TO/FOR SYRIALISM:

Translating a Syrialist Lexicon of Living through Martial Violence

THESIS

submitted at the Graduate Institute in fulfillment of the requirements of the PhD degree in International Relations

ASEES G. PURI

Thesis No. 1563

Geneva
2025

THE GRADUATE INSTITUTE GENEVA

INSTITUT DE HAUTES ÉTUDES INTERNATIONALES ET DU DÉVELOPPEMENT

GRADUATE INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

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Sur le préavis de Elisabeth PRÜGL, professeure à l'Institut et co-directrice de thèse, de Jonathan AUSTIN, Associate Professor, International Relations, University of Copenhagen, Thesis Co-Supervisor, de Michelle WEITZEL, professeure assistante à l'Institut et membre interne du jury, et de Laura SJOBERG, Professor, Politics, International Relations and Philosophy, Royal Holloway, University of London, UK et experte externe, la directrice de l'Institut de hautes études internationales et du développement autorise l'impression de la présente thèse sans exprimer par là d'opinion sur son contenu.

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Genève, le 18 mars 2025

Marie-Laure Salles
Directrice

Thèse N° 1563

بلاه زح.



Figure: 1- Damascus 15/02/2012 19:47:31, by Khaled Barakeh
(Barakeh, Khaled. Damascus 15/02/2012 19:47:31. Photograph. Website. 2013.)

Artist's Caption: "The title is the digital timestamp from a photo uploaded to Facebook at the height of the revolution in Syria. The photo portrayed a man laying on his side, displaying a back full of fresh wounds and scars – the result of a brutal police interrogation after being arrested from a peaceful demonstration in Damascus. ***His wounds, translated into print, are the only remaining information from this scene.*** They form a collection of black gestural marks, an expression of violence that could almost be an abstract painting. In each print in the series of five, the wounds recede from the viewer. Now analogous to brushstrokes, they become less and less opaque, eventually disappearing.
Author's Engagement: "Syrialy Sensing, Making Sensing of, Translating, and Reimagining the lived experience of Martial Violence by Mangled Bodies.

Or, ***How the *insert-profanity-of-choice* can we translate war-experience into war-knowledge, i.e., what kind of war-knowledge can we generate if we begin our war-stories from within such articulations – ones like this installation from Mr. Barakeh – of embodied experiences of the martial?"***



To/ For Syrialism:
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ABSTRACT

What does war *feel* like? What does martial violence *do* to a person's senses and sensibilities? How does it practically perform actual *injury* on human bodies, within which socio-political landscapes, through which materialities and technologies, amid which processes? **How do these mangled bodies, themselves, sense and make sense of this injury?** How do they give expression to this war-experience: to living through – and with – wounding, stench-retching, marching, pliers, thumbscrews, spit hoods, prison cells, boats with starboard seats reserved for corpses, bombed-out neighbourhoods, mushroom farming in tunnel-playgrounds… to experiencing violence with such brutal intimacy across every mode of being (be it corporeal, sensory, aesthetic, affective, material, semiotic, social, and/or spacio-temporal)? **And what can we learn about war, i.e., what kind of war-knowledges can we generate, if we begin our war-stories from within these articulations of embodied experiences of the martial?** These are the questions that drive this text.

To grapple with them, I propose an experiment in "empirical philosophy" (Mol, 2010) across two stages. First, we – Omar Imam, Khaled Barakeh, Ayham Jabr, Sulafa Hijazi, Malu Halasa and Zaher Omareen, Syrian artists and critics whose martial experiences, works, ideas, positionalities, and worldings are the very substratum of this manuscript and I – show you what actively 'living' and 'being' in violence feels like, collaging and naming as many dimensions of this embodied experience as we could. **In/ From/ Through/ With this (first) moment of translation, of translating lived Syrial 'war-experience' into a grounded Syrial 'war-knowledge',** we see that a given instantiation of martial violence can (potentially) be intimately, flesh-ly, sense-ly, experienced as being **(I) processual, (II) embodied, (III) multiple, (IV) plural and (V) partially connected**, constantly but not consistently, to other violent worldings, i.e., **martial violence can be experienced as Surreal**. Or rather, in this case, as **Syrial**.

Second, to test the hypothesis that this Syriality can be operationalized as an "*ethico-onto-epistem-ology*" (Barad, 2007) that could (potentially) allow us

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to generate a form of war-knowledge that can capture the (i) *complex processuality of "war's incessant becoming"* (Bousquet et al., 2020) & (ii) "pull the *bodies and experiences of war* out of the entombments created by (IR) theories… into the open as crucial elements of war" (Sylvester, 2012) by bringing focus to (iii) the actual machinations of the *"enactment of injury" – "war's primary task"* (Scarry, 1987) – and it's (iv) **lived experience**, I invite you to witness the *'on-life'* (Della Ratta, 2018) of Khaled al-Assad's beheading in Palmyra-Tadmur, and globally, with me.

I map how this beheading can be (a) Syrialy sensed and made sensible teasing out the granular details of the *'doing'* of injury here, (b) of the martial politics this beheading is Syrialy entangled with, (c) of how it Syrialy affects our socio-political worldings, and (d) trace hiccupped Syrial "*refrains*" (Deleuze, 1994) of these sensibilities, aesthetics, politics, affects and other entanglements – *of this beheading's Syrial rhythms* – across both, the "*small world*" (Austin, 2017) of beheadings at large, and through other violent worlds. **In/ From /Through /With this (second) moment of translation, of translating grounded Syrial war-knowledge into Syrial war-knowledge about beheadings, I learn that "critically reimagining"** (Mhurchú & Shindo, 2016) **a martial violence through Syrialism – i.e., writing about different martial violences by Syrialy reimagining them from within 'injury' – makes room for us to tell "a different kind of war-story"** (Nordstrom, 1997) than the ones that came before it: **an affective kind.** It crafts a possibility for us to sense/make sensible the different affective politics that occupy our "pluriverse" (Blaney & Tickner, 2017), martially or otherwise, rhizomatic-ly participating in the emergence of seemingly unentangled violent worlds and instantiations. **In the case of Khaled al-Assad's beheading this takes the shape of a war-story about *an affective politics of "ruination"*** (Stoler, 2008).

And because this is an experiment, I fail. A lot, and often. I try to make sense of the 'meaning-less-ness' of political violence. And fail, succeeding only in making it sensible. Barely. I try to make it sensible by working from within the intimacies of self-declaration: of working from within my interlocutors' own works, words, and experiences and mine. And fail, succeeding only in translating fragmented articulations of these embodied experiences. I try to make it sensible by designing this text to mimic the cadence of this Syrial experience of violence without conceding ethical ground. And fail, succeeding only in vaguely

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reproducing the overwhelming affect of a reality "twisted" (Hirsch, 2014) through violence's world-"unmaking" (Scarry, 1987) and 'remaking' rhythms. Again, barely. And in trying to make the very moments of *surviving* such injuries sensible, and to make sense of them, from within the survivors' own worldings– my way of honouring them by "staying with the trouble" (Haraway, 2016) of taking them 'seriously' – I fail, unwittingly but irrefutably, at not leaving any room to truly honour their *resilience*, succeeding only in letting the concluding pages of this text stand in solidarity with them there. Barely.

So, when I encounter these failings in the manuscript, I "name them and sit with them" (Lopes et al., 2021), wrestle with them, and chart alternative pathways that could have led elsewhere, and/but (more importantly perhaps) through it all, keep trying to make space "for more (/other Syrial) stories" (ibid).

Because that is the sole desire of this text: **"speculation"** (Lisle, 2021). This dissertation, my interlocutors' works and lived experiences, our collaborative concept-work, the story itself, *none of it are in any way, shape or form an 'explanation'* for/ of martial violence, or beheadings, *or a 'theory'* about 'embodied experience' of the 'martial', *or a thesis* on 'political violence' in Syria, *or a manual* for conducting Syrial research, *or an example* of working with/ through violence's relational ontologies.

This text is a description. It is a performance. It is a translation of an anthology of epistolary stories, journal entries, (un)reliable narrations. An exercise in critical re-imagination and world-building. All it asks is that you float through it – surrender a little to the current of its aesthetics – and allow it to take you to places where you can affectively experience what the injured bodies living within these pages have to say. "Rip, Cut and Stitch" (Choi et al., 2023) this war-story through your own injured bodies and their drives, as you read it, making sense of it all, as you see fit. Just buy into our Syrialism – my interlocutors', our injured bodies', and mine – for a first encounter and if, and/or when, something resonates with you, take a piece of our injuries, our war-stories, and our Syrial sensibilities, with you.

Allow this text to be a portal to 'experiencing' martial violence, intimately, as a "dimension of living" (Nordstrom & Robben, 1995).

À / Pour Syrialism :

Traduire un lexique syrialiste de la vie par la violence martiale

Que ressent-on en cas de guerre ? Quels sont les effets de la violence martiale sur les sens et les sensibilités d'une personne ? Comment blesse-t-elle concrètement les corps humains, dans quels paysages sociopolitiques, à travers quelles matérialités et technologies, au cours de quels processus ? Comment ces corps mutilés ressentent-ils et donnent-ils un sens à cette blessure ? Comment expriment-ils cette expérience de la guerre : vivre à travers - et avec - les blessures, la puanteur, les marches, les pinces, les poucettes, les cagoules à crachat, les cellules de prison, les bateaux dont les sièges à tribord sont réservés aux cadavres, les quartiers bombardés, la culture de champignons dans les terrains de jeu des tunnels... vivre la violence avec une intimité aussi brutale à travers tous les modes d'existence (qu'ils soient corporels, sensoriels, esthétiques, affectifs, matériels, sémiotiques, sociaux et/ou spatio-temporels) ? Et que pouvons-nous apprendre sur la guerre, c'est-à-dire quel type de connaissances sur la guerre pouvons-nous générer, si nous commençons nos récits de guerre à partir de ces articulations d'expériences martiales incarnées ? Telles sont les questions qui motivent ce texte.

Pour les aborder, je propose une expérience de « philosophie empirique » (Mol, 2010) en deux étapes. Tout d'abord, nous - Omar Imam, Khaled Barakeh, Ayham Jabr, Sulafa Hijazi, Malu Halasa et Zaher Omareen, artistes et critiques syriens dont les expériences martiales, les œuvres, les idées, les positionnements et les mondes sont le substrat même de ce manuscrit et de moi-même - vous montrons à quoi ressemble le fait de « vivre “ et d” » être « activement dans la violence, en collationnant et en nommant autant de dimensions de cette expérience incarnée que nous le pouvions. Dans/de/à travers/avec ce (premier) moment de traduction, de traduction de l'« expérience de guerre » syrienne vécue en un « savoir de guerre » syrien fondé, nous voyons qu'une instanciation donnée de la violence martiale peut (potentiellement) être intimement, charnellement, sensoriellement, expérimentée comme étant (I) processuelle, (II) incarnée, (III) multiple, (IV) plurielle et (V) partiellement connectée, constamment mais en même temps, en même temps, en même temps, en même temps, en même temps, en même temps, en même temps, en même temps, en même temps, en même temps, en même temps, en même temps (V) partiellement connectée, constamment mais pas systématiquement, à d'autres mondes violents, c'est-à-dire que la violence martiale peut être vécue comme surréaliste. Ou plutôt, dans ce cas, comme Syrial.

Deuxièmement, tester l'hypothèse selon laquelle cette syrialité peut être opérationnalisée en tant que une « éthico-onto-épistém-ologie “ (Barad, 2007) qui pourrait (potentiellement) nous permettre de générer une forme de connaissance de la guerre qui peut capturer (i) la processualité complexe du ” devenir incessant de la guerre » (Bousquet et al., 2020) et (ii) « sortir les corps et les expériences de la guerre de l'enfermement créé par les théories (des RI)... en tant qu'éléments cruciaux de la guerre « (Sylvester, 2012) en mettant l'accent sur (iii) les machinations réelles de la “ mise en œuvre des blessures ” - “ la tâche principale de la guerre ” (Scarry, 1987) - et son (iv) expérience vécue, je vous invite à assister avec moi à la décapitation de Khaled al-Assad à Palmyre-Tadmur, et dans le monde entier, “ on-life ” (Della Ratta, 2018).

Je montre comment cette décapitation peut être (a) ressentie et rendue sensible de manière syrielle, en dégageant les détails granulaires de l'acte de blesser ici, (b) de la politique martiale avec laquelle cette décapitation est enchevêtrée de manière syrielle, (c) de la manière dont elle affecte de manière syrielle nos mondes socio-politiques, et (d) tracer les « refrains “ syriens hoquetés (Deleuze, 1994) de ces sensibilités, esthétiques, politiques, affects et autres enchevêtrements - des rythmes syriens de cette décapitation - à travers le ” petit monde » (Austin, 2017) des décapitations en général, et à travers d'autres mondes violents. Dans/ De /Avec ce (deuxième) moment de traduction, de traduction de la connaissance de guerre syrienne en connaissance de guerre syrienne sur les décapitations, j'apprends que la « réimagination critique » (Mhurchú & Shindo, 2016) d'une violence martiale par le biais du syrialisme - c'est-à-dire, écrire sur différentes violences martiales en les réimaginant de manière syrielle à partir de la « blessure “ - nous permet de raconter ” un autre type d'histoire de guerre » (Nordstrom, 1997) que celles qui l'ont précédée : un type affectif. Cela nous donne la possibilité de sentir/rendre sensible les différentes politiques affectives qui occupent notre « plurivers » (Blaney & Tickner, 2017), martialement ou autrement, en participant de manière rhizomatique à l'émergence de mondes et d'instanciations violents apparemment sans lien entre eux. Dans le cas de la décapitation de Khaled al-Assad, cela prend la forme d'un récit de guerre sur une politique affective de « ruine » (Stoler, 2008).

Et comme il s'agit d'une expérience, j'échoue. Beaucoup, et souvent. J'essaie de donner un sens à l'absence de sens de la violence politique. Et j'échoue, ne réussissant qu'à la rendre sensée. À peine. J'essaie de le rendre sensible en travaillant à partir des intimités de l'autodéclaration : en travaillant à partir des œuvres, des mots et des expériences de mes interlocuteurs et des miens. Et j'échoue, ne parvenant qu'à traduire des articulations fragmentaires de ces expériences incarnées. J'essaie de rendre cela sensé en concevant ce texte de manière à imiter la cadence de cette expérience syrienne de la violence sans concéder de

terrain éthique. Et j'échoue, ne parvenant qu'à reproduire vaguement l'affect écrasant d'une réalité « tordue “ (Hirsch, 2014) par les rythmes de ” dé-fabrication “ (Scarry, 1987) et de ” refabrication » du monde de la violence. Encore une fois, à peine. Et en essayant de rendre sensibles les moments mêmes de la survie à de telles blessures, et de leur donner un sens, à partir des propres mondes des survivants - ma façon de les honorer en « restant dans la difficulté “ (Haraway, 2016) de les prendre ” au sérieux » - j'échoue, involontairement mais irréfutablement, à ne pas laisser de place pour honorer véritablement leur résilience, réussissant seulement à laisser les dernières pages de ce texte se tenir en solidarité avec eux à cet endroit-là. À peine.

Ainsi, lorsque je rencontre ces lacunes dans le manuscrit, je les « nomme et m'assois avec elles » (Lopes et al., 2021), je lutte avec elles, et je trace des chemins alternatifs qui auraient pu mener ailleurs, et/mais (plus important peut-être) à travers tout cela, je continue d'essayer de faire de la place « pour d'autres (/autres histoires de Syrial) » (ibid.).
Car c'est là le seul désir de ce texte : « la spéculation « (Lisle, 2021). Cette thèse, les travaux et les expériences vécues de mes interlocuteurs, notre travail conceptuel collaboratif, l'histoire elle-même, rien de tout cela n'est en aucune manière une « explication “ de la violence martiale, ou des décapitations, ou une ” théorie “ sur ” l'expérience incarnée “ du ” martial “, ou une thèse sur la ” violence politique » en Syrie, ou un manuel pour mener des recherches sur le Syrial, ou un exemple de travail avec/à travers les ontologies relationnelles de la violence.

Ce texte est une description. C'est une performance. Il s'agit de la traduction d'une anthologie d'histoires épistolaires, d'entrées de journal, de narrations (non) fiables. Un exercice de réimagination critique et de construction d'un monde. Tout ce qu'il vous demande, c'est de flotter à travers lui - de vous abandonner un peu au courant de son esthétique - et de lui permettre de vous emmener là où vous pourrez faire l'expérience affective de ce que les corps blessés qui vivent dans ces pages ont à dire. « Rip, Cut and Stitch » (Choi et al., 2023) cette histoire de guerre à travers vos propres corps blessés et leurs pulsions, au fur et à mesure que vous la lisez, en donnant un sens à tout cela, comme vous l'entendez. Il suffit d'adhérer à notre syrialisme - celui de mes interlocuteurs, de nos corps blessés et le mien - pour une première rencontre et si, et/ou quand, quelque chose résonne en vous, emportez avec vous un morceau de nos blessures, de nos récits de guerre et de nos sensibilités syriennes.

Permettez à ce texte d'être un portail pour « expérimenter » la violence martiale, intimement, comme une « dimension de la vie » (Nordstrom & Robben, 1995).

Mandatory Blank-ness[1]?

[1] Where the *insert-profanity-of-choice* is the French translation of the Abstract/ the Resume?

In the first entry for "Compositional Elements of the Mise-en-scène" (or in Section: 2 of Part-5).

The 'Abstract' for this dissertation is presented in this manuscript not only in English and French (as per regulation) but in the other 7 languages that I harvest ideas from for the full length of the manuscript, as well: Arabic, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Dutch, German and Portuguese.

There are primarily two compositional assumptions/arguments here: first about the role that language itself plays in this manuscript and its relationalities to our desire for a 'Syrial' lexicon and second about the benefits and constraints of translation vis-à-vis this conceptualization of languageverses, both of which have been articulated at length in Compositional Element: 1 (accompanied by said translated entries of this 'Abstract').

Simply put (in assistance of TL;DR moments), presenting the Abstract in this form, is my small way of:

(i) conferring equitable respect to all the language(and therefore life)worlds from which I distillate the ideas crowding the text,

(ii) by working with/along/against the grains of semiotic sedimentations and their (more often than not) tyrannical power over which multiplicities get collapsed into and translated to *the* single 'meaning' when words move across or within languages,

(iii) consequently 'opening-up' the potentialities of the 'Abstract' and every single word therein – retaliating against that precise moment of collapse by making sensible its violent politics – and care-fully, trying, to re-establish/restore/resume focus on its multiplicities and pluralities (becoming attuned to the sensory reverberations of the stories within the story),

(iv) and through it all, practice/ perform a wobbly sort of feminist-decolonial resistance in solidarity with "wayward" (Hartman, 2019) concepts, thoughts, ideas, words, meanings, affects, aesthetics, experiences, worldings and their constantly mutating "figurations" (Haraway, 2004).

i.e., it is a small way of putting into practice, at least some of the aspects of, the very politics of 'translation' that are inscribed into the premise of our experiment. Or what little I can practice of it anyway given that the dissertation is not only written entirely in English (solely) and – ironically and especially – given the violence of only presenting the English version of the Abstract here, in the 'Front Matter', while the others remain present and visible, but not conveniently placed, in the 'Field Notes'.

Mandatory Blank-ness.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

[This dissertation was a life well-lived.

And like all wrung-ly lived lives, it didn't come with sadness or happiness- it came with sorrow, and grief, and delirium and exhilaration. And despite, and because of, the intensity of this ride, I am deeply grateful for all of it.

