists was different than our flag.”

Yadan: “Who are the people who know what our flag means?”

Odai**:** “You are saying because we had our faces hidden, it was an ugly sight? No, it is a beautiful sight! I was afraid for my family, you were scared for your family…we were all scared for our families. This video is from the end of 2011, there was not even a terrorist or extremist group in Syria at that time! It was a revolution, and everyone knew it was a revolution!”

Rani [nodding in agreement]: “One hundred percent, one hundred percent”

Yadan: “An American citizen doesn’t know these details! They don’t even know where Syria is on a map, people! You have to tell them Syria is next to Israel for him to even know us!”

This conversation speaks to the driving intellectual quest behind this dissertation: *How might one resolve the dissonance between revolution as lived and experienced by radical subjects and how it is perceived by the outside world?* The discursive dis-alignment between what “an American citizen” might see and what “Syrians” experience articulates the complexities within the continuum of lived experiences of revolution and those external to it. The conversation also intimates how grand narratives which discredit truths are internalized, whilst radical subjects rummage to manage and organize their narratives so others might identify with their struggle. As such, this dissertation presents radical rhetoric as a model of rhetorical practice for how one might resolve fissures surrounding social movements which fall into the “confrontation between two world-views.” Each chapter represents its own practice of radical rhetoric, whilst also deriving the theory of radical rhetoric in the process. The following tenets have been pivotal to theoretical framework of radical rhetoric and its arousal of solidarity with those in revolutionary liberatory struggle: (1) The Radical Subject’s Testimony as Sacred Knowledge; and (2) The Radical Subject as the Starting Point in Inquiry.

One tenet which has not been explicitly stated above, but which underlies each of the tenets of radical rhetoric is *belief*. In this final chapter, I posit a series of questions which as yet appear unresolved, or which have not been highlighted plainly. In Part 1, *what is the leap required of the audience of radical rhetoric to transcend forces acting in a direction divergent from that desired for solidarity?* I accentuate radical rhetoric’s potential to alleviate realities which oppress and invisibilize struggles through marking belief at the heart of radical rhetoric. By refining this aspect of radical rhetoric in the terminus of this dissertation, I necessitate *belief* as the rhetorical response to the radical subject’s organization of and capacity for hope. This chapter outlines how *belief* responds to the invitation of the radical subject and matches their motifs of hope and resistance in confronting injustice. Radical rhetoric boils down to belief as the necessary condition which creates radical rhetoric’s potentiality for solidarity. To put it differently, belief comes into existence and is engendered by the radical subject and their articulations of hope.

After this, I question: *what induces a tipping of the balance toward the futurity of radical rhetoric?* Here, “hope talk” is presented as rhetorically productive to radical rhetoric’s ability to shift between temporalities and geographies, including beyond borders and beyond life. Hope talk provides non-normative entry points into revolution, defying confinement, death, debilitation, and disappearance. As an intersubjective affect, hope talk engenders the production and exchange of hope among radical subjects, with noteworthy repercussions within the nation-state and in the diaspora.

In Part 2, I ask the following question: *What are the possibilities for radical rhetoric among refugees in exile?* I think through avenues for the generational performance of radical rhetoric across various "scapes." In particular, (post)memory, discussed earlier, is considered as a multi-directional site of rhetorical radical invention with salience in the diaspora. To conclude, in Part 3, I sketch the limitations and challenges faced completing this dissertation, after which I speculate about prospects for radical rhetoric outside the liminal case study of Syria.

Belief in Radical Rhetoric

Defining Belief

In this section, I bring to the fore *belief* as privileged within radical rhetoric. Without belief, there is no hope of solidarity vis-à-vis radical rhetoric. Solidarity is an inherently hopeful act. Here, I theorize *belief* from the Islamic philosophy of iman, though taking it out of its theological telos. Belief in radical rhetoric differs from its construal within the Greek tradition of rhetorical thought, where it is translated as doxa, i.e., common opinion or point of view (Jasinski, 2001). Iman signifies ethereal belief in which one manifests submission and humility which links to the heart. Though iman alludes to a mental state of conviction and acceptance of something unseen, it is based on proof, reason, or knowledge – it acquires an epistemological ethos. In other words, it is not unfounded belief but is rooted in the human as having an intellect able to build upon systems of knowledge. Belief is adduced as a result of a deliberate study of several possibilities.

By connecting belief to the episteme of the radical subject, radical rhetoric offers an alternative to the atheistic "refusal to believe." The refusal to believe constitutes a hegemonic act unwilling to bridge the epistemological abyss between ourselves and the radical subject. This refusal, mirroring reverse moral exceptionalism, is premised on the implicit assumption of the superiority of one's own worldview and access to hidden affairs in the world. It aligns with the tendency to "distrust even that which seems unquestionable to our own consciousness" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p.42). The radical subject's subjectivity is relegated to doxa, obscure, unverifiable and characterized by "ontological ambiguity" (Hariman, 1995, p. 185). A disbelieving mindset tells us it is impossible for radical subjects to "organize something so perfect, so beautiful, so brilliantly orchestrated" (Yazbek, 2012, p. x). In some ways, the radical subject is an abstraction, an ideal that cannot be realized in any actual person, *except that sometimes it is.*

Radical rhetoric therefore introduces simplicity into schemas of meaning-making, supplanting skepticism with *a willingness to believe* those so often met with social, civil and biological death, and radical exclusion from structures of knowledge. Similar to iman, belief in radical rhetoric yields to the self-evidence of truth, and at is epitome, makes one oblivious of their own self.[2] It articulates a new set of demands of critical theory which positions radical subjects as originators of knowledge within intellectual practice. In co-articulating the producers of knowledge and the subjects of study, belief grants determinacy to the radical subject in their ontological totality. Preserving the radical political imaginary in its entirety affords radical subjects with multiple axes of knowledge: ontic, epistemic, and indispensably, alethic truth.

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[2] In sufism, iman makes the heart consumed with truth, such that it "انساني ذكر نفسي" i.e., made me oblivious of myself (Al-Ghazali, 2020).

Importantly, belief is not the suspension of criticism, or anti-intellectualism, but rather a re-direction of our wakeful alertness. Criticism must be cognizant of "the existential actualities of human life, politics, societies, and events…these realities are what should be taken account of by criticism and the critical consciousness" (Said, 1983, p. 5). Considering actualities is challenging precisely because of commanding temptations that "exert pressures…building toward the contemporary situation for long period of time" (p.5). From this perspective, belief does not call for the end of critical thinking or for the dictum "solidarity before criticism," but rectifies practices of critical thinking and meaning-making which validate the status quo. In his trademark brilliance, Said advocates a criticism which is "life-enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination and abuse… in the interests of human freedom." Belief is not antithetical to our critical capabilities, indeed, by being alive to our critical consciousness we realize the delusion of all-knowingness. We become privy, in unexpected ways, to another's "inner vision" (Al-Ghazali, 2020, p. 396).

The Hoping Radical Subject

Belief in radical rhetoric goes hand in glove with the radical subject's motifs of hope and corporeal acts of resistance in confronting injustice. The ontological future-orientation and sacrificial investment of the radical subject is meaningful to the ethos of radical rhetoric. In the vein of iman, belief entails acting with certain responsibilities toward the radical "hoping subject" (a term by Hage, 2003). Believing commands us to offer ourselves up to the “availability, the circulation, and the exchange of hope” (Hage, 2003, p. 9). In this sense, radical rhetoric keys in the hope of radical subjects as an intentional, non-passive and non-nebulous phenomenon which invites us to match their organization of hope when others “do not arrive.” I therefore recognize hope as an inter-subjective affect which demands the reciprocity of belief.

I pause here on the story of Bassel Shehadeh, a Syrian Christian filmmaker and activist. Bassel’s story exemplifies how radical subjects weave hope into a hermeneutically rich rhetoric of emancipatory action. Reading Shehadeh’s story closely takes us into the heart of the relation between hope, its percolation as hope talk, and its potential to render belief. Shehadeh had been previously arrested and detained in July 2011 in a demonstration of intellectuals in the Meydan neighborhood of Damascus. After his release, he travelled to the United States to start school in the fall semester of 2011 as a Fulbright scholar pursuing a master’s degree in filmmaking at the University of Syracuse in New York. He completed the semester, but then decided to leave his studies in New York and return to Syria to join the revolution. There, he trained activist-photographers and videographers on how to use the camera to capture the shelling of civilians and how to execute montage editing. On his resolve to return:

> Imagine, how many times will we have a revolution in our lives? How can I leave a dream that is coming true? And what will I tell my children when they ask me about my work in it? Will I answer them “When the revolution started, I left my country and went to take care of my future.” How could there be a future without a free homeland? (100 Faces of the Syrian Revolution, 2020; Mcevers, 2012).

His visionary determinism, in characteristic radical subject fashion, at times bordered on nihilism and irrational recklessness. Hope is not an elusive soft concept or a passivity-inducing wish (Farran et al., 1995), but extends corporeally to how the radical subjects behaves, feels and thinks, toward the likelihood of another world which is possible in the now. It was not Shehadeh's first time "gambling with his life" – in 2010, he drove his grandfather's old Russian motorcycle, which he called Lenin, all the way from Damascus to New Delhi, inspired by Che Guevara's *Motorcycle Diaries* (Kanaan, 2012; Shehadeh, 2014). Once in Syria, he pioneered the Currency of Freedom project, where activists printed counterfeit 1500 SYP bills and distributed them in the streets, one side of which were perfect fakes, but on the other side were leaflets calling Syrians to convene and protest in the streets of Aleppo and Damascus (Donauskyte et al., 2012; MBC, 2012). He reported to the international press, at one point appearing anonymously on *Democracy Now* under his first name. With the sounds of guns and the whizzing of bullets in the background, one can make out the tense and tenuous nature of hope which tethers between corporeal vulnerability and the compulsion to bear witness:

> ***Bassel Shehadeh*:** I just got back from Homs yesterday after spending one week there. Heavy bombing and shelling of the city continued for several days till the night of the Arab League delegation's arrival. *I witnessed tanks withdraw from Homs the morning before the observers arrived…*Now, I am calling you from al Meydan area in Damascus. Activists have called for a protest in this area and they expected the monitors, the delegations, to come and see the protests, but *no one arrived here* and the security forces are cracking down on the protestors. I can hear them running in the streets…we are wondering what are the delegations

> doing here now? I can hear the security forces outside of the room I am in now. So, I am keeping my voice a little bit low. They are outside, so I need to keep my voice a little bit low. Sorry for that.
>
> ***Amy Goodman:*** We can hear you just fine Bassel, but we want you to be very careful. You can tell us you can't talk. That is fine…But I do want to ask you about who is killing who?
>
> ***Bassel Shehadeh*****:** The snipers are for the army actually. *I was shot by the snipers when I was trying to cross from area to area*... The tried to shoot all the people trying to cross…The activists in the house are telling me to keep my voice a little bit low because…the security forces are cracking down against the protestors outside [conversation continues amidst bombing] (Democracy Now, 2011).

As explicated earlier in this dissertation, the radical subject's testimony is critical when independent media and/or non-governmental observers "do not arrive." In such times, the radical subject must organize hope into movement.[3] As oppressors work to circumvent witnessing, the testimony of radical subjects forms an epistemological agency born of hope as a category of struggle. Bassel's organization of hope endured amid disheartening setbacks and palpable danger to his life. His actions are blinded by a future goodness that obliviates the present: "one day the shelling was so heavy and I told Basel: It is too dangerous, better not to go out today. His answer was: This training is more important than anything else" (Anonymous, 2012).[4]

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[3] For more on the art of organizing hope in the Latin American context, see Dinerstein (2015).

[4] Several of those trained by Bassel Shehadeh became well-known cameramen, such as Ahmad Al-Assam (known as Ahmed Abu Ibrahim) who filmed key news reports on Syria.

On the 28th of May 2012, at 28 years old, Bassel was killed in his car under shelling in the Bab Sibaa neighborhood in Homs. He had been filming the aftermath of the Houla massacre, which occurred only a few days prior. Rebels had taken refuge inside people's homes. His peppered body, covered in a white shroud, was carried along with the four comrades who died with him (Syrian2011X, 2012). Small flashlights luminate Shehadeh's face in the dark of the night, while mourners sang "heaven open your gates, your students have come to visit you… the revolution and the revolutionaries will be alive!" (MsSamer010, 2012).[5] During his memorial service, the regime cut off access to the church where friends and family gathered, and later sieged his family's home (The Syria Campaign, 2021a). When the regime prevented the memorial service from taking place inside the church, the mourners boldly collected outside, standing on the church walls and bidding Bassel adieu with songs of the revolution.