But, since I have gone ahead, and effectively – unintentionally, but practically – flipped off every single person who invested their time, effort, energy, and care into this project with the disclaimer-pamphlet of a dedication that is to come in the following pages, I will make amends first – here and now – by insisting that these acknowledgements be read, and felt, as well deserved, and hopefully not too badly delivered, toasts. So, raise the glass then of whatever it is that you are drinking while reading this and

let's begin?]

I think all good things come in fours. At least they did for this dissertation. So, to the OG 'Fantastic Four' (Lee & Kirby, 1961), the supervision committee that agreed to supervise this project, thank you. There, quite literally speaking, would not be a manuscript without you.

Prof. Weitzel, thank you for taking a leap of faith in agreeing to be my second anchor at IHEID. Mitchell, I came into the world you had built in that classroom quite jaded, and regardless of how brief the timeframe of that engagement was, I left revitalized. Thank you for creating a space where I could try and remember, again, why I loved research.

Prof. Sjoberg, thank you for being a reality-touchstone and for somehow always magically pulling through, despite the distance (physical & metaphorical), whenever I needed you. Laura, thank you for always being 'real'- just for having the courage, tenacity, and lack-of-self-preservation (I kid) for being absolutely, honestly, yourself, everywhere, all the time. I am constantly in awe you, because of it, each time we meet.

Prof. Prügl, thank you for being home- for both the dissertation and for me. It was a hard-found-and-built home, and I consider myself infinitely fortuitous that it was with you.

Lisa, the dedication for the project may lie elsewhere, but I owe it to you. Thank you for constantly saving me. If it weren't for our 'Theories' course (and like two other classes from completely different departments), that one-leg-out I had the whole first semester (of the MA?!? – what the *insert-profanity-of-choice* is time?!?) would have dragged me away from this path long ago. The same is true for the courses that came after, the doctoral applications, the endless, endless, endless grant applications, and of course, and most importantly, for the day I walked into your office not knowing if I was going to – or even could – have the chance/ opportunity/ misfortune (depends on the day) to wrap this project up. Again, quite literally. You saved this book that day.

Prof. Austin, thank you for being a constant. Without that solid ground, the project wouldn't have made it past halftime.

Jon, thanks for showing up, always, regardless of circumstances. Lisa might have saved this dissertation, but you helped birth it and guided it without giving up on it. Thanks for putting up with our insanity- the project's and mine. And for knowing when and how to encourage it, especially in the formative stages of the manuscript, so it all somehow came out as 'creativity'. You helped raise this dissertation. And writing it saved my life. Again, quite literally. In reciprocity then: To me, regardless of circumstances, you are a part of the 'them' this text is dedicated to.

To the second ‘Fantastic Four’: Alice, Miguel, Pedro and Luisa, thanks for being both, the safety net I desperately needed and my toughest critics. They say surviving the trenches together is a special kind of bonding because you understand how deeply entangled individual existence is with its embedded community. I couldn’t have asked for a more fun, inspiring, and troubled (in the best way possible) group of humans to trauma-bond through this with. Please know that without you, this dissertation would be a shadow-version of itself.

You were my NorthStar.

Or maybe, good things come in threes?

To the first of the ‘Powerpuff Girls’ (McCracken, 1998) then: Eliza, Ximena and Mirko- your imprints on this book and the path it took to get here are undeniable. Thanks for always being game to hold down the fort, one lunch, one conversation and/or one G&T and a time.

And to the second set, the OGs: Rhea, AkashMegh, Himanshu and Tanvi – thanks for being my keepsakes across most of the lives I have lived, and for relentlessly reminding me of – and holding me accountable to – who I am. You are, and always have been, my superheroes. (It still counts even if you spend most of the time saving me from myself!)

And to the third- the parents: To the two Puris: home was never easy for us, but I am so grateful that we are beginning to find our way (back?) to building something real, together; and to my grandparents: thank you for filling my life with more kindness, support, and love than I ever thought was possible.

Now, to the ones who intersected with the project and my academic journey, only very briefly, but encounters with whom left me, and this dissertation, forever transformed: Thomas Gmuer, Franca Elena Kappes, Professor Riccardo Bocco, Professor Anna Leander, Professor Patricia Spyer, Professor Keith Krause, Professor Jairus Grove, Professor Antonine Bousquet, Juliana Santos dos Carvalho, Shambhawai Tripathi, Vic Castro, Professor Christine Sylvester and Professor Naeem Inayatullah,
and especially to (i) Angelo Krueger my hearteningly duty-full copy-editor, (ii) Dr. Harry Cross (for the crisis-watch-tower-duty!) and (ii) to Dr. Ioannis Sergentanis and Cara Perrett (SEP), thank you, all of you, for your guidance, your passion, your pedagogy, your work, your courage, and your solidarity.

And finally, to the three women that hold up my life, the GOAT grouping of the Powerpuff girls, at least as far as the dissertation and I are concerned – Saakhi, Ashmeen and Janine – thank you. Just, thank you. For everything. There will never be words or actions or affects enough for me to thank you. No matter what I say, it will always be just a bland, tame, impression of the debt, gratitude and love, I owe you.

To Saakhi, then, for constantly reminding me that there is so much more to life than the existential dread that consumes my waking hours.

To Ashmeen, thank you for being my home, before I even knew what home really meant.

To Janine, thank you for being family, in the truest sense possible.
The dissertation, my selves, and my lives would all be shattered (and I mean that across all three registers of that word: extremely broken, tired, and upset) without you three.

Mandatory Blank-ness. Again.

Disclaimer:
Translating 'Representations' of (Martial) Violence as a 'Dimension of Living' /
Living through Translations of (Marial) Violence Representations

"Let the atrocious images ***haunt us.***
Even if they are only tokens,
and cannot possibly encompass most of the reality to which they refer,
they still perform a vital function.
The images say: This is what human beings are capable of doing […]
Don't forget.*"*
- Susan Sontag, "Regarding the Pain of Others"
(Sontag, 2003)

This manuscript contains representations of graphic violence, disturbing imagery, intense horror elements and strong language that may not be suitable for all – if any – audiences. Reader discretion is strongly advised.

To be fair, I think, this stands, at the very least partially, true for (almost?) any narrative/ narration of/ about violence. We – as scholars and humans – have spilled more ink, blood, sweat and tears than can be reasonably computed over how-s of 'representing' 'violence': both, how to represent/ capture violence practically and how to represent/ comprehend violence ethically. In doing so, we have collaged together a map of sorts- a *cadavre exquis* of mingling spectrums whose different ranges (for example, explicitly show violent photographs --- show violent photographs with specific, particularly intense elements pixelated/ censored --- do not show violent photographs at all or, talk about a violent act in exacting factual detail --- discuss a violent act in its affective register in tandem with its factual detail --- focus exclusively on the affective register of the violent act, etc.) are mangled together to form a rhizomatic ethico-onto-epistemic landscape. And each of us that are experimenting with writing of/ about/ through violence must find our ways to navigate it, to decide which paths we will take, where we will take our stands, and from which vantage points we want to take in the scenery as a whole.

These are questions about **(i) the weight, agency and affect of such narratives and the narrative hooks they are grounded in, (ii) the weight, agency and affect of the mediums through which these narratives find circulation and the materialities that actualize them,** about **(iii) the intentions with which they are (re)produced and the audiences that they desire to reach,** and about **(iv) what they do – in and to our lifeworlds – once they have been encountered.** These are questions about the politics and ethics of how any given narrative of violence, including this dissertation for example, are 'actually'/ 'specifically'/ 'technically' produced, i.e., questions about **(i) the artefact and its production, (ii) the medium of its display, circulation**

and engagement, (iii) its relationship with different and differing audiences (intended or otherwise), and **(iv) its interpretations and (re-)presentations.**

So, before we begin, I would like to give you a fair and clear warning about what the type of violence-narrative that unfolds in the following pages, especially in regards to the visual artefacts presented here (given that they form the very substratum for this dissertation).

'To show or not to show' – as I will discuss in more detail in the chapter, *'An Invitation to (a) Beheading'* – is one of the most basic, and most complex, questions when it comes to images of violence or "photographs of war". These are photographs/ images/ paintings/ visuals that show "mangled bodies of adults and children. They show how war evacuates, shatters, breaks apart, levels the built world." These are photographs that scream, "This is what war does… War tears, rends. War rips open, eviscerates. War scorches. War dismembers. War ruins. (Sontag, 2002)". And this manuscript is flooded with them. It is built on them. As such, consciously and conscientiously choosing whether to explicitly 'show' these visual artefacts to you i.e., reproduce them in the following pages, was the first ethical dilemma I had to grapple with.

Think with Woolf, and me, here for a second: what do "photographs of war" (ibid) really do? Like it did with me, and like it will with us in the next few-ish pages, Woolf's engagement with this question, as she recalls in her essay, *"The Three Guineas"*, began with a single photograph: a bombed-out house, a mangled street, the rubble of what was once was a life and a 'simple' request that came in the form of a letter from a "respected gentleman" asking: How can we prevent war? (Woolf, 1966) Now Woolf's answer (or rather her response which didn't quite entail a direct answer to this question) though extremely interesting and poignant being beautifully structured around three symbolic guineas, each tied to a different institution that she argues maintains the social order that enables war, isn't directly relevant for us vis-à-vis the outline of this 'disclaimer', one of the primary theme it grapples with is: the relationship between these "spectacle of suffering" and the act of witnessing.

Particularly, Woolf's encounter with this photograph and the request that accompanied it, first and foremost, makes her immediately question the sender's intentions/ motivations. She argues that the implicit assumption that the gentleman in question is working with, when he asks his audience – in this case, Woolf – to see such photographs that detail the raw destructions of war, is that the very act of seeing these photographs, the very act of witnessing (albeit mediated-ly) the ravages of war, will universally, for all audiences always, inspire active revulsion and revolt; i.e. it will inspire the viewer to opt for/ argue for/ fight for peace. But, she warns, "The photograph is not an argument" (ibid). It is 'simply' an image. It has agency. It has affect. It has power. But it's not a mere tool that can 'simply' be

operationalized to produce the direct reductive result of 'seeing = call to action = change'. Circulating these photographs can just as easily be seen as an action complicit in encouraging martial voyeurism or worse(?), encouraging an illusion that 'just' seeing – which, I think is different than witnessing, and I will return to this shortly – is action. After all, isn't that what it really means to be a 'spectator' of war and its violences- to watch them, to have the option to "look away" from them, to consume their injuries and the suffering they produce through these images in bite sized pieces, without ever being truly, intensely, intently touched by their consequences… to feel momentary empathy yet ultimately remain detached, sometimes exhausted even (isn't that compassion fatigue) and complicit, by our own inaction, in a system that continues to ceaselessly re-produce war. A photograph, for Woolf, by itself, cannot re-write our most common/ typical war-story: that in which war itself is inevitable.

This begs the question, why would I choose to show you these images then? Why would I ask you to look or look away? Especially when we bring Sontag into our discussions. The way I understand her work, Sontag further complicates these relationalities that define the ethics of viewing suffering: the tensions between witnessing and voyeurism, between remembering and forgetting, in the ways in which these images of injury both illuminate and obscure, confront and anesthetize the lived experience of martial violence and between them catalysing, both, informed action and passive consumption.

In "*Regarding the Pain of Others*" (and "*Looking at War*" & "*On Photography*" *(Sontag, 2002, 2021)*), for example, Sontag begins with a historicization of the 'images of suffering'. She begins from a collection of photographs instead of just the one, to remind us that there is a long visual tradition of finding re-presentations/ representations of/for/through war be it through paintings, medieval depictions of martyrdom, diagrams and sketches, and so on, and that photographs, in particular, build on this lexicon of the martial that is operationalized to instruct, to moralize, to assert power… to shape our social. It is 'simply' that with photography — and later, television, and given the parameters of this dissertation with, the internet — the scales changed. Images of war, its violences and atrocities, circulate widely and instantly. They penetrate our homes, our consciousness, our collective memory at an alarming rate, with overwhelming precision, and expand the grounds that the specter of the martial can haunt. And through this historicization, building from and away from it, she argues that **(i) the ethical weight of producing a visual artefact resides primarily in 'framing',** i.e. in the contextualization of the photograph, in what it renders sense-able, in what it chooses to obfuscate, in what its captions draw our attention to, in what the photograph intends for us to see, in who controls the lens, in the institutional apparatuses in which it is embedded and which decide which bodies and which sufferings are made visible, which bodies are, consequently, allowed to be mourned, (ii) **that (in agreement with**

Woolf) these 'images of suffering' generate complex differing affects in/ for their audiences, i.e. "opposing responses, be it empathy or a call to action ("A call for peace. A cry for revenge.") **or compassion fatigue,** and that (iii) **the audience, the social collective at large, can "become habituated to the depiction of atrocity…. (people) also become habituated to horror, to moral outrage, to pity, to pain itself"** (Sontag, 2003).

And that, for me and for this dissertation I think, is the second most basic, and most complex, ethical question: if we do show, how do we show images of war and its injuries, of the sufferings it (re)produces, without aestheticizing them to the point where the pain it speaks of/ for becomes more an object for contemplation than a catalyst for outrage?

Think here, for example, with Reinhardt. For Reinhardt, there is no movement outside of aesthetics, outside of representational/ represented worldings, and so the question is never 'if' violence and its injuries should be represented and seen, but rather 'how' and with which implications/ consequences, i.e. with/for/through which affects. His argument is deceptively simple: **To represent is to aestheticize. To aestheticize is to transform. But really what happens when the subject being transformed is 'suffering' or 'injury'?** When we access/ experience violence through an image, when the raw brutalizations of the martial are aesthetically framed? What do we gain – and lose – from making war and its violences sense-able? And how do we tackle **the central "anxiety"** (as he outlines in *Picturing Violence: Aesthetics and the Anxiety of Critique (Reinhardt, 2007)*) that drives this visual lexicon: **the fear that though we desire to render violence sense-able we will 'simply' end up rendering pain digestible/ palatable/ consume-able,** i.e. the fear that these 'images of suffering' will become 'only' art-efacts and not also evidence? He too maps histories of painting and photography, through images of war and genocide, or rather, maps the histories of images of the martial through those of painting & photography, but for him the primary concern in/ of these retellings is whether 'beauty' in the representation of atrocity, i.e. in the depiction of horror, is a betrayal of sorts to the actualities of its pain-full-ness or is it a form/ method of witnessing itself. A photograph of a mutilated body, for him and I agree, does not automatically demand compassion, nor does it necessarily turn pain into spectacle. These photographs are not 'always' 'only' anything: they do no 'always' 'only' flatten suffering or act as calls to action; their contextualization matters (as Sontag would echo). And with these concerns, the considerations about the politics and ethics of the 'how-to-show's, here, comes down to one question: does rendering/ transforming/ aestheticizing an instance of violence always and necessarily make it only 'digestible'/ 'consumable' (like we discussed earlier) or can it create an opening, a space, a worlding where the actual weight of martial violence and its injuring becomes not just sense-able, but nauseatingly unbearable? i.e., Can

the aestheticization of the martial, at least potentially, make its violences not only sense-able but also contribute/ participate in the (co-)production of specific narratives/ worldings/ stories through which the martial can be made sense of, and in particular, stories that make sense-able to actual 'cost' of war such that can only be made sense of as atrociously unjustifiable.

Honestly, I have no *insert-profanity-of-choice* clue about where to begin with either of those questions when it comes to this manuscript. I do not have a definite answer, and as I mentioned earlier, I don't think there is one. All I can do is help you roughly gauge where I stand on those/ these spectrums – reminding you that this is a tenuous hold at best – by working with/ through visual artefacts, in line with Azoulay, as a "civil contract" and arguing, with Reinhardt, that representing violence (though potential-ly flattening) can (also) potential-ly be a form of care-full witnessing. And that is what I have sought to do throughout this text/ that has been the compass-ing principle behind all visual-artefact-decisions: for us to be, as Behar coined, "vulnerable observers".

For Azoulay, **a photograph** – in particular, but I would argue any visual artefact – **is a "civil contract"**- a fragile/ nervous but agentic/ power-full/ affect-ive agreement between the one who captures the photograph/ the painting (the artist), the one who is captured by the photograph (the subject), and the one who looks at the photograph/ the painting (the audience) (Azoulay, 2005, 2015, 2021). In this understanding/ approach the questions shift from the what-s, which-s and how-s of care-fully and response-ably representing violence, to the what-s, which-s and how-s of care-fully and response-ably witnessing it, i.e. from (re)production of violence-representations to their consumption. And that brings us to the third, most basic, and most complex, ethical question: how do/ how should we look at violence and its injuries? What do we owe to those we see- both, to those whose suffering bodies we are looking at and those who made sense-able their suffering? What would it mean to care-fully and response-ably see/ sense and make sense of martial violence, i.e., to truly 'witness' it, instead of just looking at it?

Her argument is grounded in the notion that photography is a civil space where the gaze, agency and therefore the rights of the photographed are not erased by the act of being captured and seen but rather "the photographed person's gaze seriously undermines the perception that practices of photography and watching photographs taken in disastrous conditions can be described and conceptualized as separate from the witnessed situation." This effectively means that, in Azoulay's worlding, a photographic space is not dominated by either the absolution of the photographer's gaze and framing, nor is it shaped exclusively by the consumption practices of passive witnessing. Instead, it is a collage – a shared political world – in which the subject of the photograph can also find room for political representation

and participation. For those who have been denied recognition and/or been systematically oppressed, for example (she mentions stateless populations, refugees, victims/ survivors of occupation), a photograph becomes a space for self-determination and through this move, of understanding a photograph – or any visual artefact – as a "civil contract", seeing such images becomes a civil task/ act/ practice 'not only' an aesthetic one. Here, the onus of resisting indifference – be it through compassion fatigue or aesthetic distancing – does not rest solely on the producers, but is shared with the consumers as well, because if the act of looking if carried out care-fully and response-ably, with true appreciation of/for its political potentialities, it becomes an act of solidarity… an act of compassionate witnessing that fundamentally refuses to let suffering be consumed by the abstractions of representation.

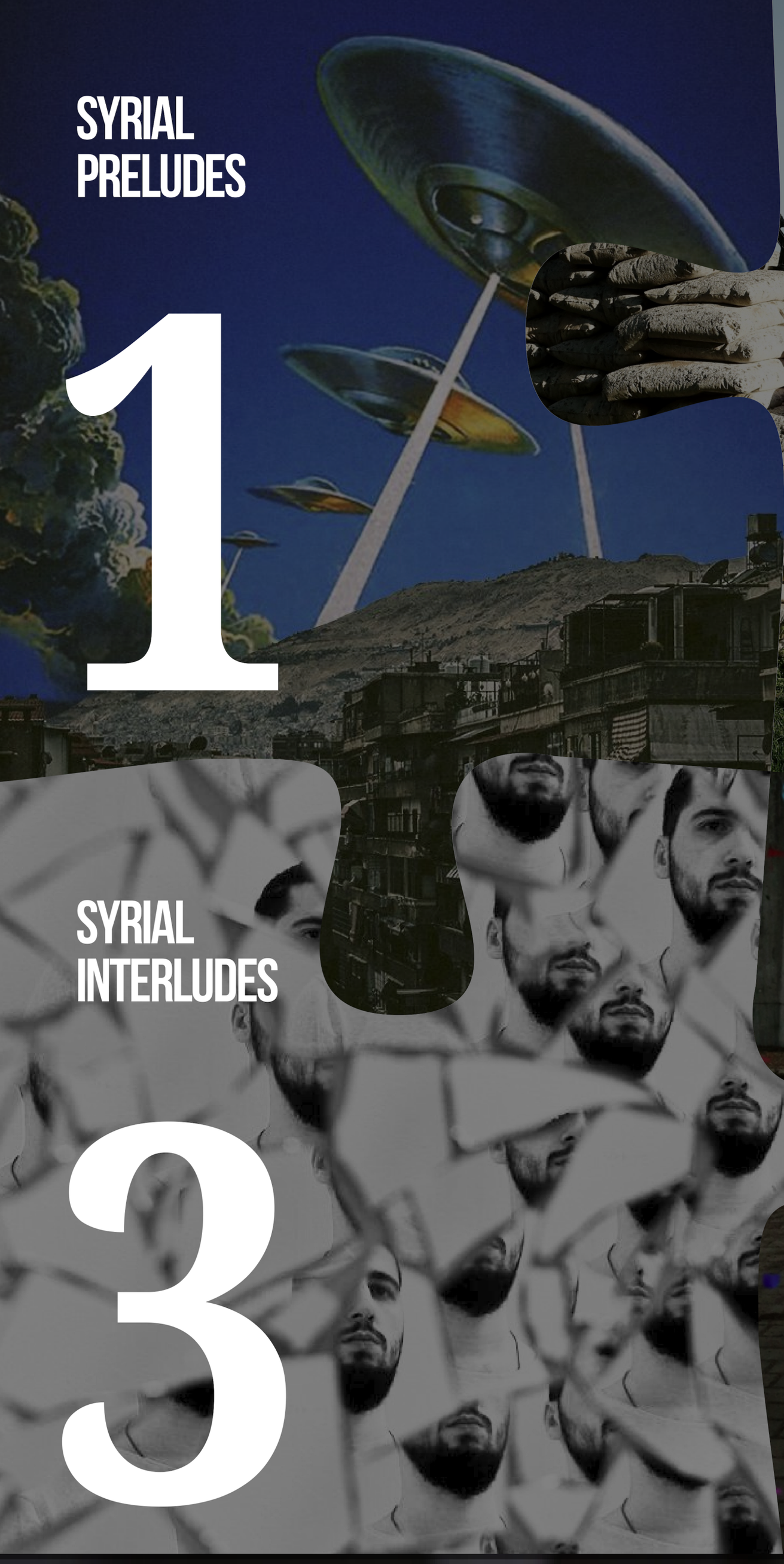
The question, then, becomes how do we witness with care? For me, at least as far as this dissertation is concerned, the answer lies with Behar's figuration of a "vulnerable observer" (Behar, 2022). Behar's "*The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks your Heart*" begins with her re-telling of one of Allende's short stories, "*Of Clay We are Created*", (Allende, 2015) which brings us to the death of Omaira Sánchez, a young Colombian girl trapped in the mudslide of 1985. The figure that haunts Behar, in/from this story, is that of Rolf Carlé, a journalist who, at least at first, diligently documents the tragedy but as the story – and the suffering unravels – ultimately chooses to put down his camera to embrace the dying girl. In Rolf Carlé, Behar finds the perfect figuration for/of a "vulnerable observer"- **a witness who actively lives from within the questions of witnessing** – "Do you, the observer, stay behind the lens of the camera, switch on the tape recorder, keep pen in hand? Are there limits—of respect, piety, pathos—that should not be crossed, even to leave a record?" – **and ultimately chooses to collapse the critical distance, or at least reduce it,** (distance which is often necessary for both, erring on the side of caution and the protection of the observed and observer) **between the self and the subject such that is it no longer possible to remain detached from the pain.**

Here, **"loss, mourning, the longing for memory, the desire to enter into the world around you and having no idea how to do it, the fear of observing too coldly or too distractedly or too raggedly… these are the stopping places along the way" to working from within/ through grief, pain, displacement, injury, and the perpetual(?) tensions between belonging and alienation, having abandoned all the pretence – and safety – of objectivity.** And this 'immersion'(Geertz, 1973; Schatz, 2009, 2013; Vrasti, 2008), of course, doesn't erase any of these tensions. **These tensions** – all the ones mentioned above and more so, if we response-ably consider the ethical & political questions about/ of witnessing and observation – **are inescapable, but rather than look**

away from them or try and find absolute resolution for them, Behar insists on writing – vulnerably – from within it.

This argument of hers finds entanglements with a broader mêlée of self-reflexive scholarship, I think, one that both acknowledges the impossibility of pure objectivity especially when it comes to the witnessing of injury and appreciates the added texture that an affective register can bring to the act of observation. Behar, herself, argues (building on Devereux's "From Anxiety to Method" (Devereux, 2014)), that despite the risks of personal writing – and there are quite a few, and she rightfully insists, I think that the exposure of the observing-self must always and only be in service of the story being told – "What happens within the observer must be made known… if the nature of what has been observed is to be understood". **This is an embodied kind of witnessing- one driven by a delirious desire to be care-full but necessarily limited by the actualities of the power discrepancies in its entanglements.**

And this is where I am writing from. All 'design' decisions made in this dissertation – about which visual artefacts to show or not show, how to show them, how to re-present them, how to interpret them, whose stories to tell, which narratives to make sense-able, how to acknowledge the limits and invisibilities produced, how to make sense of it all, all of them – are grounded in my attempt at being appreciative of the affect of violence-representations as 'civil contracts' and at being a 'vulnerable observer'.



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contents.

cq



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(Cushman, Chloe. The Syrian authorities' treatment of boys it blamed for anti-Bashar al-Assad graffiti is widely considered the fuse that sparked the uprising. Illustration. NBC Website. March 18, 2021)

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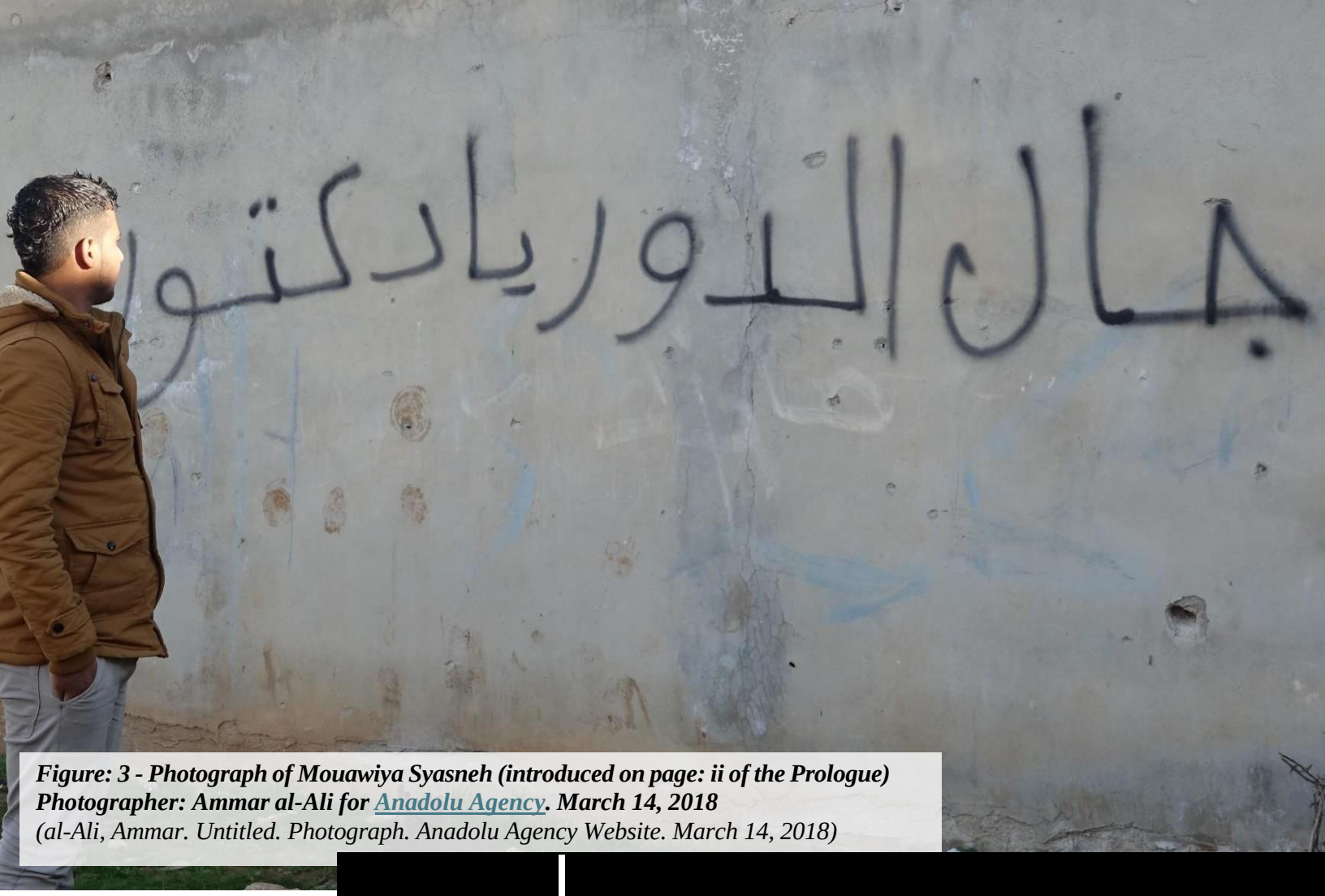


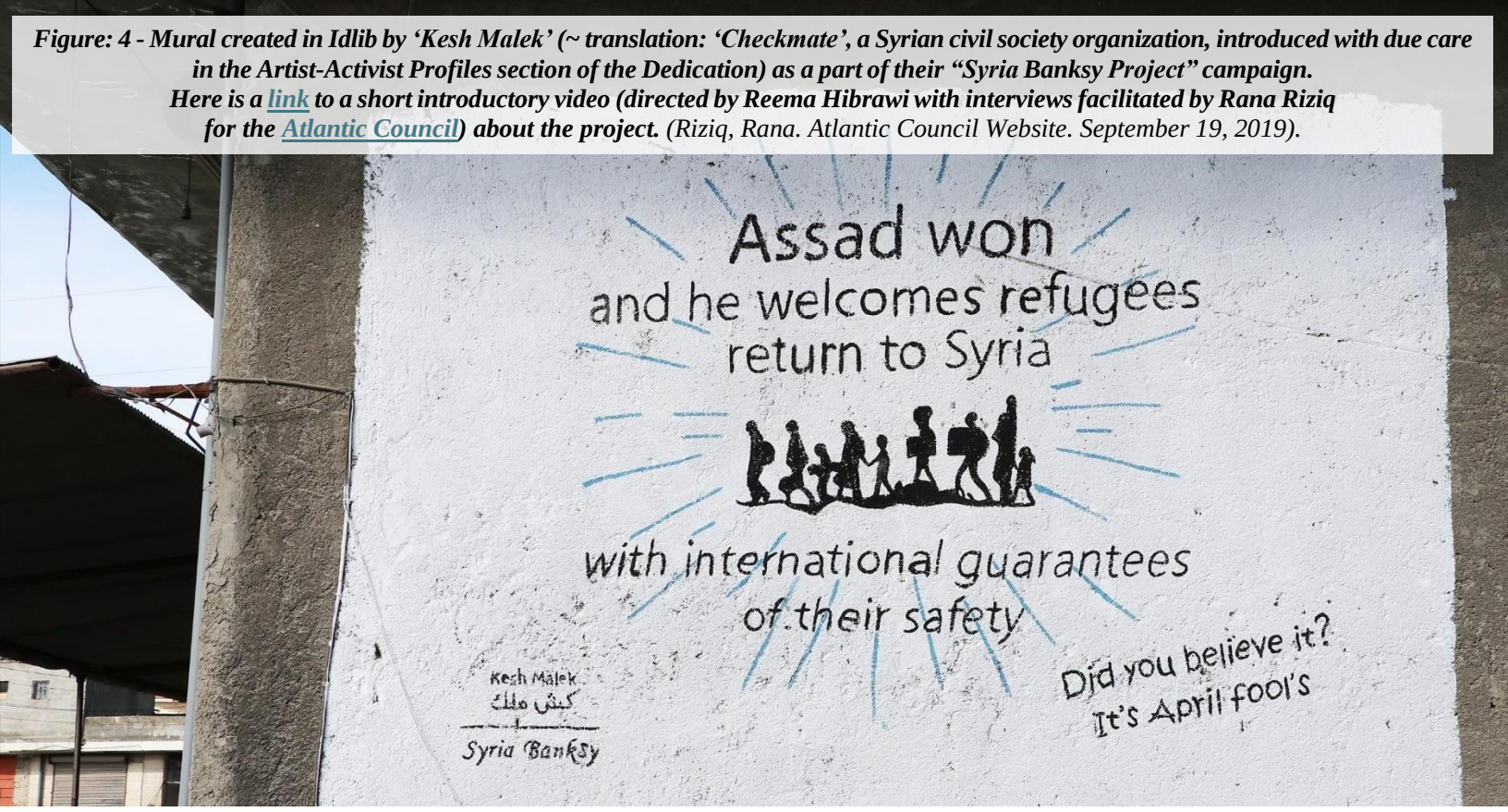
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Photographer: Ammar al-Ali for Anadolu Agency. March 14, 2018
(al-Ali, Ammar. Untitled. Photograph. Anadolu Agency Website. March 14, 2018)

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A spokesperson of the organization in an interview with Malu Halasa (whom we will meet on page. 55) explained: 'At first, we created this initiative as a page on Facebook, in the hope of lifting even a small part of the media blackout on a place that has been marginalised for too long. So we chose our city's symbols – its river and suspension bridge. Our methods of expression were simple school chalk on black paper. Although black is the colour of mourning, we managed to make it vibrant with the colours of love and imagination" *(Halasa et al., 2014).*



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Figure: 133 A Photograph of Tadmur/ Palmyra
Figure: 134 A Photograph of Tadmur/ Palmyra
Figure: 135 A Photograph of Tadmur/ Palmyra
Figure: 136 A Photograph of Tadmur/ Palmyra
Figure: 137 A Photograph of Tadmur/ Palmyra
Figure: 138 A Photograph of Tadmur/ Palmyra
Figure: 139 A Photograph of Tadmur/ Palmyra
Figure: 140 A Photograph of Tadmur/ Palmyra
Figure: 141 A Photograph of Tadmur/ Palmyra
Figure: 142 A Photograph of Tadmur/ Palmyra
Figure: 143 A Photograph of Tadmur/ Palmyra
Figure: 144 A Photograph of Tadmur/ Palmyra
Figure: 145 BlackBoxed Photograph of Tadmur/ Palmyra
Figure: 146 BlackBoxed Photograph of Tadmur/ Palmyra
Figure: 147 BlackBoxed Photograph of Tadmur/ Palmyra
Figure: 148 BlackBoxed Photograph of Tadmur/ Palmyra
Figure: 149 BlackBoxed Photograph of Tadmur/ Palmyra
Figure: 150 BlackBoxed Photograph of Tadmur/ Palmyra
Figure: 151 BlackBoxed Photograph of Tadmur/ Palmyra
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Figure: 153 BlackBoxed Photograph of Tadmur/ Palmyra
Figure: 154 BlackBoxed Photograph of Tadmur/ Palmyra
Figure: 155 BlackBoxed Photograph of Tadmur/ Palmyra
Figure: 156 BlackBoxed Photograph of Tadmur/ Palmyra
Figure: 157 BlackBoxed Photograph of Tadmur/ Palmyra

Translating through (a) Beheading

Figure: 158 Photograph of Luciano Garbati's "Medusa beheading Perseus"
Figure: 159 Photograph by Author, "Judith Beheading Holofernes"
Figure: 160 Artwork by Mantegna, "Judith Beheading Holofernes"
Figure: 161 Artwork by Klimt, "Judith Beheading Holofernes"
Figure: 162 Artwork, Khaled Barakeh, "Regarding the Pain of Others"
Figure: 163 Comic Strip by Rhea Saupin & Author

Mandatory Blank-ness-ness.



Figure: 6 - No overtaking. Citizenship, Justice and Equality', by Kartoneh, Deir al-Zour, 18 August 2012
(Halasa et al. Photograph. Print: Syria Speaks. 2014)

*Speaking further about the work that the group does, they explain: "**We are youths from the heart of this city.** We did not carry weapons, despite the siege that has now continued for more than two years. **We have changed where we live more than once because of the shelling, but we never changed our hearts about "our Deir".**..... 'Our city was declared a disaster zone just a few months after the beginning of the revolution; more than 700,000 civilians fled. We stayed put, and fortunately, **we gained the trust of the population. We actively document the names of martyrs and destroyed neighbourhoods. We also record the names of families who remain in the besieged city (which number no more than 640) in addition to displaced families and where they have gone to.***

"We provide psychological and medical support to civilians despite our modest resources. We are also working to raise awareness and restore civic spirit to the revolutionaries. Our small team includes doctors, engineers, teachers, workers and carpenters. Despite our varied backgrounds, we work in solidarity.

*..... 'Deciding what we write on one of our banners comes about after long consultation, and according to what is taking place on the ground. **Because we are part of Syria we write about all Syrians in Deir al-Zour. We believe that if our work is not "Syrian enough", we will be doomed to failure, and our voices will remain locked in our throats.***

*.....The banners travel to most parts of Syria; although we have no more than 7,000 followers, one banner has been shared by more than 390,000 people. Over the past few months we have completed our first animated film, **Abu Eskandar.** It tells the story of the siege of Deir al-Zour from the point of view of a cat who lives in a poor neighbourhood."* (Halasa et al., 2014).

In the Artist-Activist Profiles for the Dedication, we will look into their work with more care and also take a moment to acquaint ourselves with other anonymous collectives, like these two (Kesh Malek' & Kartoneh), for example: "Al-shaab al-suriyy yarif tariq-hu" (The Syrian People know their way) "whose work is rooted in the tradition of political posters with some particularities specific to the Syrian situation" and whose Facebook and Flickr pages remain active, and/ or the "Lens Young" umbrella of initiatives (and its different chapters across Syria), and the role Local Coordination Committees – and individuals like Assadd al-Achi who was the "mystery shopper" for such LCCs – in facilitating their work.

LIST OF THEORETICAL NOTES:

Note: 1-

On-life': Universe-ing Cases

Note: 2-

'Lived Experience': Subject-ing this Study

*Or, What the *insert-profanity-of-choice* does the needle look like?*

Note: 3-

Living with(in) Aesthetics': Site-ing this Study

Or, Where the *insert-profanity-of-choice* do we look for this needle - what exactly is the *insert-profanity-of-choice* is the position, shape and texture of our haystack - and what is our *insert-profanity-of-choice* plan to find it?

Note: 4-

Affect-ive Communities: Object-ive-lu Engaging with the Study

*Or, Which *insert-profanity-of-choice* characteristics and phenomena should we look for to gauge the position, texture and size of our needle?*

Note: 5-

Iconic Figurations: Working with Concepts/ Concepts that work in this Study/ Concepts that Make this Study Work

Or, What roles do *insert-profanity-of-choice* concepts/ theories/ thoughts play in this 'experiment' and how the *insert-profanity-of-choice* do they find themselves quite so agentic?

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Figure: 7-
Poster by Kartoneh that reads:
"For Mature Audiences Only: A disaster-struck city, 1 km ahead', Deir al-Zour".