Hope Talk

To bring Shehadeh's story full circle, it is interesting to note that Syrians who had never protested were stirred to join the revolution after witnessing Shehadeh's funeral (Abdallah, 2021c) – they were incarnated into radical subjects. The short film *I Will Cross Tomorrow,* credited to Shehadeh himself, was in fact pieced together by others with footage Shehadeh had taken of himself crossing the street breathlessly, as he ducked snipers standing on the rooftops. Shehadeh had filmed the footage with the intent of illustrating what life was like for everyday civilians in Homs (Shehadeh, 2013a). Another film of his, *Streets of Freedom,* which he hoped to be his best work, was never completed. In what has been termed "emergency cinema" (Bayoumi, 2015), activists patched the footage into a twenty four minute version of the film (Shehadeh, 2013). Digging into the past to retrieve his last recorded words, I could not help but come undone at the flourishing of hope into the perilous praxis of revolution, in spite of his untimely death. The ability of the radical subject's hope to "transcend the current reality to understand what it is" (Lear, 2006, p. 103) bounds us likewise to transcend our realities, in the hope that we might believe too.

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[5] Author's translation.

From the above, one can recognize the symbiotic nature of radical subjectivity and more specifically, the circulation and exchange of hope among radical subjects past death and across borders. Through thinking about hope relationally, one can decipher rituals of "hope talk" which are rhetorically productive to the radical subject's shifting between temporalities and geographies. How the revolutionary past is resourced for hope is pertinent to the lifetime of liberatory struggle, and for insight into the forces which anchor devotion when hope is lost. Within the rhetorical ecology of social movements, it is part of the complex interplay of processes and purposes which lend longevity to revolution and draw it into futurity.

Hope talk allows for the continued *belief in hope*. Through hope talk, radical subjects transcend realities and defy the confinement of death, debilitation, and disappearance. It orients radical subjects, even operates in their formation, whilst carrying making bearable loss. Take for instance the affective politics of performance of individual protestors dancing dabkeh in unison (i.e., a folkloric circle dance entitled 'dancing of the feet') amid the raining of bombs in the public sphere: their bodies are "كتلة بشرية"(in the words of Farah, 2021) – *one human mass or body politic, even if these bodies do not have a singular voice.* The collective entity is obdurate - asserting itself while disaffirming the modus operandi of death. Protestors reckon with death as a form of thanatopolitics: “they protest. They are killed. They mourn the dead while they are protesting. They are killed. They protest. And the camera keeps rolling, so they may say the revolution goes on” (Farah, 2021). When revolutionary rupture takes place, hope is insurrected in productive opposition to biopolitics and its reductive ontologies of political death, so revolution might “go on.” In their dreams, they “have seen another world, an honest world, a world decidedly more fair than the one in which we are now live.” (Marcos, 2001, p. 18). As a collusion between those with similar conditions and conditionings, hope talk has the capacity to transcend the death of the radical subject, contending with the politics of death to reach what Achille Mbembe cites as the highest ethical horizon of “giving death to death” (Mbembe, 2001).

Reading radical subjectivities for hope suggests that there is no impeccable separation of ontologies between radical subjects. As an intersubjective practice, hope talk speaks to the way radical subjects in the same struggle are comported toward one other. The in-betweenness and inter-relationality of radical subjectivity is critical when hope is in a condition of existential suspension. Viewing radical subjectivity in this manner reveals forms of agency that lie outside normative categories of entry into revolution. Wafa Mustafa observes the symbiotic nature of radical subjectivity and the circulation of hope among radical subjects:

> Sometimes I feel there is no hope…But then, I believe, the largest hopes can never be defeated, but they can be re-shaped. The motive for me to go on is not hope. I don’t find that hope exists now. I wake up in the morning, and I *create hope* with my hands and teeth, but it is not there. What I have is an incalculable

> amount of sorrow, pain and anger. But so that they don't dominate me, I create hope each day when it is not there…and *it is سلسلة بشرية, like a human chain* which gives hope to others and then comes back to me…*It saves me from the belief in no hope*. (Mustafa, 2022, emphasis added)[6]

Hope talk can be germinal and unacknowledged, in the tradition of *collusio*, an agreement which is not contractual or overt as much as based on mutual understanding between those who share habitus (Bourdieu, 2000). As one of the intricate politics of everyday survival and protean politics, it is at once subversive and seditious. In the language of Bayat (1997, p. 6), "surreptitiously offensive" actions make visible new strains of political activity forged in the crucible of death, debilitation and adversity. One senses this kind of hope talk in the Abounaddara Collective (Bayoumi, 2015),[7] an anonymous group of self-taught filmmakers who produced some of the most mesmerizing portraits of the revolution, often without narration or frames of reference. The collective calls for "the right to a dignified image," with the intention of averting the western desire to witness victimhood by avoiding discourses of suffering and violence (Ryzik, 2015). Inspired by a line in the World War II *Song of the Partisans*, "Friend, if you fall from the shadows on the wall, another steps into your place," they also take the uncompleted work of radical subjects after death, debility, or forced disappearance and furtively present it as if it was completed by the subject himself. As mentioned earlier, they made the film *I Will Cross Tomorrow* after Bassel Shehadeh's death and introduced it as his “to prove to the regime that Bassel is not dead” (Bayoumi, 2015). They explicate in an interview the logic behind this surreptitious act:

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[6] All quotes by Wafa Mustafa in this chapter are the author's translation.

[7] Abounaddara translates into "the man with the glasses," i.e., the person who can, with lenses, see clearly.

> So the idea with the film we’ve done with Bassel’s rushes was exactly that. We even dedicated the film to the sniper who murdered Bassel. “Brother Sniper,” we wrote on our Facebook page, “I will cross tomorrow. You can kill me, but your children will see my images. With love, Bassel Shehadeh.” This is our homage to Bassel. (Bayoumi, 2015, emphasis added)[8]

After the regime broke the fingers of the political cartoonist Ali Ferzat, another artist in the collective drew a portrait of Ali Ferzat in his hospital bed, his hands bandaged except for an intransigent middle finger (see Figure 15). The artist faked a signature of Ali Ferzat on the portrait to make it appear that it was Ali Ferzat himself who had drawn it.