(Halasa et al. Photograph. Print: Syria Speaks. 2014)

They continue, ***"Sometimes we ask ourselves: does the revolution deserve all these sacrifices?*** *The answer quickly comes* ***from the bullet stuck in the neck of a third colleague*** *(the first two died in action).* ***This fragment of war and hatred lodged near his spinal cord is a reminder of the animosity, violence and tyranny of the war, and the necessity of continuing until we achieve our freedom.***

'We believe that the Syrian dictator is only today's passing news, something temporary, but we are the "living document". *We believe that our city, the "Beauty of the Euphrates", is a place for life and love, and that all this devastation and grief is only a fleeting accident in itseternal river."*
(Halasa et al., 2014)

Mandatory Blank-ness again?

Yup, Mandatory Blank-ness. Again.

Figure: 8 – Untitled from Syrialism, by Omar Imam

(Imam, Omar. Untitled. Conceptual Photograph. Omar Imam Website. 2016)

(The Artist-profile is presented with due care on page. 47 of 'Living through Syrialism')

Artist's Caption: "I made this in Lebanon when I moved from Syria to Lebanon, and I was trying to go on with the project where I share on Facebook. So, it was during the... the... ***saying like the visual stream coming from the jihadist, from ISIS,*** because... so it has to do with the concept that I was telling you (about), that ***how can we fight (with) this weapon that during the fight, like how can the camera be an element to brainwash, to make a reputation for a new army.*** Because not only with the jihadist, for example, I had an interview I made during that time with a Syrian filmmaker who used to work with rebel's group, to promote their work, to get money from sponsor, from Saudi Arabia. So his mission was to ***film them while fighting but in most of the time it was not real fight so... um just... like movie.*** And he was like so proud of his work, and saying me like, ***'ya, without my films they wouldn't get any dollar, but, because how can the sponsor believe in them if they don't see it on videos. So, then, I mean when I make interviews I am never sure how much transparency you have in the interviewee because everything can be made up in your imagination then. But also (at the same time) you feel it (or know it) as a human."***

Author's Engagement: "Art Activism", Artists and Activists, Activists and Art, the 'Truths' and their 'Testimonies' and the "On-Lives" they create,

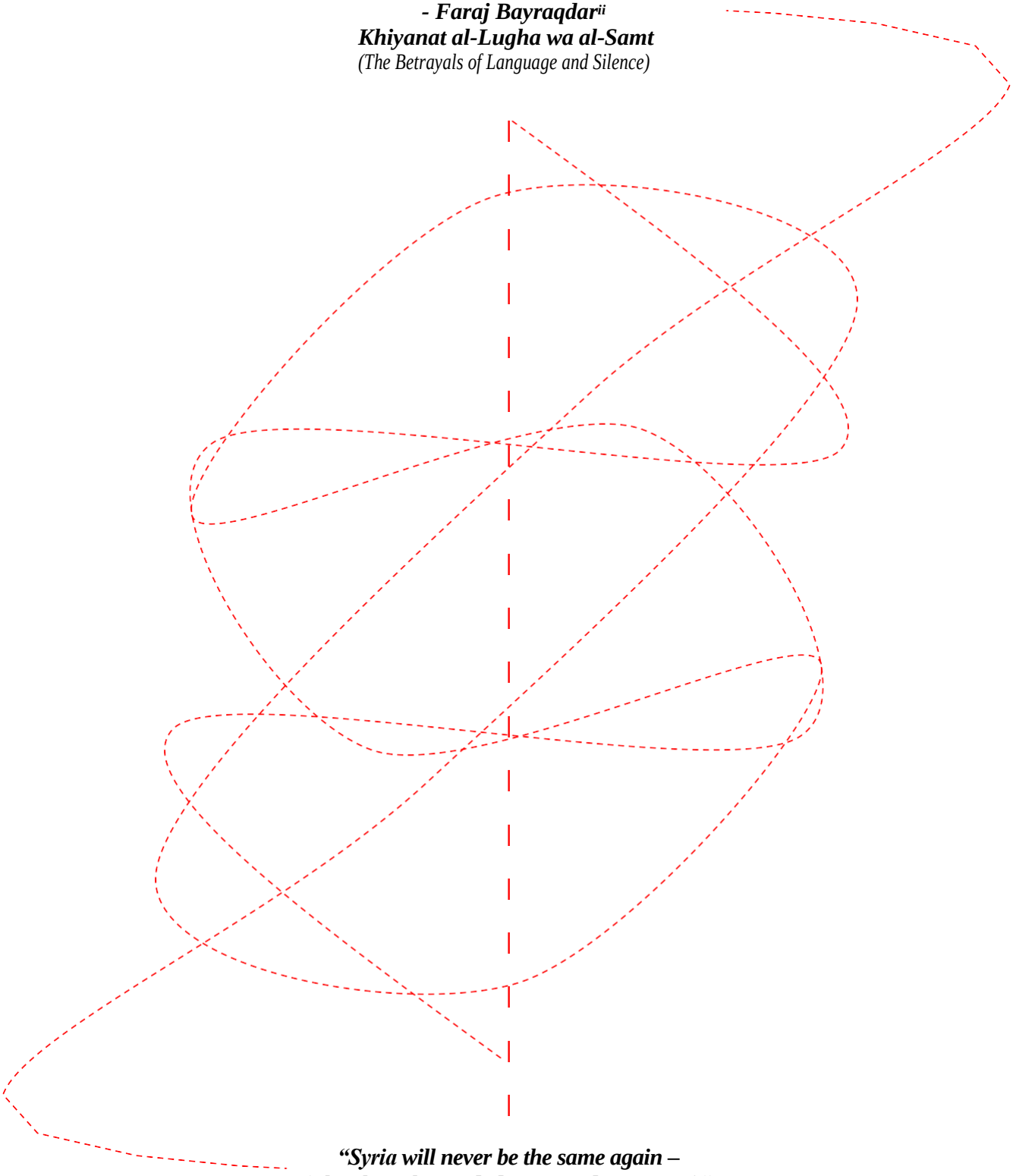
Or, ***How the *insert-profanity-of-choice* do we even begin to "access" this 'war-experience' that we are hoping to translate into some form of war-knowledge, i.e., (i) where do we begin our investigation into the war-stories that explicitly focus on translating lived 'war-experience' in the first place, and (ii) if we are to take those aesthetic productions – across both registers: conceptual photographs like the one here by Omar Imam, and user-generated videos circulating across different online platforms like the ones from DAESH/ different rebel groups that he mentions – as our entry points/ portals, how can we measure the 'authenticity' of these 'testimonies' and/ or their representational potential vis-à-vis any generalizability? Do they even have any 'truth' and/or 'representational' value, and if not, then why the *insert-profanity-of-choice* are we even looking at them in the first place?***



من أجل حب الدبكة

Syrial Preludes

"Do you really want the truth?"
- Faraj Bayraqdar[ii]
Khiyanat al-Lugha wa al-Samt
(The Betrayals of Language and Silence)



"Syria will never be the same again –
it has been hanged, drawn, and quartered."
- Samar Yazbek, The Crossing[iii]

A Prologue

Living through an Experiment in Syrialism |

| Living Through a Syrialist Experiment

A Prologue:

Living through an Experiment in Syrialism /
Living Through a Syrialist Experiment

1 graffitied high-school wall; 3 'sentences', 16 teenagers, and caesura-tic rage: that is how our story begins, in Da'ara, with Mouawiya Syasneh; and his friends.

Their "crime" – graffitiing slogans of protest on the wall of a local school in the Hay al-Arbeen district (in southwestern Da'ara) – their imprisonment; the torture that was visited upon them by Atef Najib's 'security apparatuses'; the surge of protests, demonstrations and sit-ins that the people of Da'ara unleashed upon their city; the sheer intensity of their resistance, their rebellion, their desire for freedom; the sheer durability of the Assad-ian mêlée of imperial violence; their Ministry of Information's decision to lift the access-block on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter; and the larger ecological register of the "Arab Spring"[1] - all participated in the events that seized Da'ara from March 6th to May 5th, 2011, their ***entanglements*** populating the ***emergence*** of the ongoing Syrian Revolution.

It is their ***'on-'life*** (Della Ratta, 2018; Ratta, 2021; Ratta & Valeriani, 2012) – the constantly morphing and mutating on/off-line-life of this, now 13 years-long, revolutionary process – that diligently, desperately, and decisively demands, I think, that the discipline of International Relations "critically (re)imagines" (Mhurchú & Shindo, 2016) the ways in which we 'study' war and its violences. It demands, echoing the chant of the revolutionary protestors, that our war-stories "pour" over/with/for/like "the tears of the eye, pour over for the martyrs and the youth of Syria. //."[iv] يا دموع العين سكابا على شهداء سوريا وشبابا

[1] 200 USD worth of debt, 1 toppled produce cart, a pair of electronic scales, 3 police officers, their capacity for harassment, violence and public humiliation, a failed meeting with the governor of Sīdī Bū Zayd, a can of gasoline, and the blaring cry "How do you expect me to make a living?": **that is how our story begins**, with Tarek El-Tayeb Mohamed Bouazizi and his self-immolation (though 'self' is a stretch here - he might have struck the match with which he lit himself on fire, but it was the extortion, corruption and bureaucratised cruelty of the Tunisian governmental apparatus that led him to *that* state of desperation).
Or, An unprecedented drought, 1 ophthalmologist, 2 moments of 'transition'- one marked by the transfer of power to the father & the other to the son, 30 years of an autocratic and kleptocratic rule & 11 of 'dual movements' that differently repeated those imperial politics of ruination, the milieu of the Arab Spring: **that is how our story begins**, with 16 teenagers in Da'ara & their graffiti, and the regime-response-precedence set by/ the political-memory-of the Hama massacre of 1982. ***No matter where we choose to begin, our story always 'begins' – remains and ends – in media res.*** In that regard, as you will see in Field Note: 4, ***any and all of the histories*** within this text – regardless of their scale – are ***stories that are deeply contingent, emergent and alive*** with no commitment to any generalisable transhistorical 'truth'; and the choices, then, of where to begin, whose stories to begin with, whose stories to continue with, where to take the stories, where to end them and with whom, are all acutely political, normative, agentic, and affective i.e., they are both, driven by and reproductive of, the desires of the story itself... the choices are all in service of the seemingly simple question - ***"what is the story about"?*** The answer to which (and therefore the guiding principle for all choices made) is that the protagonists, here, are not so much the/ an individual character but the relationalities between the characters and the realities their ***entanglements*** create.

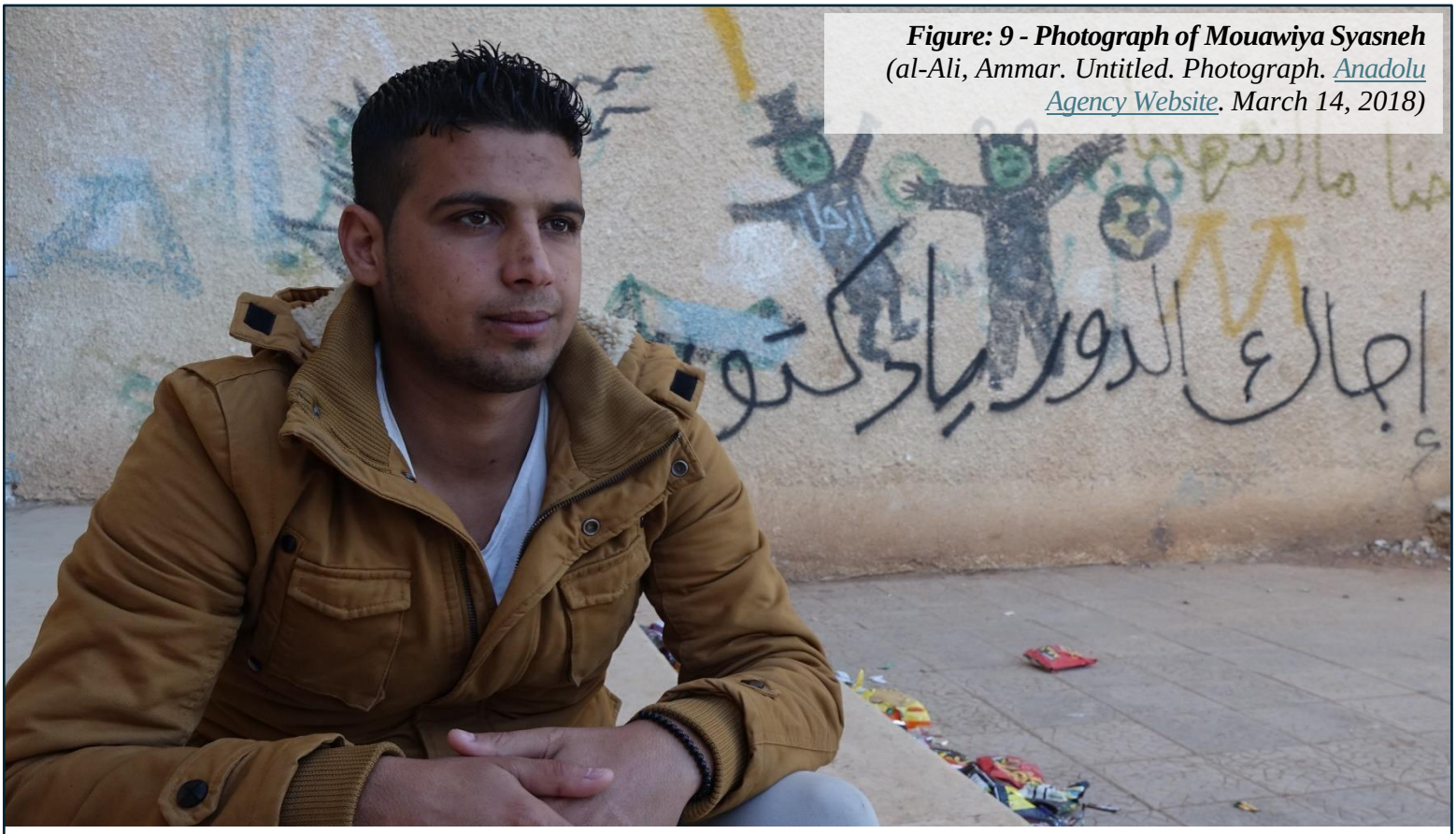


Figure: 9 - Photograph of Mouawiya Syasneh
(al-Ali, Ammar. Untitled. Photograph. Anadolu Agency Website. March 14, 2018)

Mouawiya Syasneh (whom you can find, both, standing in the photograph on the 2nd page for 'Contents' and sitting here) was 14 when the regime decided to see – and treat – him and his friends as (a) 'criminal's. On the seventh anniversary of the beginning of the conflict, he gave an interview to Anadolu Agency (14th of March, 2018) detailing how he was brutally detained, incarcerated, & tortured.

Re-visiting the wall, taking the time to linger at the graffiti that flung him into his own personal hell, and choosing to sit – and get photographed – with it, he gave the following testimony: "We used to watch the news about the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. They used to write 'Freedom,' and 'Down with the regime,' so my friends and I spray-painted graffiti reading 'Freedom' and 'Down with the regime,' and 'It's your turn Doctor'" (Maimaitiming, 2018).

Later, with CNN (on the 15th of March), he spoke further of how the regime officials came to his house at 4 a.m. as the adhan (call for prayer) sounded out and woke him up. "They handcuffed me. My parents were surprised, wondering why they were taking me" and though they assured him and his family that they would bring him back in a while, he was imprisoned for a little over a month. "It was terrifying. At the police station, under torture [knowing that his friend's finger had already been broken under 'intense interrogation'] and beating, I admitted to the spray-painting and graffiti with my friends" (Tarabay et al., 2018). And in those weeks his parents and friends – and those of the other 14 – would go to Najib's office, pleading for their release where "They were told, 'Forget your children.

If you want children, make more children.
If you don't know how, bring us your women and we will make them for you'" (Malek, 2017).

But the rage – at the obscenely unjustifiable disproportionality of the regime's actions – that was driving the protestors finally broke through the barricade of Assad-Najib-ian security apparatus, and Syasneh recalls that "…they released us after people began pouring into the streets when the anti-regime demonstrations began", and despite everything – and perhaps because of it – he remains "proud of what I did seven years ago. We saw the regime's true face and the uprising was triggered – at least partially – as a result of our revolutionary graffiti" (Maimaitiming, 2018).



Figure: 10 - Photograph of Bashir Abazayd presented in an NBC News article authored by Sephora Smith and Ammar Cheikh Omar on March 18, 2021.

Bashir Abazayd's story is quite different. And yet, somehow, quite similar.

Bashir Abazayd was also a teenager when he was detained, incarcerated and tortured for the same 'crime' as Mouawiya Syasneh: scrawling that graffiti on the walls of their high school. In Abazayd's case however, he insists, it was a false accusation. "Abazayd says that, inspired by the mass protests that had toppled dictators in Tunisia and Egypt, he and his friends were enthralled by the creeping Arab Spring and wanted to send a message to Assad, a British-trained ophthalmologist, whose family had ruled Syria for more than four decades at that time" and while he had actively participated in these discussions, he didn't know about the graffiti until it "appeared on the wall" around "the same time". And yet, a few days later, the mukhabarat (مخابرات) had hunted him down, taken him into 'custody', tortured and 'interrogated' him: all in open-invisibility (because no court, prison or security records are publicly available in Syria). He "[describes in a shaky voice] how he was beaten with sticks and cables in detention until his face was unrecognisable and he wished he were dead" (Smith & Cheikh Omar, 2021).

"I sacrificed everything," he told Saphora Smith and Ammar Cheikh Omar in an interview he gave for NBC News, adding, "Who would have believed that the regime would kill its own people with chemicals and warplanes? That it would destroy homes, hospitals, schools and markets, entire cities, that it would burn villages?" Not only did he lose his own adolescence to the violence of the Assad-Najib-ian security apparatus (in 2011) and was effectively forced into exile to Turkey shortly after his 'release' – that, alongside Syasneh's and their other friends' was hard fought for by the people of Da'ara and the avalanche of public demonstrations they unleashed onto the city – but over the course of the next ten years, he "lost his brother to an airstrike, his father to a broken heart 10 days later and his mother and other siblings to Jordan", unable to even visit their graves.And despite everything – and perhaps because of it – he remains "defiant", asserting he is "sure the revolution will continue and that there will be more anniversaries in the coming years until the Syrians, with the help of Western countries, drop Bashar Assad and his regime" (ibid).

Think with me for a moment here.

Think of all the war-stories that 3,578,591 videos from 5024 sources across 2069 incidents – each collected, preserved, processed, verified, investigated, and published, i.e., archived in a single space – could tell us, if we could figure out how to translate their war-know-ing into war-knowledge. Since 2014 the Syrian Archive project team alone has housed this massive record of user-generated social-media posts, each of which stands as virtual ***testimony*** for the "documentation of human rights violations and other crimes committed by all parties in conflict in Syria for use in advocacy, justice and accountability" (Syrian Archive, 2014). In fact, their most recent project, "(Re-)Humanization of the Syrian digital memory" is exclusively geared towards investigating the ***"'meaning(s)' of the so-called "Syrian Digital Memory" of the 2011 uprising and its subsequent war"*** and by thinking about each ***individual 'user' that is 'generating' said 'content' as "surviving eyewitnesses of atrocities"*** – i.e., by showing us that ***"individuals in Syria have produced not only archival and documentary digital "copies" of their everyday lives during war but have also provided digital extracts and quick flashes of the real individual and collective memories of the war and its significant events"*** – the team is already working on translating their war-experience into some form of war-knowledge.

And they aren't the only ones. Syria Deeply – now housed by 'The New Humanitarian' on their digital platform as a part of the larger "News Deeply" project-turned-company – for instance, was cofounded by Lara Setrakian and Azeo Fables in December 2012. As a "part news aggregator, part interactive backgrounder, and part conversation space" (National Press Foundation, 2013), it was a single-issue website dedicated to creating a process of information-synthesis where all this user-generated digital content that was coming out of Syria was funneled through to their freelance correspondents from across the Middle East and North Africa region and/or Ushahidi (Swahili for "testimony" and is closely related to 'shahidi' which means "witness", is an open-source software that uses user-generated reports to collect, map and present data, essentially combining citizen journalism and activism with geographical information tracking) and information products like conflict-maps, detailed journalistic reports, informational videos, interactive infographics and Google hangout 'roundtables' were then generated. The project, through its commitment to both, their "let's put a roof over it" approach to digital content and operationalisation of the "single subject news model" by generating "one story, with one landing page, with the best possible user experience of information" at a time as "basically a content architecture exercise", took "every type of information (they) thought was useful and designed it…" (re:publica & Setrakian, 2014) to produce high fidelity reports – effectively producing its own virtual testimonials of martial

violences in Syria – that they were then able to circulate not just on their own website, but also through their partnerships with The New York Times (especially with the columnist Nicholos Kristof), the BBC, MSNBC, ABC news and so on. The Syria Just and Accountability Centre too has been carrying out its own documentation process for the better part of a decade now, and the same goes for The Syrian Network for Human Rights (active since June 2011), Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (active since 2006), the United Nation's International Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria, Amnesty International's & the Human Rights Watch's datasets, the dataset being compiled by the Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD) and the list goes on.

All these archives/ collections/ datasets understand and appreciate that the "***testimonial, evidentiary*** and ***creative"*** (Saber & Rahman al-Jaloud, 2024) value of these archival attempts across both 'levels'/ 'scales' (be it the individual user generating the content for a personal/ group account/ archive and/or project teams such overtly gearing their efforts towards curating collective archives) cannot be underestimated. ***When we work with/ through them "in full recognition of the centrality of oral testimonies in historic and mnemonic processes"*** (Zelizer & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2014)***, thus displacing the focus of historical inquiry from solely considering facts (what has happened), to looking at the ways things are experienced, and how they will be remembered*** (Assmann, 2006)***" (ibid)***, their affective potential is well beyond overwhelming.

Just think for a moment about what a 'collection' or an 'archive' actually means here: it means that hundreds of thousands of Syrian citizens, from different cities, towns and villages across the country, have recorded as many aspects as possible of their daily lived experiences of the revolution, in their own voices, and we can actively engage with each of their individual war-stories in these collective spaces. They have documented the actual machinations of different individual instances of violence that they survived, different violations they were subjected to, all the atrocity that they faced, and how they remain strikingly defiant and resilient through it all, in concrete, practical terms – they have recorded what it looks like when bombs go off just a few feet away from them, which ammunitions are used in 'capturing' battles, how belligerents move across cities when they siege them, which 'everyday' object do they use when torturing civilians (belts, walking canes, chairs, table fans etc.), what walls look like with a post-blast halo of soot and blood, what the aftermath of a sarin attack looks like on convulsing bodies that are foaming at the mouth. They have shown us what tarps can do to save their streets from sniper-bullet-rains so they can reclaim their neighbourhoods, how busses flipped on their sides make for excellent barricades, how craters formed by unrelenting siege can be used as makeshift swimming pools, how a father teaches his daughter to live

through a war by training her to laugh every time she hears a blast, how solar charges make for excellent windows, how rocket debris can be used to flatten bread, and what an ecology of solidarity and resilience looks like in underground basements and tunnels (all converted to house children's playgrounds, markets, schools and shelters)[2].

Through this data, allowing for the possibility of these archives, they have created an intimacy between us – as humans, viewers, and witnesses – and their lived experience of their violent/ violence lifeworlds and in doing so, they have not just become 'citizen journalists' and 'front line archivists' but have also impelled us, their audiences, to confront that in "reality (they) were direct witnesses to these events, and more often than not victims of indiscriminate shelling, forced disappearances, and arrest by conflicting parties" and as such the digital content that they create should/must be seen, appreciated, engaged with and operationalised as "victim testimony" (Ciorciari & Heindel, 2015).

And/ or as 'perpetrator testimony'. In many ways, at least within the Syrian context(s), perpetrators of martial violences have been curators and archivists of their own violence. From Caesar's archive, prison CCTV footage (for example from the Ghwaryan prison), (usually leaked) content from within different branches of the Assad-ian security apparatus (such as the video of the Tadamon massacre) especially that of/from/about the Shabbiha (such as footage from the Baniyas Massacre, May 2013), content circulated on closed Facebook groups like Air Force Intelligence of the Syrian Arabic Republic and/ or on Instagram accounts like the 'syrian_republican_guard', we know that this stands true for the Assad-ian regime. It definitely stands true for DAESH (/ISIL), who operationalise this violence/ violent curation quite intentionally (as you will see in Chapter: 2 of Part: 4 and through quite a bit of work that has been done of the 'communication' strategies employed by the group). Perhaps most importantly, from works such as those of Jonathan Luke Ausitn, this becomes almost impossible to un-see/ not-see because through these works we can sense and make sense of how this digital content/ testimony/ injury-stories can be understood as performative acts that not only document but also perpetuate the violence itself. Austin's research delves into the complex interplay between the representation of torture and its material enactments, exploring how digital and visual mediums serve both as archives of brutality and in a manner of speaking as instruments of continued oppression, especially if we take their passive pedagogical value into consideration. His analysis highlights the

[2] We will (re)visit most of these digital artefacts, and others, in the coming pages, especially in Part: 2, Chapter: 1- "Encountering Syrialism: Travelling to Three Little Syrias" and Part: 5, Chapter: 1- An Epilogue: Living through an Experiment in Syr-vival / Living Through a Syr-vival-ist Experiment."

performative nature of torture documentation – at large, working through digital content and ethnographica interviews – suggesting that these digital artifacts do more than record events, they actively participate in the ongoing cycle of violence by reinforcing the power structures and terror practices of/for perpetrators/ perpetration. This content, then, at least here, stands as 'evidence' of course, and as 'testimony' for the actual "doing" of torture, but also becomes an active participant in the broader machinery of martial violence (Austin, 2016, 2017b, 2017a, 2019, 2022).

As ick-y as it is to admit this then, the fact remains, that regardless of which form of content we speak of, across either modulation of 'testimony', (i) ***individual users have been/ are actively participating in generating a "living archival memory"*** (Hoskins, 2009) of the Syrian revolution, that (ii) ***their archival efforts, alongside those of the projects mentioned above (and others), is creating a "collected memory"*** (Garde-Hansen, 2011) ***that has enormous political, normative, judicial[3] and advocacy potential, not only because project teams are tirelessly investing in rigorous documentation*** (especially in the face of constant erasure and elisions) ***for this collection, but also because these 'collected memories' can be seen as "mediators", of sorts, between "eyewitness video content" and every actant desirous of advocating for "human rights claims in international fora",*** and that (iii) ***taking these testimonies seriously, giving them due respect, care, and compassion, is an "essential step in the (re)-humanisation of the narrative of the Syrian conflict, and in any postwar reconciliation effort"*** (Syrian Archive, 2014)***, and for us, as humans and researchers, a way to stand in active solidarity with them.***

[3] Especially keeping in mind how this digital testimony has been operationalized recently in the trial of Anwar R and Eyad A, two former officials of the Assad-ian government, on grounds of crimes against humanity for the torture of political prisoners in detention while they were serving as officers of the law. To echo the words of Saber & al-Jaloud, then, this digital content and its war-stories are integral to "Making sure the victims, who have been caught in the line of fire, are able to tell their own stories is a prerequisite to achieving any form of transitional justice, and to ensure proper engagement with the history of this uprising in the years to come" (Saber & Rahman al-Jaloud, 2024).



Figure: 11 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi
posted on their Facebook page on April 29, 2016 with the following caption addressing it's location:

المكان :حُـمْـص - حـيّ الـوعـر
الزمان :29 نيسان 2016
Location: Homs - Al-Wa'er Neighborhood
Date: 29 April 2016 *(Homsi, Lens Young. Photograph. Facebook. 2016)*

Think of the next few pages as a flip-book of sorts.

I want us to 'walk through' the Al-Waer neighbourhood, in Homs, across/from July 2012- May 2021 and some of the areas around it.

I had 'encountered' these images on the "Lens Young | Homsi" (عدسة شاب حمصي) *Facebook page sometime in 2019, I think. And I remember being instantly, jaw-clenching-ly overwhelmed. It was the first 'Lens Young' page I had found my way to – 'snowballing' works for open-source investigations too, I promise – and I don't think anything could have prepared me for the sheer volume of content I suddenly had access to. I had had some sense of this volume, before. I had been working with/on/through these 'onlives' and their data for almost two years by then, had by some miracle 'designed' a project around it, had already gathered 'data' on a few other events (like the al-Ghouta Sarin Gas attacks of 2013, archiving 'testimony' across as many actors, platforms, channels and content-styles as I could- I was, at least then, still working from well within my control-freak-ed-ness, so everything was tabulated, colour coded, listed, cross-referenced and categorized), but this page – the project itself – was, well, revolutionary. At least to me.*

A mostly anonymous group ("It's a big secret. Our friends and parents don't even know," said Salma Aldiri, a founding member, in an interview with Syria Deeply) of 5 'young amateur' photographer-activists had – in keeping with the Lens Young tradition (started by a similarly anonymous-amateur-activist-y group of 'young guys' in Homs) – started this Facebook page to work with/through the (i) ***the "need to document events with***

images on social media, to convey them to the world faster", *(ii)* ***participate in the Revolution "from the first cry" in a way that ensured that their "action in the Revolution remained a peaceful struggle",*** *(iii)* ***operationalize the "importance of art and creativity in photography" because of their correlation to "the speed with which it reaches the world. In this way, it conveys suffering in a way that motivates people to share it. It is like [written] news, but faster",*** *and/but, most importantly – for me at least –* ***to capture what 'real' 'living' looked like in/through the violence of the Revolution*** *(as told by one of the founding members of the Homs' chapter, Muhannad Hamoud – a pseudonym – to Sama Mohammed of Syria Direct, in an interview help on the 21st of December, 2016).*

For every single neighbourhood, for every single street, almost of a daily basis (at least, until October 2017) they had captured, archived, curated, and published dozens of photographs of both, ***"destruction and sorrow, but at the same time a lot of life"*** *(ibid). Moreover, they actually respond to the requests made by their viewers: "If you look in our inbox, every day we get hundreds of messages from Homsi people asking [about] what is happening to their neighborhoods and houses," says Salma in a different interview with Ella Wind for Jadaliyya. And so, the "Photographers from different areas take a few photographs in response to people's requests for pictures of their homes. Often, the entire extended family and their neighbors have left, and this is one of the only ways of obtaining detailed news from inside the city. "Actually, these photographs are where we get the most comments, from Homsis themselves. They really appreciate it and write 'that's my house, this is my grandfather's house, there is my school!' They always seem shocked to see it, and even if it is destroyed they are happy to at least know what is happening and have it documented.""*

You could/can physically *see* the evolution of a street across days, months, years, events through their collection, and *see* this evolution – of ruin and survival, injury and resilience – across all modes of being: *i.e., you could/ can, quite literally, see injury being enacted on a single neighbourhood, in a single city, on this singular account, in demolished buildings, mushroom clouds, abandoned living rooms, bullet-holes-riddled walls, kitchens and bathrooms shelled to bones, in 'city views' through riflescopes, in florescent green buses (employed exclusively for civilian evacuation), shot-kittens, in handmade signs scrawled on brown chart-paper, in children casually studying next to the toil-fin of an exploded shell, or in shell-debris being used as a candlestand during power-cuts.*

And this was just one Facebook page! Just take a moment to truly grasp the scope of the 'digital content' we have available to us through them, and all the other individuals, groups and archives curating such content.

What they were recording here, is not only 'testimonies' of single/individual events of violation and injury, but what it looks like to actively live – wake up, eat, breathe, sleep, shower, study, take photographs, laugh, cry, interact, fight, assemble, paint – when violation and injury, when violence, is the very "dimension of (one's) living" (Nordstrom & Robben, 1995). ***This is what the 'onlife' of the Syrian Revolution captures: the lived experiences of martial 'injury' as a mode of being and the stories we tell about these experiences.***

Go ahead, flip through them. Get to know Al-Waer (حيّ الوعر) (Muhannad's hometown) a little.

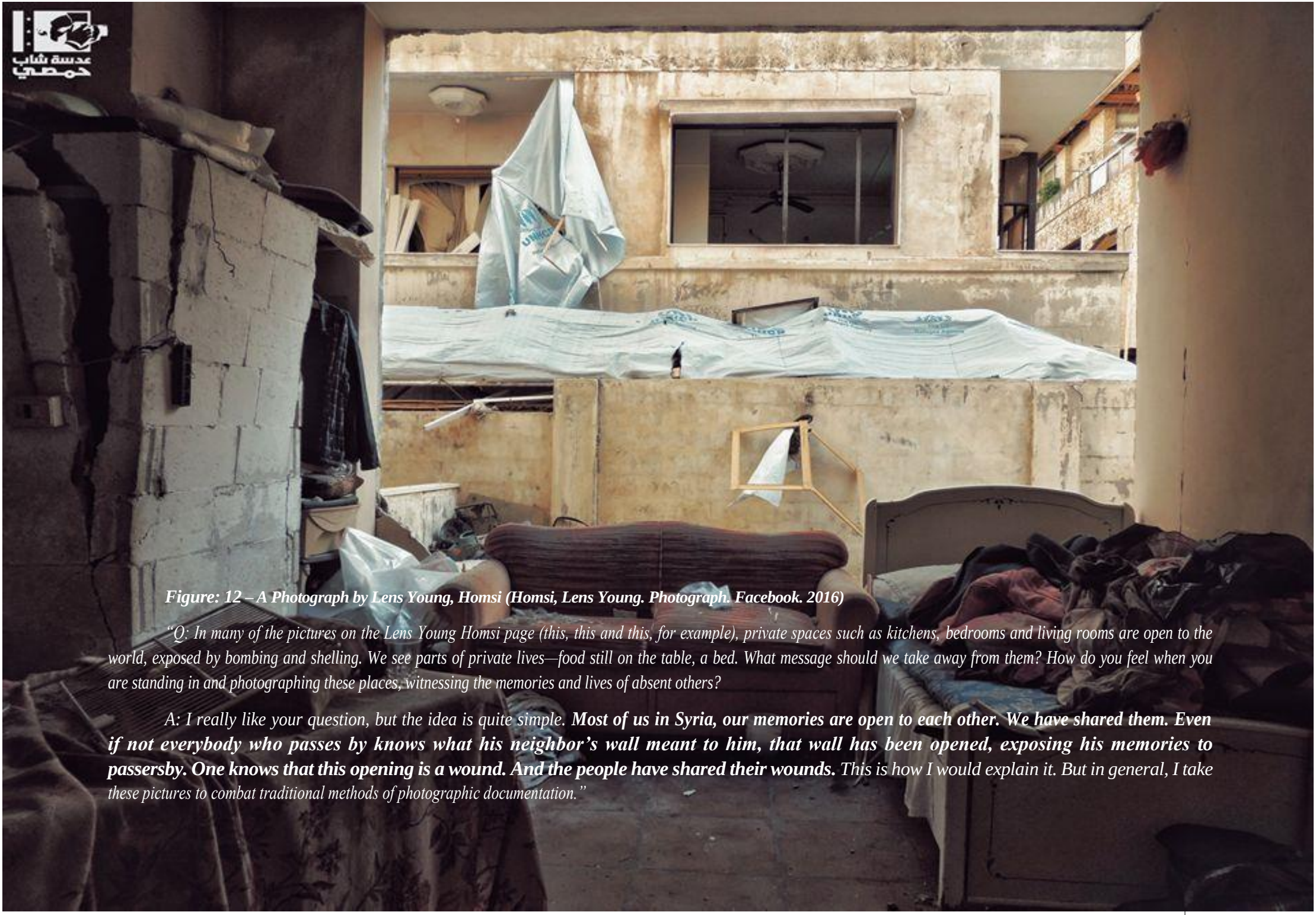


Figure: 12 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi (Homsi, Lens Young. Photograph. Facebook. 2016)

"Q: In many of the pictures on the Lens Young Homsi page (this, this and this, for example), private spaces such as kitchens, bedrooms and living rooms are open to the world, exposed by bombing and shelling. We see parts of private lives—food still on the table, a bed. What message should we take away from them? How do you feel when you are standing in and photographing these places, witnessing the memories and lives of absent others?

A: I really like your question, but the idea is quite simple. ***Most of us in Syria, our memories are open to each other. We have shared them. Even if not everybody who passes by knows what his neighbor's wall meant to him, that wall has been opened, exposing his memories to passersby. One knows that this opening is a wound. And the people have shared their wounds.*** *This is how I would explain it. But in general, I take these pictures to combat traditional methods of photographic documentation."*

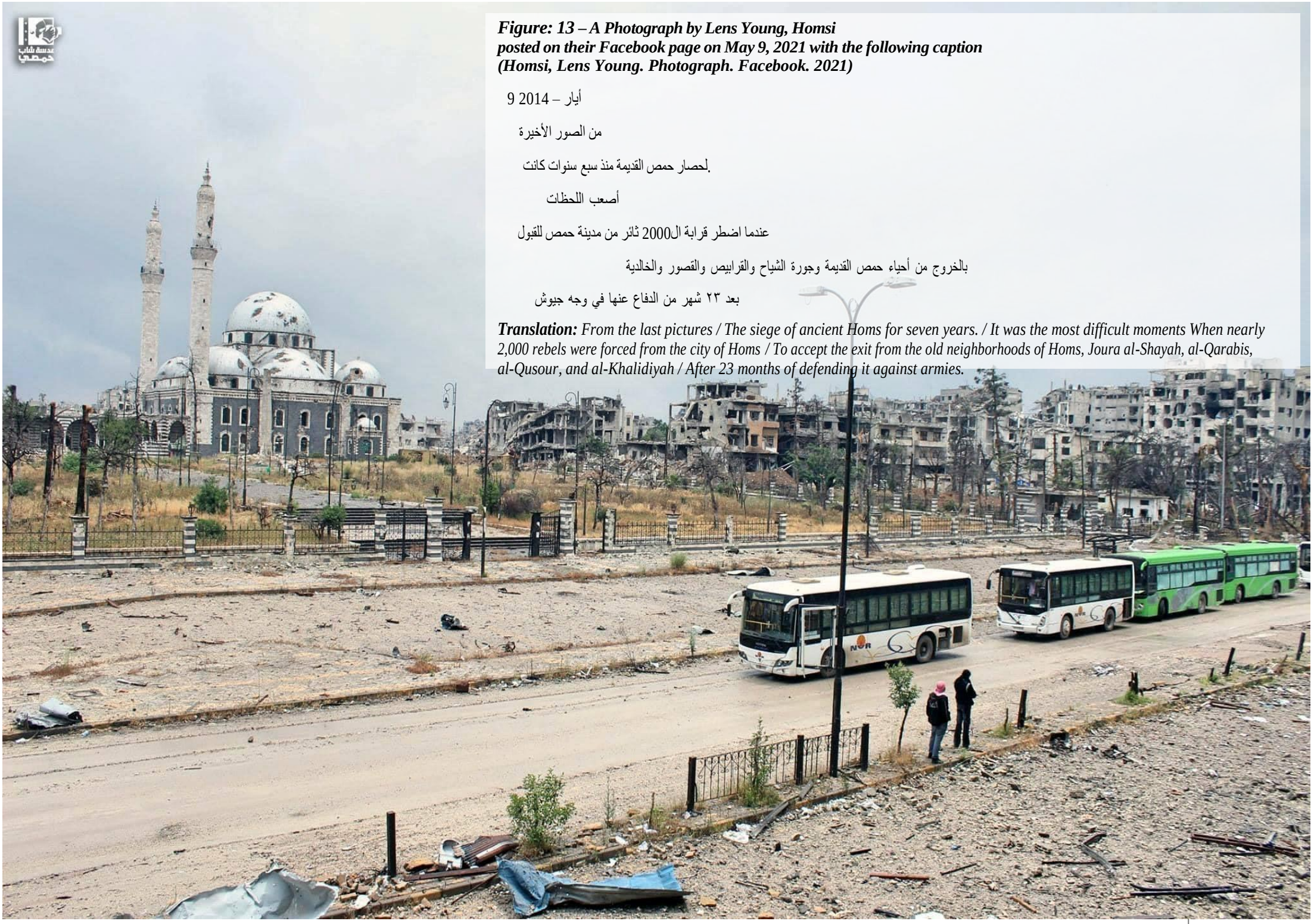


Figure: 13 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi posted on their Facebook page on May 9, 2021 with the following caption (Homsi, Lens Young. Photograph. Facebook. 2021)

9 2014 – أيار

من الصور الأخيرة

لحصار حمص القديمة منذ سبع سنوات كانت.