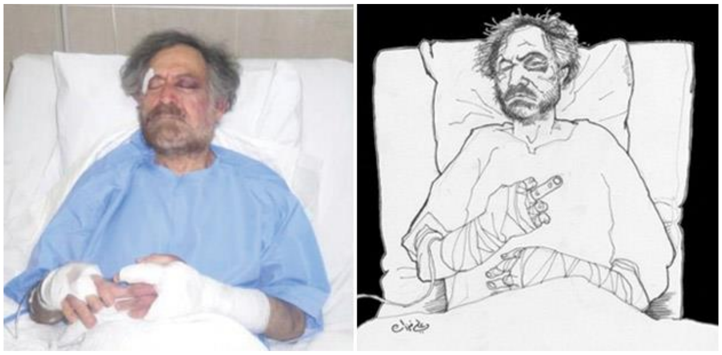

Figure 15. A photograph of Ali Ferzat and a portrait of Ali Ferzat (Kenner, 2011)

A member of the collective expounds on the logic of attributing the drawing to Ali Ferzat, who was clearly unable to draw a caricature of himself at that time:

> People were shocked because just two days prior every Syrian had seen Ali Farzat totally broken and in the hospital. Suddenly, here’s a self-portrait signed Ali

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[8] “Rushes” is a film production term to describe raw footage from a day's shooting.

> Farzat? How could it be? This is resistance. I know the artist who decided to draw the portrait of Ali Farzat as Ali Farzat, and in this gesture is how our society is resisting. *There will always be someone else who will do the fighting*. (Bayoumi, 2015, emphasis added)

In other instances, hope talk is a discursive practice, such as the “wasiyya” (will), “amaneh” (a valuable kept in safekeeping), “ahed” (oath or trust) or “iltizam dam” (blood contract).[9] This hope talk is anticipatory – predicting the need to rectify the conduct of others in the future. Ghalia Al Rahhal and her son Khaled Al-Issa engaged in this form of hope talk with one another. Khaled was a young photojournalist from Kafranbel who documented the violations of the regime, travelling to areas like Shaar neighborhood in rebel-held eastern Aleppo where coverage of the revolution was scant. The target of several assassination attempts, he was eventually killed at twenty-five years old by an explosive targeting him and his best friend journalist Hadi Al-Abdallah in their home. A few years earlier, his mother Ghalia, a hairdresser in Kafranbel converted her salon into an underground shelter to hide from bombs, where women would gather to talk about their lives after the revolution. Before long, the basement turned into a women’s organization called the Mazaya Center for Women’s Empowerment. Mazaya was created under the Union of Revolutionary Bureaus (URB), an organization founded by the civil society leader Raed Fares. Under Ghalia’s leadership, Mazaya became a place for the vocational training of women in journalism, paramedic, first aid training, and political activism. Over the years, Mazaya expanded to include seven centers, including medical clinics and child-care centers, and the publication of a magazine on women’s empowerment. Because of their revolutionary work and in particular, their empowerment of women, Mazaya was the target of several arson attacks and Ghalia herself narrowly escaped an assassination attempt.

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[9] In *Our Memory Belongs to Us*, the activists from Daraa memorialize التزام دم [i.e., the blood contract with the dead or disappeared].

After her son's death, in several interviews, Ghalia explained how her steadfastness was brought about by her son's وصية [i.e., will before death]. In an eerie premonition of his own death, a video surfaced in which he tells the camera: "all I can tell my mother is – stay steadfast. And no matter what you find changes inside of you, if you are retreating, stay steadfast. At the same time, if something happens to me, don't be sad" (SY Plus, 2020). Elsewhere, she stoically refers to performative potency of the عهد [i.e., oath] – the pact between herself and her son:

> He used to always tell me, if any of us dies, the other must continue. ما بتوقف مسيرتنا [i.e., our path won't stop]. If I die, you continue and if you die, I will continue your path. Not many people will understand this agreement. In the end, it was عهد, an oath with those who were martyred, an oath with those who were incarcerated, an oath with our friends who were exiled, and an oath with those who were forcibly disappeared from the arena, whose whereabouts no one knows and whom we have lost. This gave me the motivation to continue my path, even if we are displaced from our lands and even if we endure hardships. The oath we made to each other before he was martyred keeps me going. (Halab Today TV, 2021)[10]

I leave you with the peroration of the journalist Hadi Abdallah on how revolution is compelled through the affective hope of those in liberatory struggle. Hope talk brings intersubjective experiences into collective signification – of “simple revolutionaries” against “the world.” When an interviewer prods Hadi on whether he regrets revolution, he conveys with candor the infuriating quandary he is confronted with –between عهد [i.e., the oath] and between staying safe for family, in his case, his only daughter Bissan. He contemplates the reignition of revolution each time from the ashes:

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[10] Author's translation.

> I will never regret it. And if history were to repeat itself, I would do the same. Because when we went out in solidarity with Daraa, we were not going out for fun. We went out not to leave Daraa by itself. And then, we were stuck…the regime would dedicate all its power to repress one neighborhood, but then all the other neighborhoods would rise and revolt. Every action we took, we did because we had no other choice. We were forced into it. That is not to say that anyone threatened us, but *we had to be true to ourselves, to not betray the blood of the martyrs killed with us in protest or the screams of those detained when we were protesting together*. I am still living in Syria, and if there is one شبر [i.e., five fingers width] outside of regime control, I will stay there and I will live in this inch *to be loyal to the people who I once made a promise to*. I will put one foot there and stand with one foot, because both my feet would not fit in that شبر. I am not selling rhetoric. *These are the realities and these are our truths*. (Abdallah, 2021, emphasis added)[11]

One ponders at a world in which staying alive for one’s daughter might be a breach of trust. In the passing of radical subjects, we dust their rhetoric for its teleological tracks, all that is left of them. The dead, the dying and the disappeared unflinchingly rise up and speak. Loss and suffering is made meaningful a posteriori.

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[11] Author’s translation.

Though hope here has been situated as existing among those who share the revolutionary milieu, whether one might rise to the occasion and traverse a hopeful path to the “realities and truths” of the radical subject is where radical rhetoric becomes consequential for solidarity. Belief in radical rhetoric is the key through which we access the hope of radical subjects, produce it within ourselves, and relieve some, if not all, the constraints upon solidarity.