أصعب اللحظات

عندما اضطر قرابة ال2000 ثائر من مدينة حمص للقبول

بالخروج من أحياء حمص القديمة وجورة الشياح والقرابيص والقصور والخالدية

بعد ٢٣ شهر من الدفاع عنها في وجه جيوش

Translation: *From the last pictures / The siege of ancient Homs for seven years. / It was the most difficult moments When nearly 2,000 rebels were forced from the city of Homs / To accept the exit from the old neighborhoods of Homs, Joura al-Shayah, al-Qarabis, al-Qusour, and al-Khalidiyah / After 23 months of defending it against armies.*



Figure: 14 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi posted on their Facebook page on 30th of August, 2019 with the following caption *(Homsi, Lens Young. Photograph. Facebook. 2019)**:***

المكان :حُـمـْص - حـيّ الـوعـر

الزمان :30 آب 2019

Location: Homs - Al-Wa'er neighborhood

Date: 30 August 2019

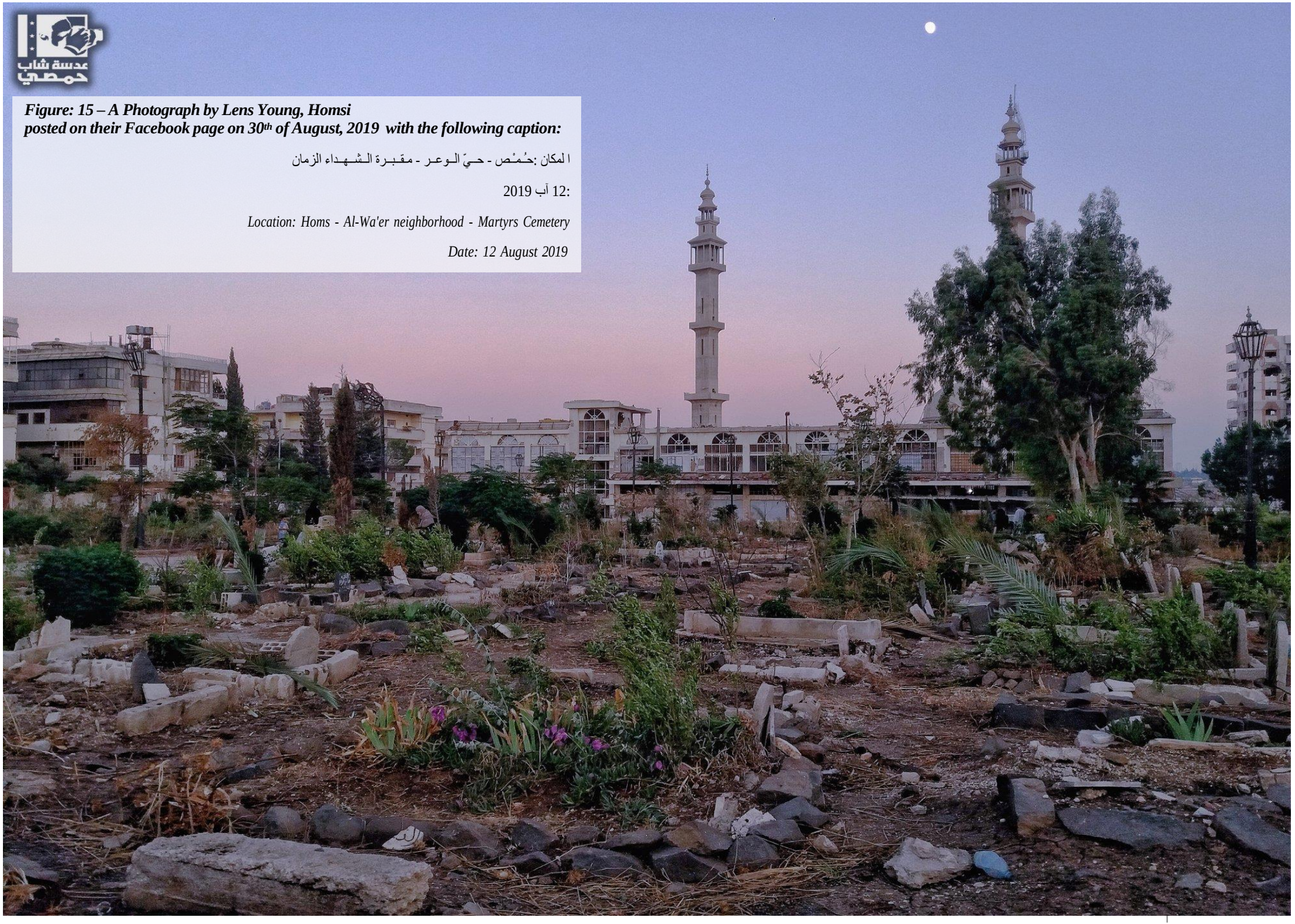


Figure: 15 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi
posted on their Facebook page on 30th of August, 2019 with the following caption:

المكان :حُمْص - حيّ الوعر - مقبرة الشهداء الزمان

12: آب 2019

Location: Homs - Al-Wa'er neighborhood - Martyrs Cemetery

Date: 12 August 2019



Figure: 16 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi posted on their Facebook page with the following caption (ibid):

المكان :حُـمْـص - حـيّ الـوعـر

الزمان :13 آب 2019

Location: Homs - Al-Wa'er neighborhood

Date: 13 August 201

Figure: 17 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi posted on their Facebook page on with the following caption (ibid):

المكان :حُـمْـص - حـيّ الـوعـر
الزمان :16 أيار 2017
Location: Homs - Al-Wa'er Neighborhood
Date: 16 May 2017


عدسة شاب حمصي



Figure: 19 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi posted on their Facebook page (ibid).

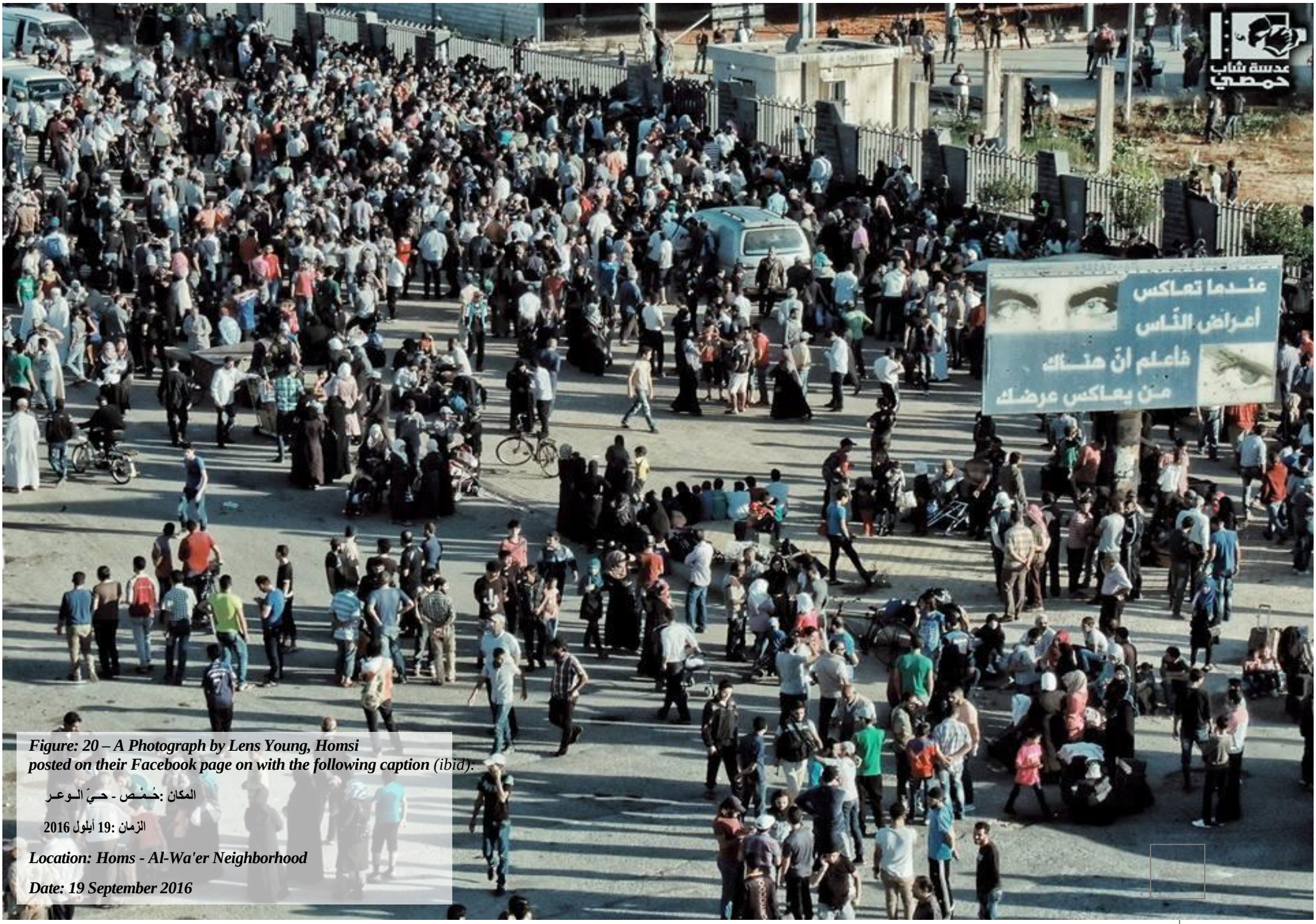


***Figure: 20 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi posted on their Facebook page on with the following caption** (ibid):*

المكان :حُـمْـص - حـيّ الـوعـر

الزمان :19 أيلول 2016

Location: Homs - Al-Wa'er Neighborhood

Date: 19 September 2016



Figure: 21 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi posted on their Facebook page on with the following caption (ibid).:

المكان :حُـمْـص - حـيّ الـوعـر

الزمان :11 آذار 2016

Location: Homs - Al-Wa'er Neighborhood

Date: 11 March 2016



Figure: 22 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi posted on their Facebook page on with the following caption:

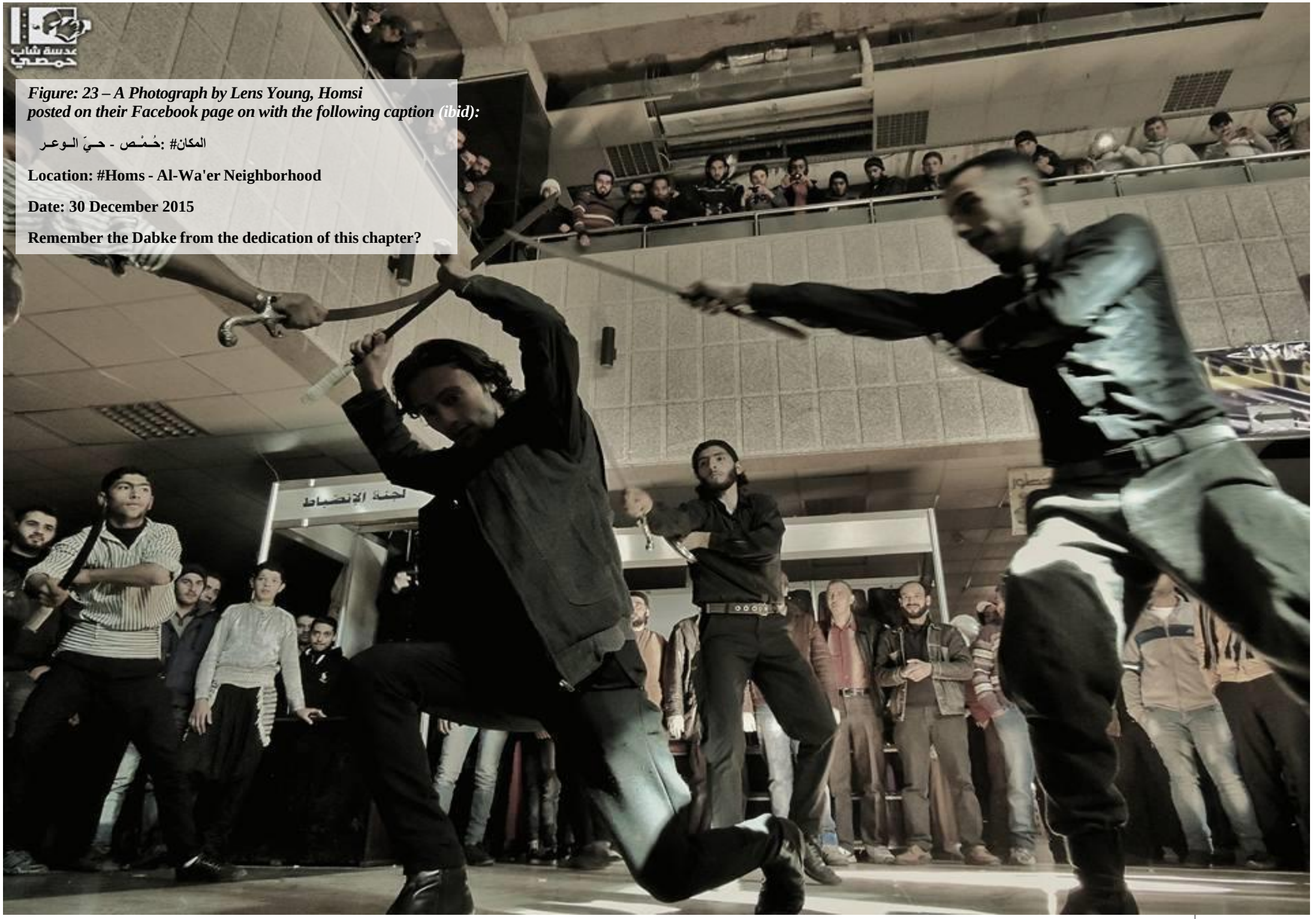


Figure: 23 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi
posted on their Facebook page on with the following caption (ibid):

المكان#: حُـمْـص - حـيّ الـوعـر

Location: #Homs - Al-Wa'er Neighborhood

Date: 30 December 2015

Remember the Dabke from the dedication of this chapter?



Figure: 24 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi posted on their Facebook page on with the following caption (ibid):

المكان :حُـمْـص - حـيّ الـوعـر
الزمان :منـذ عـدّة أيـام - شـبـاط 2015
Location: Homs - Al-Wa'er Neighborhood
Date: Several Days Ago - February 2015



Figure: 25 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi posted on their Facebook page on with the following caption (ibid):

#Homs - Al-Wa'er Neighborhood

Date: 05 November 2014 via

@lenshomsi

#Syria #Our_Waar_Is_Burning

#حمص #الوعر #سوريا



Figure: 26 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi posted on their Facebook page on with the following caption (ibid):

المكان :حُـمْـص - حـيّ الـوعـر
الزمان :اليـوم - 1 تمّوز 2014
Location: Homs - Al-Wa'er Neighborhood
Date: Today - 1 July 2014

المكان :حُـمْـص - حـيّ الـوعـر
الزمان :الأمــس - 23 تـشـرين الأوّل 2014
Location: Homs - Al-Wa'er Neighborhood
Date: Yesterday - 23 October 2014 (ibid)





Figure: 28 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi posted on their Facebook page on with the following caption (ibid):

المكان :حُـمْـص - حـيّ الـوعـر
الزمان :اليوم - 1 أيّـار 2014
Location: Homs - Al-Wa'er Neighborhood
Date: Today - 1 May 2014

المكان :حُـمْـص - حـيّ الورشـــة

دخلت اليوم شاحنتين تابعتين للأمم المتحدة والهلال الأحمر العربي السوري محملتين بالمساعدات الغذائية والدوائية، كان من المفترض أن تدخل هذه PM حمص المحاصرة 5:20
الشاحنات وشاحنتين أخرتين عند الساعة التاسعة صباحاً ولكن خرق الهدنة المتكرر من قبل النظام اليوم حال دون ذلك، فشهد اليوم قصفاً استهدف أحياء حمص القديمة وخاصة الحميدية، دون الاكتراث لهيئة وموظفي الأمم
المتحدة المرافقين للقافلة، في محاولة لمنع وصول المساعدات للأهالي والمحاصرين داخل هذه المناطق ..وكل تلك المحاولات من قبل جيش
..الدفاع الوطني "الشبيحة "لمنع وصول الطعام للمحاصرين باءت بالفشل

Two UN and Syrian Red Crescent trucks transporting food and medical assistance entered at 5.20 pm. Two additional trucks were supposed to enter alongside these vehicles at 9:00 am, but the truce violation by the regime made that impossible. The Old City -- especially the Hamidiyeh neighbourhood -- of Homs was shelled, though the UN and its staff accompanying the convoy showed little concern for this. The shelling was an attempt to stop the aid from reaching the residents besieged in these areas. All these attempts by the National Defence Forces (shabiha) to stop food from reaching the besieged people ended in failure.

المكان :حمـص - حـي الـحـمـيـديــة
الزمان :الـيـوم - 8 شبـــاط 2014 الساعة 5:20 مساءً
Location: Homs - Al_Hamidiya Neighborhood
Date: Today - 8 February 2014 5:20



Figure: 29 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi posted on their Facebook page on with the following caption^ (ibid)

Figure: 30 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi posted on their Facebook page on with the following caption (ibid):

المكان :حمص - حيّ الوعر

Location: Homs City - Al-Wa'er Neighborhood

الزمان :اليوم - 6 تشرين الأول 2013

Date: Today - 6 October 2013



Figure: 31 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi posted on their Facebook page on with the following caption (ibid):

المكان :حـمـص - حـي الـقـصـــور
Location: Homs City - Al-Qossur Neighborhood
الزمان :اليوم - 12 آب 2013
Date: Today - 12 August 2013



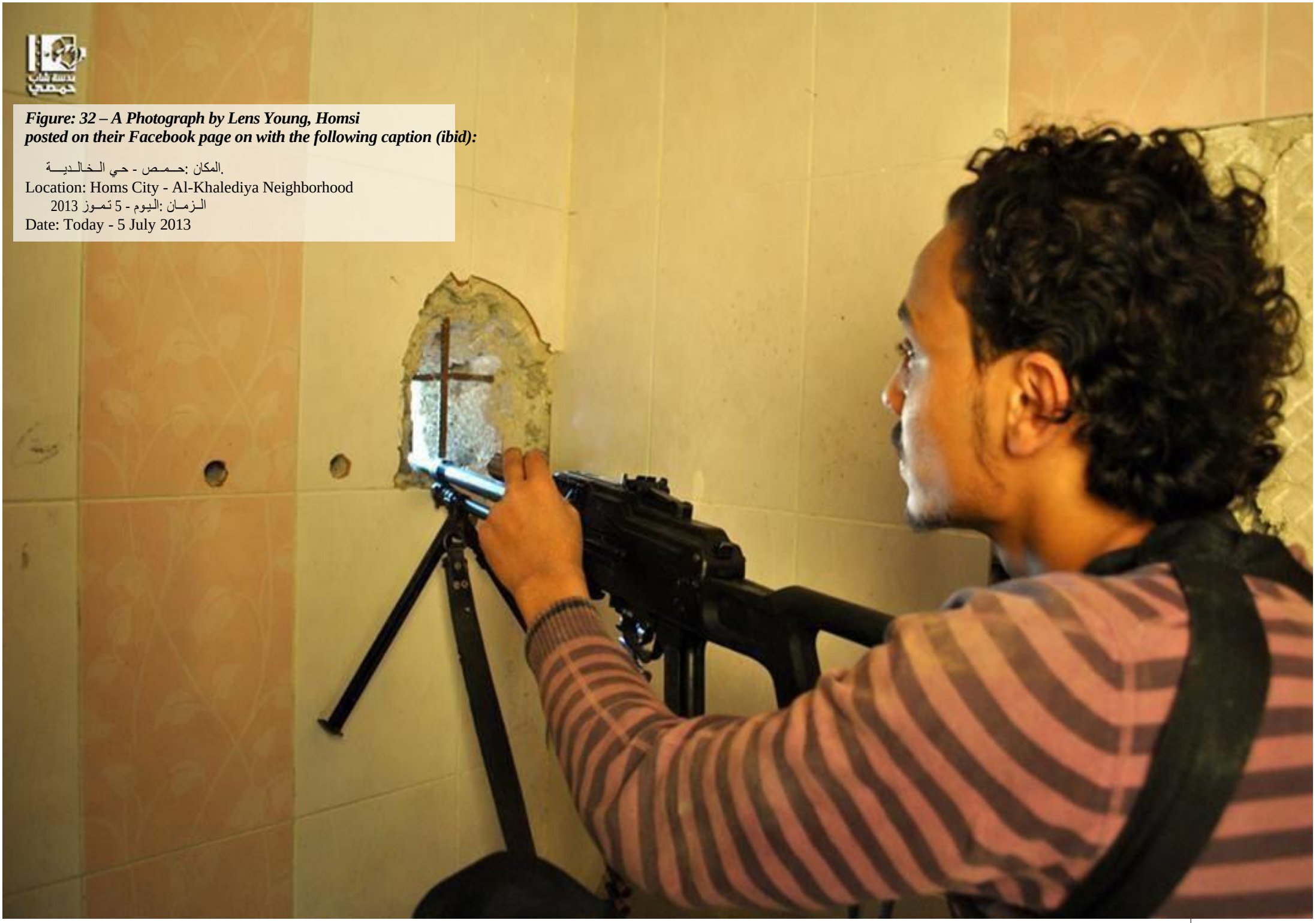


Figure: 32 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi posted on their Facebook page on with the following caption (ibid):

المكان: حـمـص - حي الـخـالـديـــة.
Location: Homs City - Al-Khalediya Neighborhood
الـزمـان: اليوم - 5 تمـوز 2013
Date: Today - 5 July 2013



Figure: 33 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi
posted on their Facebook page on with the following caption (ibid):

المـشفـى الـوطـني | the National Hospital
الـيـوم | Today
4 Feb 2013



Figure: 34 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi
posted on their Facebook page on with the following caption (ibid):

الإنشاءات - حاجز السفير | Insha'at - Safeer Checkpoint قبل قليل |
A While Ago
23 / 12 / 2012



Figure: 35 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi posted on their Facebook page on with the following caption (ibid):

الوعر | Al Wa'ar
اليوم | Today
3 / 12 / 2012



Figure: 36 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi posted on their Facebook page on with the following caption (ibid):

. . حمص القديمة الآن .. !
. يـــــتبع

July 14, 2012

Old Homs now..!

To be continued



Figure: 37 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi posted on their Facebook page on with the following caption (ibid):

.. شعب لا يهزم 🙂

احدى القذائف التي تمطر حمص القديمة

2012. 7. 5| الآن One of the shells that rained down on Old Homs..

An unbeatable people.

حمص مدينة العراقة والتاريخ

المدينة الأثرية التي يعود تاريخها لمئات السنين بأسواقها الأثرية و قصورها و بدور عبادتها . هذه المدينة الذي تلذذ .

النظام بتدمير وطمس معالمها من سوق التجار الأثري إلى قصر الزهراوي الذي أتخذه النظام متراس لعمليات القتل منذ مدة

النظام البربري ...الذي لم يفرق بين التاريخ والحاضر ,بين المسجد أو الكنيسة ,بين الرجل أو الطفل أو المرأة .

حمص ..قسماً لنعمرك و نرممك من جديد ,وإن دمروا جدرانك السود ...فأضلاعنا هي الجدران .

حمص القديمة – أحد القصور الأثرية /اليوم

(تم ترتيب قذائف الهاون و قذائف دبابة الـ ت 72 بجانب أحد التحف من قصر جوليا دومنا وبشكل تمثيلي لا يعبر عن أدنى مستوى من الواقع الذي تعيشه مدينتنا المحاصرة)

Homs is a city of tradition and history

The ancient city, which dates back hundreds of years, with its ancient markets, palaces, and places of worship.

This is a city whose landmarks the regime took pleasure in destroying and obliterating, from the ancient merchant market to Al-Zahrawi Palace, which the regime has used as a rampart for its killing operations for some time.

The barbaric regime...that did not differentiate between history and the present, between a mosque or a church, between a man, a child, or a woman.

Homs... We swear to revive you and restore you again, and if they destroy your black walls... then our sides are the walls.

Old Homs - one of the ancient palaces / today

(Mortar shells and T-72 tank shells were arranged next to one of the antiques from Julia Domna Palace in a manner

My representation does not express the slightest level of the reality our city is experiencing

- Al-Waar neighborhood



Figure: 38 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi posted on their Facebook page on with the following caption mentioned above (ibid).



Figure: 39 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi posted on their Facebook page on with the following caption mentioned above.

Bab Al Tuorkman | باب التركمان
Yesterday | الأمس
9 / 8 / 2012



Figure: 40 – A Photograph by Lens Young, Homsi posted on their Facebook page on with the fo llowing caption mentioned above (ibid).

باب التركمان | Bab Al Tuorkman
الأمس | Yesterday
9 / 8 / 2012

عدسة شاب حمصي

And just in case, we had forgotten about the 'exquisite corpse'-ness of the onlife of the Syrian revolution, I wanted to us to quickly meet this cat – well, because, its a cat and they rule our world – but also because both the caption presented here, and the quote from an interview with Salma (one of the founding members of the group in Homs) that gives it some context, is a not-so-gentle reminder for us about how the onlife takes a life of its own, beyond the intentions of the producers, and in fact, sometimes to add to their injury.

"Young Homsi's lensers were also surprised by international outcry over an image of a wounded cat, unable to use its back legs after being hit by shrapnel. ***"We were angry at the beginning because they never cared what happened to humans. But when an animal got injured, there was all this interest."***

The group nevertheless followed up on the cat's treatment at a field hospital until a final photo was posted of the cat walking normally.

The story garnered a large following as Facebook users debated the priority of animal rights in the context of war, prompting Young Homsi to post a public statement about the controversy".

صورة آخرى / Another photo
حمص / Homs
باب التركمان / Bab AlTorikman

. القطة المشلولة وهي تعالج بإحدى المشافي الميدانية ..هي ذاتها التي يعالج بها أبناء هذا الحي الذين يتعرضون للإصابات المختلفة ..برصاص أو قذائف النظام السوري
. وبسبب النقص الحاد للأدوية والأطباء في هذه الأحياء فقد عولجتْ بشكل تخديري ..بعد أن فشلت العديد من المحاولات في إخراج شظية الهاون التي أستقرت في ظهرها
. وللعلم :أننا عالجنا هذه القطة وهي من بين العديد من الحيوانات التي نعالجها في كل يوم عـال
. جناها من مبدأ إنسانيتنا و أخلاقنا وتعاليم ديننا ...و ليس بسبب قيام العالم وقعوده بشأنها ,فالعالم بأكمله لم يعد يعني لنا بشيء

The paralysed cat being treated in one of the make-shift field hospitals in the city .. This field hospital is in fact where the locals of the neighborhood are treated when injured by regime fire or regime shelling. ***There is a severe lack of medicines and doctors in this neighborhood, but the cat was treated under anaesthetic as several attempts were made to remove the mortar shell shrapnel from her back without anaesthetic but it was unsuccessful.***

It should be noted: We treated this cat, as with several animals daily, on the basis of humanity and caring for life and our surroundings. ***The cat was treated on the basis we cannot watch any life - animal or human - suffer. We did not treat the cat because of your reactions or the uproar and messages received from animal rights organisations and the international world. Trust, the world and its opinions means nothing to us inside Syria anymore.***

And from where I stand[4] as a non-Syrian, non-West-Asian, non-Arabic-speaking, non-'area expert', non-'war-studies scholar', non-'advocacy specialist' and non-'legal practitioner' (to name a few), there was/is no better way for me to practice said solidarity – to care-full-y engage with not just the 'content' that is being produced but the lived experience of the archivists themselves (the individuals and the collectives), beyond/ outside/ from within these stories, i.e., "to understand not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, [and] what they now think they did" (Pinchevski, 2011) through this performance of "social intervention" (ibid) that operationalises "archiving as a repository of resistance" (Bailony, 2021; Moosavi, 2024) – than to dive into one particular texture of content being generated: **creative memory**. After all, it is only fitting that a revolution which 'began' with graffiti (remember, from page: i of this prologue?), found in creative expression, "not only a way of surviving the violence, but (also) of challenging it" (Halasa et al., 2014).

Think of Sana Yazigi[v] and her team for the Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution project here for instance. They have been working, since 2013, with/ through collecting over 12630 "original materials translated into both English and French from Arabic, including graffiti, murals, drawings, sculptures, videos, photos, poems, songs, caricatures, theatrical works, and texts produced during and in response to the revolution", spanning across at least 200 different locations within the country, in their attempt to write about and archive, "***stories of the Syrian people and their epic experiences, through which they regained the meaning of their social, political, and cultural lives, repossessed the public space, practiced, and experimented the act and responsibility of belonging to it,"*** focusing especially on the role, impact and legacy of "artistic Syrian resistance". Or of SHAP (the Syrian Heritage Archive Project), housed at the Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin, has received, processed, archived and researched through and with "over 270,000 items from more than 80 collectors around the world" – "photos, plans, maps and reports" – that document "Syrian cultural and natural treasures". In the last decade, they have added over 4000 new locations on their virtual map of Syria making 115000 digitised items that speak to/of "almost all areas of Syrian archeology and building history, its geography, culture and last but not least contemporary histories" publicly available, creating a dataset that has already become vitally important in the on-going reconstruction efforts vis-à-vis "Syria's destroyed monuments" and "thus creates values for the future" (Mollenhauer, 2013). Or, think of Lara Al-Hassan and her team for the Syria Untold project here for instance. They have been working, since 2012, with/ through collecting over 9000 "original materials translated into both English and Spanish from Arabic, including personal stories, essays, documentaries, animations, photos, poems, songs, interviews, and texts produced during and

[4] I will discuss the landscape of this 'where' quite extensively in Field Note: 5.

in response to the revolution," spanning across at least 150 different locations within the country, in their attempt to write about and archive, "the untold stories of the Syrian people and their profound experiences, through which they regained their voices and narratives, reclaimed the public discourse, practiced, and experimented the act and responsibility of telling their own stories," focusing especially on the role, impact and legacy of "local Syrian storytelling." And these are just the projects that self-identify as 'archives'. There are thousands – if not millions – of other projects, initiatives, and efforts that stand in strong solidarity with these, especially if/when we begin to count individually and/or by-group and/or internationally ***contingent, emergent, and designed compositions*** of this archiving drive for user-generated-content within Syria, and (partially?) beyond it.

In fact, I think it would only be a marginal exaggeration if we said that globally martial violence has recently exploded into public spaces at an unprecedented scale. ***Digital content*** – artistic and/or slice-of-life testimonies, both – from Occupied Palestinian Territories, Ukraine, Yemen, Myanmar, Iran, Mexico, Kashmir, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Haiti, Moldova, Azerbaijan and so on, much like that from Syria, ***has breached participatory-media infrastructures with such velocity*** – both, in terms of the speed of constant and instantaneous re-circulation and the ***networked*** directionalities of the content generated – ***that it has become quite an influential occupant of the sensory regimes through which we access these violent/violence realities.*** We (recently/) now see, hear, touch, taste, speak of and about, access, process, understand, conceptualise, participate in and against these conflicts and their violences, in and against martial politics, *through* this digital content, i.e.

through these 'expanded images' that	through this digital content that
(i) work with/ within/ on the deeply 'entangled' 'relationalities' of our current worldings,	- works with/ within/ on our Social-Media-ly Constructed Reality
(ii) and allow their narrators to find and develop aesthetically & affectively charged 'translations' for their 'embodied experiences' of the martial,	- and allows individual user's generating this content to craft their own virtual testimonies of their lived experiences of martial violence
we see the emergence of a fiercely vulnerable 'on/'life' for any 'captured' violent/ violence event/ instantiation,	we see the emergence of competing, contrasting, complimenting, conflating, diverging, detailed, descriptive, localized, records being archived for every individual instantiation of violence,

and in participating in this collaging of different on/lives these images become 'portals' through which we - as witnesses – researchers and humans – can gain an intimacy with the daily machinations of war's injurious processes.	and in that regard, this content can be operationalised to access different lifeworlds of martial violence.

This is the 'on'life' – this collage-esque ***"exquisite corpse"*** (Zalewski, 2013) of competing and/or complimenting realities that are constantly if not consistently (re)generating endless sprawling circuitries of violence/violent experiences being churned out through social-media and through that infinitely mutating and reproducing the life of the conflict itself/ living through the conflict itself, while also being reproduced by it – ***that,*** (as I mentioned on page: vii) ***I think, demands, repetitively, across its different and differential iterations*** (be it the form and extent of the mediation itself or differences of and in the socio-political contexts) ***that we "critically (re)imagine"*** (Mhurchú & Shindo, 2016) ***our very "figurations"*** (Haraway, 2004; Weber, 2016) ***of war***.

It is as if the social-media-ly mediated archival drive of the 'onlife' of the Syrian Revolution itself wants to give us a novel/different/another opportunity to enact International Relation's (IR) "creative and imaginative" disciplinary desires by creating an opening for "relentless" rigorous conceptual "reinvention" of 'war' and its violences demanding that we take seriously its potentialities as a 'foundational assumption'/ 'the starting point'/ 'the trigger observation' (in terms of inductive reasoning) for our discussions of/about war, its figurations within, and beyond, the discipline and the metaphysical, ontological, epistemological, methodological, and ethical stakes of reimagining those concept-worlds/ conceptual worldings. That is, of course, if we agree with Mhurchú & Shindo, in thinking that ***IR (too), itself, already demands that we constantly – if not consistently – keep critically (re)imagining our very figurations of war***, i.e., that ***"The discipline of International Relations (IR) is driven by a desire to be critical and imaginative… Once introduced, concepts and theories are constantly under scrutiny. They are relentlessly re-invented to address the inadequacy of the old ones, to replace them and, eventually perhaps, to be replaced by others. In this regard, despite many strands of theories and 'isms' gracing their work, one of the underlying aspirations shared by IR scholars is arguably to possess and exercise a 'critical imagination'"*** (Mhurchú & Shindo, 2016).



Figure: 41 – Artwork by Sara Shamma
Title: Butcher (2014),
from the Collection: World Civil War Portraits

(Shamma, Sara. Butcher. Painting. Sara Shamma Website. 2014)

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[5] Think back to the green buses we saw in the flipbook, to figures 18 and 19. Those green buses, in that exact neon, have – through the Revolution – become the chromato-material signifier for civilian displacement. They are at once, often, the only way for people to survive their martial realities, and an extremely violent martial reality in themselves. The choice of death or home is an… unthinkable one. And that is why I think these two different 'aesthetics' of this digital content, need to be encountered in tandem: the photographs from Lens Young, their captions, their details can show us, for instance, in granular detail how displacement occurred, how it was sensed as a martial reality across the different dimensions of lived experience, while this artwork by Sara Shamma, her green dress, shows us how she felt from within that injury- how she felt being displaced, and how she made sense of it. It is only together than they can help us make sense-able the violence of the Revolution as a "dimension of living" (Nordstrom & Robben, 1995).

Or, at least, they both (the 'onlife' of the Syrian Revolution and IR itself) seems to demand this of me.

These two entangled desires then, I think, re-open for us some of the most perineal questions in IR: What, why, and how do write about 'war' and its violences? Whose wars do we write about and when and where do we write of them? How do we access, articulate, understand, theorise and communicate these war-stories? And what shapes would these stories take if we operationalise this social-media-ly mediated 'war-knowledge' and 'war-knowledge'-making as our point of access and mapped martial realities by thinking through this user-generated content?

They beg us to take these testimonials and the martial realities they inhabit, (re)produce and (re)present, to engage with them thoroughly, to entrench ourselves within their lifeworlds and critically reimagine what we think of the martial, and ask again: ***How do we encounter, comprehend and translate the 'living through' of/in the violence of a revolution? How do we stand witness to – sense and make sense of/ encounter, articulate, comprehend, conceptualise, and memorialise – the 'embodied experience', the actual daily machinations, of this violent/ violence reality? What figurations of 'war' and its violences can any given form of witnessing generate/ is said witnessing grounded in?***

Most importantly, perhaps, ***if/once we do take the plunge and commit to working from within these testimonies, to engaging with them, and translate war-knowledge from within their war-experiences and their injuries, this 'onlife' haunts us with questions like: What does war *feel* like? What does martial violence do to a person's senses and sensibilities? How does it practically perform actual injury on human bodies, within which socio-political landscapes, through which materialities and technologies, amid which processes?*** What does it even mean to measure, map, and understand martial violence from within these injuries of totalitarian oppression and the audacity of resistance? How do we do justice to accessing, tracking, and tracing this 'lived' dimension of autocratic terror, across both its registers: its manifest violence, and the radical hope of survival? ***How do these mangled bodies, themselves, sense and make sense of this injury?*** How do they give expression to this war-experience: to living through – and with – wounding, stench-retching, marching, pliers, thumbscrews, spit hoods, prison cells, boats with starboard seats reserved for corpses, bombed-out neighbourhoods, mushroom farming in tunnel-playgrounds… to experiencing violence with such brutal intimacy across every mode of being (be it corporeal, sensory, aesthetic, affective, material, semiotic, social, and/or spacio-temporal)? ***And what can we (as humans & students of 'International Relations')***

learn about war – i.e., what kind of war-knowledges can we generate – if we begin our war-stories from within their own articulations of their embodied experiences of the martial?[6]

[6] Before we continue, I want to make sure that we are on the same page about one thing: ***Non-Representation***. Though we will navigate our way through the non-representation sea-scape – and its border-waters: emergence, complexity, processuality, and relationality in Field Note: 1 – for now, what we need to focus our "sights" on (both in terms of our vision, and in terms of the celestial-navigation technique for calculating one's current position vis-a-vis the Earth's geographical surface) is the non-representational texture of how 'testimony' and 'history' are being deployed in this text.