Radical Rhetoric in Exile

Over half of the Syria’s pre-war population is now in exile, with 11 million either internally displaced or beyond the country’s border in the most substantial forced displacement of individuals since World War II (Ignatieff, 2016). In this “Great Syrian Exodus” (Atassi & Homsi, 2014), refugees are viewed in profoundly distortive terms – as noble sufferers, apolitical victims, statistics, or political pawns (Ghazal Aswad, 2019a; Partain, 2019, 2022). This “strategic essentialism” bespeaks an agony rooted in reality, though incurring serious costs for the radical subject. Within the spectacle of suffering and violence, the refugee and the revolutionary are incompatible, if not antithetical, to one another (Ghazal Aswad, 2019a, 2020a, 2020b). This false dichotomy is an impossible one – closing avenues of inquiry and separating us from larger ideological questions tied to the radical subject. The clipped acknowledgment of radical subjects obliterates the more starkly political strata of their history. As a humanitarian stance, it has limited potentiality in enacting solidarity:

> [the] nonpolitical stance is often what makes humanitarianism possible – permitting access to populations in need of aid, convincing countries to sign on to refugee conventions – but it also gives humanitarianism a sometimes cruelly narrow focus, able to keep people alive but entirely incapable of changing the conditions that have put them at such great risk. (Feldman, 2007, p,139)

Perhaps it is telling that my interest in this dissertation originated in the political and media discourses surrounding refugee subjects (Ghazal Aswad & de Velasco, 2020), but with time, shifted toward the *refugee as radical subject*, and from there, the radical subject dominated my analytical perspective. Though some might claim a divisively political approach to the plurality of the radical subject is risky, arguably, a restrictive "humanitarian" approach averts the immediate crisis whilst ignoring how rights are entangled still with the "homeland."[12] In many a case, radical subjects are "refugees, trained in revolution" (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami, 2016). To acknowledge refugees as radical subjects entails the willingness to see with their "inner eyes" (Wynter, 1994), without containing or retreating from their stories. Wafa Mustafa, a refugee in Germany advocating for the release of her father Ali Mustafa (who was forcibly disappeared by the regime in 2013), accentuates the burden this dissociation forms on radical subjects in exile:

> One time, I was invited to an event with the Red Cross. We were preparing for the event, and they let me know what they wanted me to focus on. This happens to me routinely: "Wafa, please focus on the emotional aspect of your separation from your father." Of course, this is part of my life, part of who I am, part of my

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[12] "Homeland" is no doubt a problematic term, but I use it in the dissertation following in the footsteps of Bassel Shehadeh and Abdel Baset al Sarout.

> story. I am not ashamed of it, and I present it with all transparency and strength. But then they ask, “we prefer that you not talk about the political side of things, because it is a humanitarian event.” I know this is bullshit. What should I do? Should I go along with them? … I said no. I apologize. I have no intention of going along with this. My father was detained for political reasons. My father was detained because he had the courage to talk politics in a country in which it is forbidden to talk politics. And so if I go out and talk like you want me to, simply, *I would be committing a crime against my father. And I do not have the ability to do that.* (Mustafa, 2022, emphasis added)

Mustafa’s rhetoric speaks to several truths: the invisible threads knotting the lives of those within the “homeland” and outside of it, as well as the harm to radical subjects when we censor their subjectivities.

The revocation of the refugee status of over 400 Syrian refugees in Denmark after Damascus was declared no longer sufficiently dangerous to provide grounds for international protection serves as a salutary reminder that our thinking about refugees as radical subjects must be more rigorously entertained (Murray, 2021; The Syria Campaign, 2021b). It also brings to the fore questions about whether the refugee is ever able to entirely escape the suppression by, and the struggle against, the authoritarian state. On the 9th anniversary of the revolution, Suhail Al Hammoud, a Free Syrian Army rebel famous for his skill in operating the BGM-71 TOW anti-tank missiles which neutralized military targets (giving him the nickname Abu Tow),[13] congratulated Syrian revolutionaries across the globe, stating: “Every year that passes, may the revolutionaries

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[13] Suhail Hammoud has been the subject of eight assassination attempts, most recently on the 18 March 2020. He continues to fight in Idlib.

in Syria be well. Every year that passes, may the revolutionaries *outside* of Syria be well" (Syria TV, 2020, emphasis added). In this statement is unequivocal resolve that crossing borders does not compromise the revolutionary quality of radical subjects. In this sense, the conceptual potency of radical rhetoric in exile must not be disregarded. Here, radical rhetoric might be viewed as a state of being (less than a theory centered on certain "scapes") which extends to various environments or milieus.

Simultaneously, exile marks the opportunity to demarcate new territories of hope and fresh predicaments to resistance. Revolutionary politics are always and already protean and cannot be molded into a nonnegotiable interpretive scheme. With this in mind, exile may compound the inherently unstable state of being in revolution. A generation of "new affinities, identifications, loyalties, animosities, and hostilities across borders…new subjectivities and identities, new sites of struggle and new scales of identification" form (Isin, 2008, p. 16). Liberatory aspirations take unknown avenues amid the anxieties of prolonged exile and consternation about the degree to which one thinks the thoughts and speaks the words of those in the "homeland."[14] Yassin Al Haj Saleh, just after his exile to Turkey, muses on the disquiet radical subjects face in displacement and the potential for growth in their struggle:

> I don't know exactly what I will do in exile. I have long felt claustrophobic over this term. It seemed more like mockery coming from those who remained in the country. Today, its meaning might change to include our overwhelming

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[14] The refugee Félix Pyat, a revolutionary French political activist and representative of the National and Legislative Assemblies of 1848-1849 envisioned exiles as intrinsically connected to France writing: "we think its thoughts, we speak its words" like a "distant but faithful echo" (quoted in Neudorf, 2021).

> experience, the experience of uprooting, escape and dispersal. And the hope of return. (Atassi & Homsi, 2014)

In the powerful last scene of the documentary *Our Terrible Country*, the migratory dilemma of the desire to stay versus the desire to escape surfaces in a conversation between Free Syrian Army fighter Ziad Homsi and Yassin Al Haj Saleh. Ziad has left his mother, brother, and detained father in Syria, while Yassin has left his wife, Samira Khalil and his brother, Firas Al Haj Saleh. After extricating themselves from mortal danger in their odyssey from Douma to Raqqa to Istanbul, these two men, generations apart, find themselves in a restaurant in Turkey, fighting tears in a poignant moment as they wrestle with the pangs and shame of leaving Syria and leaving their loved ones. While on the road, they had found out that both Ziad's father and Yassin's brother had been arrested by the regime. Yassin (referred to as "doctor" in by Ziad) would not find out until a few days later that his wife had also been kidnapped.[15] Ziad's heart-wrenching soliloquy deserves quotation at length:

> I felt a bit ashamed of myself and worried Yassin would see me and my family differently (i.e., for wanting to leave Syria). I will tell you it honestly, I wanted my family to be safe. To get them out, out of death's way [long pause, wells up] …Damn it, hold on, let me finish…My father, listen, my father was imprisoned for thirteen years and my mother waited for him patiently…I don't want to cry [tears]. She endured it. I was arrested twice and she endured it. My brother Eyad was arrested four times during the revolution, and she endured it. And now he has been arrested again… I told her, "That's enough. I am going to get you out." But

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[15] They were captured by extremists and have not been heard of till today.

> she said she would not leave without me. I told her "okay, I promise to leave with you." When I got back to Raqqa, she said, "Enough, let's carry out our plan and leave together." When she said this…I was shocked because my mother adores my father! How could she want to leave when my father was still in prison? And this conversation happened in front of the doctor (i.e., Yassin). I didn't want to talk about it front of him. It is not that I was embarrassed, but I know what my mother is, and I didn't want her image to fall short in front of him. Do you know why she said that? Just so she could get me out…[tears]…so she said "get us out!" (Atassi & Homsi, 2014, emphasis added)

The existential decision of whether to cross borders prompts emergent forms of subjectivity, evident in the contention between "giving enough," wanting to "go back," and "getting out":

> I want my father back and I want to go back…but, there is something called a will to live. I want to live doctor (i.e., Yassin) and I want you to live. I want my mother to live. I am going to get her out. I am going to get my brother out. I am going to get my father out. Because they can't live inside. People who want to live should get out. Inside, there is death. But doctor, a young man can tolerate being inside, you have given enough, it's enough. Get out. (Atassi & Homsi, 2014, emphasis added)

As can be deciphered from Ziad's address, the radical subject inhabits multiple realities and is torn between several places. "Diasporic lenticularity" is the ability to occupy two spaces, or more, at the same time (Hage, 2021), a concept which speaks to the contradictory diasporic yearnings of the radical subject. This fragmentation might be understood both spatially and temporally as a “flickering between one and the other” (Hage, 2021, p. 186). The radical subject’s affective attachments are negotiated along with the practicalities and material necessities of life as they are now conditioned. With territorial displacement, liberatory struggle may take a seat to the exigencies of the everyday survival in the vicissitudes of the diaspora. And, the radical subject must reconcile the will to persist in their own being.

The fluid landscape of memory-making also prompts a recognition of the complex processes of semiosis for radical subjects in the diaspora. We cannot assume the automaticity of memory retention or its wholesale transmission in exile. When more contingent forms of memory gain relevance, radical rhetoric must accommodate forgetting as its own constitutive force to allow for the creation of new identities and memories. Sometimes, forgetting is a deliberate disengagement from liberatory struggle:

> [it is] not the kind of forgetting when something is just not important enough to remember, so it slips your mind…It is the kind of forgetting that comes from knowing more about what you are trying to become than who you are leaving behind…It is the kind of forgetting you do to recover from trauma, memories to painful or shameful to be of value, so you push them away. (Rowe, 2008, p. xi)

This speaks to the ways those in the diaspora evade the negative inheritance of trauma through assertion of a clean break with the past. For others, such as Wafa Mustafa, her activism in Germany is inextricably entrenched in the anguished and undesirable nature of revolutionary memory:

> I am not saying that all people cannot forget, some people can forget…But, I have reached an impasse in my inability to forget. Even though I want to forget, I

> cannot. My life has become so brutal that, I swear on my father’s life, I pray, “oh God, may I have a car accident and wake up, and find that I have forgotten who I am, and forgot that my father is not here. (Mustafa, 2022)

The consequences of the (in)ability to forget as well as the intentional non-preservation of memory within the lifespan of liberatory struggles is a salient dimension of radical rhetoric worthy of further exploration. Moreover, in the شتات (the exilic condition of being dispersed, strewn and detached), *hope talk*, discussed earlier, will no doubt serve as a critical resource for revolutionary activity across the experiential and symbolic separation of space and time in suturing the décalages which occur among those in the diaspora. Hope talk has the ability to interpellate diasporic subjects and sustain relationships across doctrinal and national lines, counteracting migratory fragmentation through internal cohesion. Younger generations of radical subjects born in the diaspora who did not experience the heady days of public defiance which galvanized their parents will absorb and inherit memories in a myriad of processual and open-ended ways, much as their forebearers did. I advance this here, as the rhetorical power of (post)memory, addressed in Chapter 5, is essential to the conceptualization of radical rhetoric as an intellectual and affective phenomenon inherited via the historied nature of liberatory struggles. Attention to the generational performance of radical rhetoric in exile will be an important next direction for this study. The extent to which novel political discourses are mobilized, retain their autochthonous grassroots character, or are shelved entirely in exile, is a question unravelling as we speak.

Challenges and Future Directions

On Romanticism

In the process of writing this dissertation, sentiments toward the subject of my study did not stay still or become engraved in time. Shortly before he was killed resisting the advance of the regime into the countryside of Hama in 2019, Abdel Baset al Sarout was at the front lines carrying arms against the regime, but was nostalgically recollecting the رونق of the earlier days of the revolution, a word which most closely translates into splendor, brilliance, and purity (al Sarout, 2019). Today, writing on the romanticism and idealism of radical subjects like Bassel Shehadeh and Abdel Baset al Sarout is difficult. For some, revolution has become a phenomenon to be exorcized rather than commemorated. In light of the impasse of international law and the normalization of the regime, a deep cynicism and demoralization has taken over revolutionary Syrians (Ghazal Aswad, 2021a). Several Arab and European countries that previously cut diplomatic ties with the regime are now re-building ties (Sherlock, 2021). Aside from Colonel Anwar Raslan, the head of the Branch 251 detention center and Eyad al-Gharib, a former intelligence officer, who were both found guilty of crimes against humanity, not a single central regime figure has been prosecuted (Otto et al., 2021; The Atlantic Council, 2022).16 The work of healing and closure cannot be realized in the scarred landscape of the "empty talk" (haki fadi) of world leaders, including Obama's feeble "red line." The innumerable times the hopes of Syrians have been raised and dashed has allowed for bitter disillusionment and privately shared ambiguity about what brought us here. This

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[16] Neither al-Gharib nor Raslan were key decision makers in the regime apparatus. Dr. Alaa Mousa, a military doctor in the regime's 251st branch, has also been charged with crimes against humanity at the Higher Regional Court in Frankfurt, Germany.

has constrained the ability to celebrate the achievements the revolution, with a general disenchantment that is occasionally mired in overtones which mirror the West's erasure of the revolution. For instance, among some, '"nothing ruined our revolution except the Islamists," but then in the next sentence, "this is my revolution until I die."17

Conversations also gravitate toward جلد الذات [i.e., self-mutilation or whipping of oneself for one's mistakes] in a tendency to direct blame as much at oneself as against the oppressor. Ziad Homsi, a Free Syrian Army fighter and photojournalist who was captured by Daesh in Raqqa, questions: "when I was held by Daesh, I started thinking, is it possible that lot came because of us?...It cuts deep to think that they are one of the consequences of the revolution" (Atassi & Homsi, 2014). Later, Homsi decided to no longer bear arms amid uncertainty about what he was fighting for:

> I feared that I had taken up arms, not to bring down the regime, nor to bring down Bashar the criminal, nor even to protect myself. I feared, here I am talking about myself, that I was carrying weapons for a political project which I would not agree with completely. I won't take up arms for a political project. The revolution is bigger than that…I take up arms for an idea. In all probability, I might take up arms again, I don't know, but this idea is being lost now. (Atassi & Homsi, 2014)

In the urgency to make sense of the trajectory of the revolution thus far has been the magnification of failures and a construction of hopelessness which threatens to eradicate the revolutionary dream.

At the same time, radical rhetoric does not idolize the radical subject as above reproach, nor circumvents internal critiques of revolution, all of which have their place, but attempts to fully acknowledge those who have braved the storm. Revolutions undeniably mark seismic moments in the brazen acknowledgement of the "storm

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[17] From a conversation in the presence of the author. The temporal shuttling of these discourses also speaks to the public performance of narrative in formal settings as compared to less guarded conversations with comrades.

brewing” – the Zapatistas’ way of describing the catastrophe we all feel, an unhidden awakening to abusive matrixes of power of the storm. With this in mind, the empirical thrust of this dissertation revolves around liminal grassroots subjects as they have experienced and explicated their struggle in a phenomenological sense.

While recognizing the progressiveness of revolution on many fronts, this does not preclude an acknowledgement of paradoxes within struggle. There are a multitude of struggles within the greater struggle. Moreover, embracing the ideological idealism of revolution and its radical subjects does not negate that there are those who abuse revolution for their own ends. Of note for instance, the official and political representation of the Syrian opposition (self-titled as the نخب – [i.e., elite shadow or exile government) are separate from the “internal” radical subject, with the former having been increasingly compromised by political interests and agendas of foreign donors.[18] Nevertheless, “accentuating the greyness must not lead straight toward a path of moral ambiguity; it must not lead to a blindness toward the victim” (Bouris, 2007, p. 115). As Syrian filmmaker Mohammad Ali Atassi tactfully puts it, there is an obligation to critique but not to “put a knife in (the) back” (Bello, 2015).

Scholarly Positionality

Another limitation which comes about not by design, but of necessity, is my scholarly positionality. As explicated in Chapter 5, I have not been an “objective” observer of the revolution. I do not say this to foreground a rhetoric of authenticity or moral edification, or as an indexical maneuver to suggest that “I” speaks for the “we,” but to reiterate my scholarly positionality which unapologetically influences my method. Matthew Shaer, a western journalist who covered the Syrian revolution, reflects on his "objectivity" in comparison to that of the parrhesiatic practice of Ziad Homsi and other radical subjects and their flanking of danger:

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[18] The Syrian-Palestinian writer Salama Kaileh’s differentiates between the “interior opposition” (the popular resistance of newcomers and youth) versus the “outside opposition” (the political representation of the revolution which is its “talking front” (jehat hewar) on the world stage) (Kaileh, 2016, p. 73).

> I entered each interview with the perspective of a western journalist who has been taught to prize absolute objectivity. I listened to citizen journalists…describe carrying both cameras and side-arms; I heard them say they had helped picked out enemy sniper posts with their zoom lenses; I asked one if he considered himself to be an unbiased journalist, and received the following reply: "Yes, but for the side of the revolution." It was easy to smirk at this. It was easy to forget that while I had elected to write about the conflict in Syria, these journalists felt no such choice… There are debates about biases and standards, and then there is the fear that your job will get you killed, and you do your job anyway, because you can't not. (Shaer, 2013)

Though my positionality diverges from that of the radical subject, the intimacy of my scholarly positionality might to some entail "a failing of rigor, honesty or energy…an intemperate and even unseemly polemicism" (Said, 1983, p. 28). To those critics I say, the objectivity of the scholar, indeed of the "unprejudiced mind" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 46), has always been a mythical illusion. Each scholar, even the white male scholar who operates under "neutrality" and "objectivity," has "value orientations" which influences their scholarship (Said, 1981a, p. 142). Oftentimes, the scholar claims an Archmidean perspective, though the self lingers at the center instead of one object among many, “polemiciz(ing) on behalf of our own version of the good, the true, and the beautiful” (Haskell, 1990, p. 130).

I take the opportunity here to call out those who claim to extend solidarity from the pedestal of the scholar, while retaining the right to “judge, to be surprised, angry, even repelled” (Wedeen, 2019, p. xi). Syrian scholar Rahaf Aldoughli confronts the aloofness of this “formless and decontextualized solidarity” (Aldoughli, 2020a). Such scholarship, under the guise of being “free” and unincumbered sets out to give voice yet snatches it as quickly it is given. Perfunctory nods to the “situatedness” of knowledge in such scholarship urges greater “hauntedness” on the ethos of its solidarity and the ways in which it is complicit in restabilizing power dynamics (Hanchey, 2022).

Admittedly, this hauntedness is a formidable task – it behests scholars, journalists, activists, chroniclers, and international solidarity groups to transcend themselves and their “epistemic fortress” as they attend to the vestiges of meaning collected in the wake of Others. This dilemma is the “aporia of solidarity”: “the question is, how are we to struggle for a desire to exist and to be free, when this desire is not exactly “ours,” in fact can never be exclusively “ours”?” (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 184). Locating when and how to rhetorically be in solidarity in situations of revolutionary rupture is never entirely predictable or perfectible. In the era of fake news and conspiracy theories, it is a tall order to sift through all the “lies, half-lies, half-truths, and alternative facts” which mark our post-truth era (Mejia et al., 2018, p. 3).

Radical rhetoric therefore demands conceptual effort and hard labor in discerning the flux of forces which make us impervious to certain struggles and subjectivities. To become a believer, to practice radical rhetoric, one must “open [their] inner vision” with “concentrate[ion]” and “direct[ion]” (Al-Ghazali, 2020). Conscious striving is arduous entirely because of the notion of space, culture or ideology – i.e., we have unequal access to the radical subject. By this, I mean the “environment, process, and hegemony in which individuals and their work are embedded, as well as overseen at the top by a superstructure and at the base by a whole series of methodological attitudes” (Said, 1983, p. 8). Hence is the problem of locating the radical subject in unfamiliar territory: we must stay on the lookout for those whom we instinctively think of as different. We do not all belong to these historical moments of liberatory struggle: solidarity is rarely achieved by the recognition of something antecedently shared by “us.” Radical rhetoric requires a degree of self-doubt toward one’s knowingness, the ability to access the totality of knowledge, and the affective estrangement of distance and privileged existence, as a knowing practice “*to* the other…*by* the other” (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 94).

On the Macro-Politics of Resistance and Domination

A limitation of this dissertation is that I have not explicitly engaged all the structural, economic, and institutional dimensions of the radical subject’s liberatory struggle, nor those that have buttressed state rule, except as has come about through refractions in the text of radical subjects. Though the extensional dimensions of power are not neglected entirely, indeed the dissertation touches on the geo-political grand narratives surrounding the revolution, this has only been addressed in a limited capacity through refractions from the perspective of radical subjects. Admittedly, this dissertation is not exhaustive in its analysis of the rhetoric of radical subjects, which are far too plentiful and potent to be explored in just one study.

Though I do not disregard this critique, I contend that radical rhetoric as a practice makes starkly visible the bio-political apparatuses employed by state and non-state actors in a manner most meaningful to those wishing to be in solidarity. The ontology of the radical subject encapsulates within it a multitude of macro-political, structural, and historical contexts, events and circumstances. Indeed, radical subjects allude directly to them. By situating analysis through the lens of the radical subject, even a single anecdote provides a cross-section of the macro-politics of power and transgenerational resistance.

New Territories for Radical Rhetoric

Finally, despite the broadness of the tenets of radical rhetoric, this dissertation centers Syria as a limit case, or a litmus test in the theoretical sense. The writing has been tied to the "radical constellations of thought and life visions" of Syrians as a lived and material context of struggle (to borrow the words of Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 51). In this moment of rupture in the dominant order, we are privy to specific ways of thinking, sensing, making and doing which arise from the Syrian liberatory struggle. The "ethnographies of the particular" (Abu Lughod, 1991, p. 158) which color every page risk relegating radical rhetoric to the jurisdiction of ethnographic locality, as a theory "contaminated" by historical and political particulars (Weheliye, 2014, p. 7) and articulated as a result of and in relation to certain events.

Struggles against capitalism, fascism, patriarchy, and the colonial are unified by the demand for human dignity. The universal nature of the quest to end one's precarity renders imperative the theoretical recourse to paradigms such as radical rhetoric. The innovative impulse of theoretical reflection formulated from the particulars of struggle and exclusion are no less transposable to a variety of spatio-temporal contexts than that which does not operate from explicitly intersectional contexts. Such theories are not to be ensconced to liminal or exceptional spaces, though they operate most obviously in highly policed spaces such as that of the authoritarian state, prison systems, and refugee camps. Though radical rhetoric is presented from the liminal vantage point of Syria, Syria is not an aberration on the world stage. The erasure of local contingencies, from Hong Kong, to Sudan, to Yemen, to Mexico, to China, to Egypt, and beyond speaks to the conditions of life that move similarly for oppressed peoples across the world.

The possibilities of radical rhetoric are endless and open up consideration of the radical subject's potential to create otherwise worlds. *How might radical rhetoric in the Syrian case inform encounters with other liberation struggles? How might we demarcate new territories for radical rhetoric? How is the affective investment in liberatory struggle tied to presence within the "homeland" and how it is affected by migration?* These questions all demand investigation, but for the time being, let us rest in the recognition of those brave souls, the radical subjects of this dissertation, who risked their lives to lift veils of exception. Their struggles cannot be circumscribed either to the particular or the universal, as they are far greater than both.

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Appendix

Letter from Syrian revolutionaries to the Sheikh Jarrah Neighbourhood

To the steadfast men and women in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and all the neighborhoods of occupied Jerusalem.

For days, we have been following closely and with great anticipation what is happening in Jerusalem, watching your struggle, sharing your voice, and feeling for you. Borders kill us and our diaspora kills us, as they stand in the way of our actual presence with you. That is why we are writing to you, and sending you this message, in the hope that it will convey the slightest hint of the feelings of pain, anger and burning that rage in our hearts because of your great suffering and pain.

In your revolution we saw our revolution, and in your steadfastness our steadfastness, and in your displacement our displacement. And because we really know the meaning of displacement, which we experienced at the hands of the Bashar al-Assad regime, we know like you the meaning of the oppression and detention that we faced at the hands of the Assad regime, as you faced them at the hands of Israel.

we, as an oppressed people, share with you this just battle with all its moral, human and existential dimensions against Israel and against the normalization regimes.

And we, as an oppressed people, share with you this just battle with all its moral, human and existential dimensions against Israel and against the normalization regimes.

In your liberation from the occupation we see our liberation from tyranny, and in your chants we hear the chants of our martyrs, and in “Paradise Paradise” we remember our voices and our revolution, and in your resistance and steadfastness we hope and supply us to continue the path.

Greetings to you and you from the revolution of freedom and dignity.

The undersigned and the undersigned, Sons and Daughters of Syria