*"We shall meet again in *Damascus* as though we had buried the sun there…"*
- The Pastoral, in The Country without a Post Office!
(Ali, 2013)

I borrowed this epigraph (and morphed it ever so slightly) from one of Agha Shahid Ali's most intensely charged (I think) poems: The Pastoral. Through the poem, and in the collection as a whole, Ali binds to words the ***lived experiences of exile, of the loss of a home, of the longing that incites for a place-of-one's-own, and of the ferocity of the nostalgia that festers in our bones***. Though this poem was written for Srinagar – for that for that most intensely intimate moment of reunion between someone deeply loved and the poet himself, in Srinagar – I think that the poem can take up residence in Damascus as well. ***This isn't a comparison, or a question of equitability, it is a matter of rhythm, refrain, of an echo.***

i.e., that moment of 'vasl' (وصل) which because of its potentialities for philosophical-relational-emotional transcendence and transformation has become *the* absolute motif for the 'instance of union' between two beings, entities, relationalities, worlds, worldings, such that they both become a 'continuation' of the other, in Urdu poetry, and finds echoes in both, the Arabic 'mutasil' (متصل): 'connected' which stands as its current literal translation – and also given that 'mutasil' migrated to Urdu to become 'muttasil' (متصل): 'adjoining', 'adjacent', or 'touching' – and of course, the Arabic 'wasal' (وَصْلة) that literally translates to an 'instance of connection', or 'attachment', but is typically utilized in reference to an alphabetic variant of the letter hamza, or as a name, from which it is etymologically derived.

These are, both, lands whose very spatial, temporal, aesthetic, affective & social dimensions reverberate with war, conflict, blood, loss, separation, militarization, massacre, grief… crooning to a rhythm of 'dead post offices' and 'letters' & 'wills' found in a bedside 'drawer' in a 'cedar stand'- the only tactile memory of those that have long since left us. But these are also lands of survival, of hope, of longing, of nostalgia, of resilience, of a deeply rooted desire for reconciliation (of land, home, others and self)… lands lilting with a refrain of 'shirts torn up to make tourniquets', and 'ivy warming into roses'. ***Going (back) to Srinagar always made me feel like this; like "Humankind can bear everything;" but perhaps only when we, "get news of our death after the world's." And from what I have seen, heard, and felt (through the three 'little Syria's and their many Syrians) it feels the same - it feels just as surreal - for and in Damascus.***

Think back to pages ii. and iii, to the testimonies of Mouawiya Syasneh and Bashir Abazayd'.

Or of 'vasl', here, in that little 'sticky note' right above.

Or take these words into consideration when thinking through Khalil Younes's paintings: especially, 'Our Saigon Execution', 2011, 40 x 30 cm, Ink on paper and/or I am from Syria, 2012, 40 x 50 cm, Ink on paper.

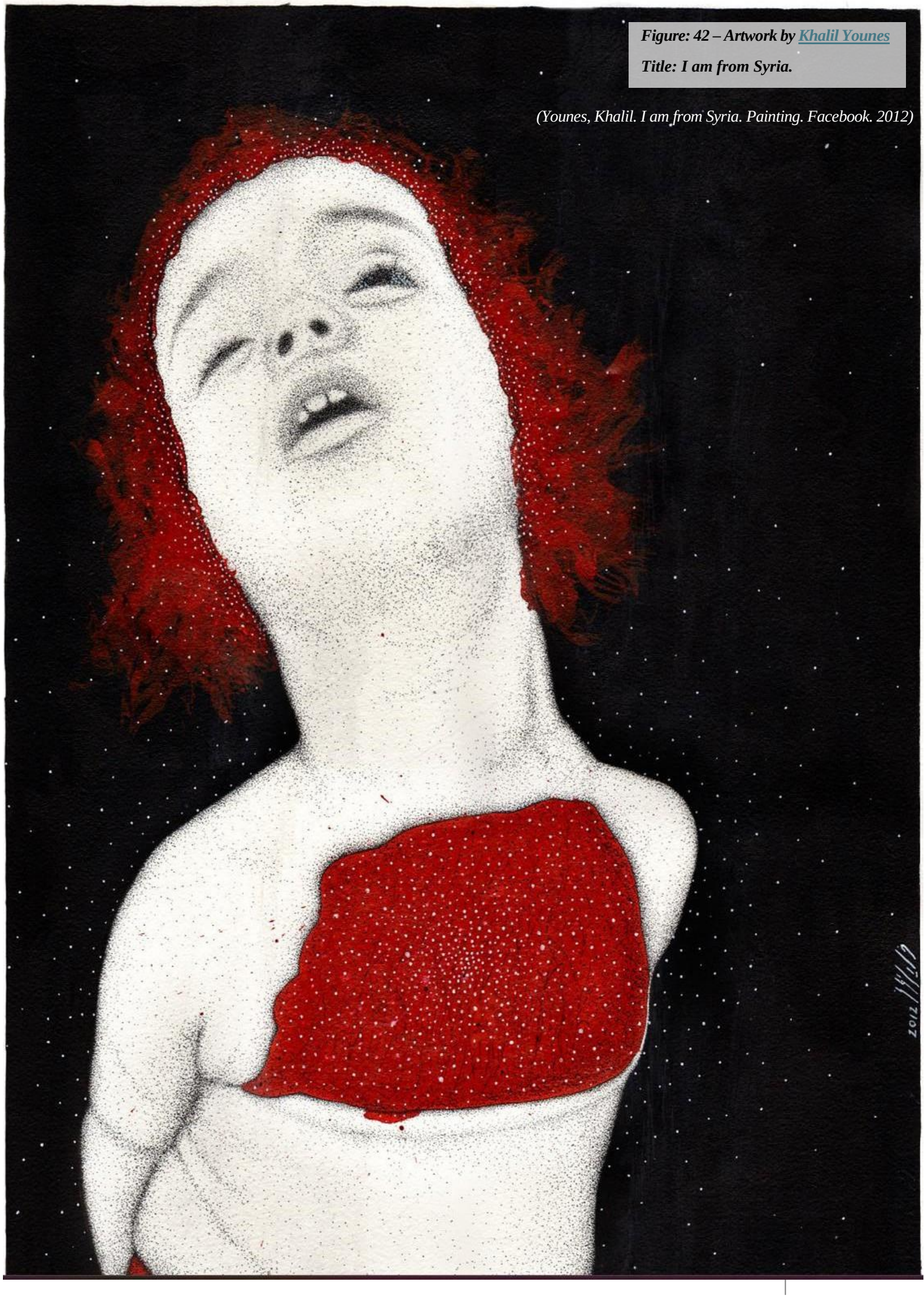


Figure: 42 – Artwork by Khalil Younes

Title: I am from Syria.

(Younes, Khalil. I am from Syria. Painting. Facebook. 2012)



Figure: 43 – Artwork by Khalil Younes

Title: 'Our Saigon Execution', 2011, 40 x 30 cm, Ink on Canvas.

(Younes, Our Saigon Execution. Painting. Facebook. 2011)

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[7] Khalil Younes' "I am from Syria" and "Our Siagon Execution" are both, and neither, meant to be (i) representative of the experiences of all Syrians, or (ii) representative/ equivalent to/ comparable to – in any quantifiable/ measurable sense – Eddie Adam's photojournalistic 'capture' of the moment Officer Nguyễn Văn Lém was shot/ executed. What is felt here, what is sensed and rendered sensible, is a 'feeling'/ an 'affect' that there are some echoes, some refrains, some rhythms, across these very distinct, localized, individual moments/ events/ instantiations of violence – and the 'moments' they sought to capture, the desires of those aesthetics and visuals – and the 'martial injury' of it all. Like with Mouawiya Syasneh and Bashir Abazayd's testimonies that were quite different from one another, but had multiple repetitions, or vasl and muttasil and their linguistic journeys, none of these instances of violence can be used as a marker/ placeholder/ replacement/ representative for *all* instances of violence within that *category* simply because there is no such categorical thinking in a rhizomatic-ly Syrial world. Each and every moment of living with/ through/ from within violence is 'unique', but at the same time, it is intimately entangled with martial (and other) politics and politiques of all forms, has an affinity/ acquaintance with other violent instantiations through echoes of practice, or materialities, or performativities, or affects, and/or has partial connections to other violent – and other – worldings.

Think about this through Tamam Azzam's art for instance (presented below).

"The only thing that I can do as an artist is to try to make evocative and thoughtful images relating to what I have witnessed, in order to give the world a better understanding of the situation.

One work in particular seems to have resonated with people. I had posted the work Freedom Graffiti online, from the series Syrian Museum, and then left my house; it went viral. When I came back a few hours later, I was bombarded on every social network by journalists and by people I didn't know.

The work features a famous painting by Klimt. I chose it as an icon of love, *a way of looking for the stories of love behind this wall that was completely obliterated by the machinery of war. In Syria, the spaces that once held windows or doors must have borne witness to thousands of stories behind them; now, they are just voids. (Think back to what Muhannad Hamoud mentioned in the caption for Figure: 12 vis-à-vis the 'sofa and windows' that he took photographs of in Homs. There it is again, here in Azzam's work too, the desire for intimacy with stories of living within/ from within the violent/ violence realities of martial violence- to look at - and make the world look at - the "open wounds" in/ of the Syrian Revolution.)*

The Syrian Museum series was my attempt to highlight [a condition in which] the whole world could be interested in art and blindly neglect the fact that two hundred people were killed every day in Syria, at the time. Other works in the series feature famous artworks by Warhol, Van Gogh, da Vinci, Goya, Dali, Matisse, Gauguin, Munch, and Klimt. From one perspective, the series' emphasis on Western art history conveys a fact—that we are all citizens of the same world—and equality in all things, including culture, is important to me. From another perspective, I felt that these instantly recognizable images of European masterworks could be borrowed to draw attention to the tragedy of Syria. Goya created a work to immortalize the killing of hundreds of innocent Spanish citizens on May 3, 1808. But how many May 3rds do we have in Syria today?"

Here, then, non-representation becomes non-representative along all both registers:

- *(i) There are no connotations of representation as in 'standing for' or representative of*
- *(ii) There are no connotations of representation as 'signifying' a fixed meaning/ reality/ truth, i.e., as 'signifying'*

And it is therefore: (I) more of a 'sensibility' here (one from within which the very congruence spoken of above^ is either expanded, twisted, rejected, de-emphasized, 'made strange' to instead bring in the agency of the representation itself, and not just the represented or the power-ties that tether them,) (II) such that it allows for us to work with and through realities/objects/subjects as "emergent, relational, complex" (processual, entangled and collage-esque, here), (III) experiencing them (as encountering here) through materialities, sensory regimes, technologies, spatialities, temporalities, affective regimes, aesthetic regimes, embodiment and so on, rather than thinking of/ about them as 'comparable data points'. We will revisit the benefits and limitations of this approach, and precisely what the *insert-profanity-of-choice-here* I mean by all of this in Field Note: 1.



Figures: 44 and 45 – Artwork by [Tammam Azzam] from his collection, the Syria Museum

Title for the Artwork at the top: Goya's The 3rd of May, 1808 \| 2012 \| *(Azzam, Tammam. Digital Illustrations. Website. 2012)*

Title for the Artwork at the bottom: Paul Gauguin's Tahitian Women (On the Beach) \| 2012 \| *(ibid).*





Figures: 46 – Artwork by Tammam Azzam from his collection, the Syria Museum

Title: Klimt, (the) Freedom Graffiti

(Azzam, Tammam. Digital Illustrations. Website. 2012)

These, then, are the desires and the very questions that drive this text: they are 'how' and 'what' questions concerned solely with 'translation' and 'speculation'. And, in/through this text – in/through my attempt at designing a (vii) "haunting" (Auchter, 2014)***, "speculative"*** (Lisle, 2021; Lisle et al., 2017) ***experiment of/ in "empirical philosophy"*** (Mol, 2003) – ***I intend to comply with these desires in the strongest terms I can***.

Simply put, there is no drive here to 'explain', to 'answer', or 'critique', or 'represent', or 'capture' anything and/or no desire to craft a 'capital-T-theory' – or even 'capital-A-arguments' – that can/should/must be tested/ verified/ confirmed/ proven or falsified. This dissertation, my interlocutor's works and lived experiences, our collaborative concept-work, the story itself, none of it are in any way, shape or form an 'explanation' for/ of martial violence, or beheadings, or a 'theory' about 'embodied experience' of the 'martial', or a thesis on 'political violence' in Syria, or a manual for conducting Syrial research, or an example of working with/ through violence's relational ontologies.

The text is simply a description. It is a performance.

At it's best it is an anthology- a collection of war/injury-stories, grounded in the self-declarations of injured bodies themselves, geared towards archiving these war-experiences and translating them into a form of war-knowing. At it's worst it is 'merely' an exercise in critical re-imagination and world-building- an opening to enact a particular understanding of martial 'injury' and an opportunity for immersion into that potentiality.

All it asks is that you float through it – surrender a little to the current of its aesthetics – and allow it to take you to places where you can affectively experience what the injured bodies living within these pages have to say. "Rip, Cut and Stitch" (Choi et al., 2023) this war-story through your own injured bodies and their drives, as you read it, making sense of it all, as you see fit. Just buy into our Syrialism – my interlocutor's, our injured bodies', and mine – for a first encounter and if, and/or when, something resonates with you, take a piece of our injuries, our war-stories, and our Syrial sensibilities, with you. **Just, allow yourself to consider the possibility that martial violence, and its injuries, can potentially be 'felt' as Syrial and that this Syrialism can potentially tell us an interesting war-story or two. Allow this text to be a portal to 'experiencing' martial violence, intimately, as a "dimension of living"** (Nordstrom & Robben, 1995)**, at least briefly.**

Artist-Activist Profiles for/ from the Prologue

[i] mariam cooke

For me, miriam cooke, and her work, have been/ and continue to remain & keep becoming, the Polaris when it comes to writing in/ of/ from/ about/ through Syria. She has spent decades – that feel like lifetimes honestly – unravelling the knotted metaphysics-s of gender, war, and culture in the Arab/ West Asian world, and I truly believe that her contributions have transformed how we sense, make sense of, understand and (re)figure Arab literature, Islamic feminism, and the cultural landscapes of conflicts. She has, at least in my eyes, crafted a career – not only as a scholar but as an activist, being, (if she would allow me such leeway to characterise her as such), an activist-artist herself – who *truly* believes in the power of stories – stories lived, stories written, stories remembered, and stories forgotten – to shape our lives, worlds, worldings and realities.

The first time I met her writing it was in 2012 through an Al Jazeera article of all things! It was an account of her then recent trip to Mardin, Turkey. She and her husband, Bruce, were traveling close to the Syrian border at the time when Syrian and Kurdish refugees were starting to pour into the region. She had me from the very first 'particular' detail — the moment they had visited Mor Gabriel, a monastery that had "opened its doors to Syrian refugees" and almost immediately seen, "behind open doors" how entire families, exhausted and displaced, were sprawled across beds in the monastery's rooms, waiting for Istanbul to process their journeys to Europe. I was hers. I was theirs. I was there, at least, as there as a reader can be, through the way that she wrote.

It felt like I was with her when later that week, as she sat dining by the Marmara, four men—young, one on crutches, and all wearing green stoles—passed by and found out what was written on their stoles: "Death rather than humiliation." These were soldiers from the Free Syrian Army, each with a story of injury, defection from Assad's forces and Syrvival. One even showed her an x-ray of his leg filled with shrapnel. The stories themselves would have been enough for me to gorge on, if I am being entirely honest. But cooke, in those most cooke-ian of ways (that I can only describe the ability to masterfully orchestrate 'encounters' through/in/with/within even the smallest of moments-of-startle), took us a step further, pushing us straight into the deep end of the moral complexity of this encounter. Were these men heroes, standing up to tyranny? Or were they misguided, swept up in a resistance without fully grasping the price to be paid? And that, to me, is cooke's magic: the deep human-/-ity /-ness that seems to explode out of every word/ thought/ feeling she inks, and the near-maddening but truly embodied ever-morphing socio-political-moral-liminality of that experience.

I also think this capturing of human-lived-ness is the red thread across all her works/ workings, be it in "War's Other Voices: Women Writers on the Lebanese Civil War (1988)" where her writing continually circles back to how individuals, particularly women, navigate war and oppression as a "lived dimension" or, Women Claim Islam (2001), for example, a personal favourite till date, which redefined how I think about Islamic feminism, about women as writers, about women and their identities, about the positionalities from which we write, and the positionalities that we make space for, allowing ourselves – and others – room to identify with them, through writing, especially when you read through this book in tandem with "Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing" (1990/2005, co-edited with Margot Badran). Not to mention, of course, that I do think it is impossible to have 'studied' Syria and not read "Dissident Syria (2007)" – the first in my tribe I would say, if I could ever be so bold as to trace the

lineage of this manuscript to anywhere remotely near the camps of her work – which explored how 'art', particularly Syrian art, was both a form of dissent and co-optation under the Assad regime.
But Dancing in Damascus – the book to which I owe the dedication for this section and the introduction to dabke (دبكة) – is, even with her own oeuvre, something else entirely — it's a testament to the sheer blinding, brilliant, storm-ish-ly whirling, power of creative resilience. In the book she tells us how graffiti artists, dancers, and performers turned their art into resistance during the height of the Syrian Revolution. It's power-full work, focusing on how creative culture becomes an act, space and mode of survival and defiance, a "dimension of living" in its own right, in the face of unimaginable violence.
And that 'fact', undoubtedly, forms the most foundational assumption – and contribution – of this manuscript as well.

References: (Cooke, 1987, 1995, 2016, 2018b, 2018a, 2019, 2020, 2023; Cooke & Cooke, 2002)

[ii] Faraj Bayraqdar
In contrast to how quickly I found mariam, pretty much around the same time I found Syria (as you will see in Encountering Syrialism), I came to Faraj Bayraqdar, embarrassingly late.
His words transported me to a world that was both intensely personal and universally resonant. Bayraqdar is more than a poet; he is a witness to the tumultuous history of Syria, a voice that articulates the pain, resilience, and hope of a people enduring the scars of war. His work embodies the complexities of identity, exile, nostalgia, resilience and the yearning for freedom—a reflection of the struggles many of us have come to know too well.
Born in 1951 in Homs, Bayraqdar's early life was deeply shaped by (if you would indulge me here) the Syrialism of Syria and its socio-political culture. To me then, it is not merely coincidental that his poetry erupted in the late 1960s, a time when the Arab/ West Asian world was experiencing significant socio-political shifts/ eruptions of its own. But it was Hafez al-Assad, and his oppressions, that I think ultimately thrust him into living wholly as an artist-activist-in-exile. It was under al-Assad's carceral-archipelago (read, "torture archipelago") that Bayraqdar was arrested (1980) for his political activism and spent nearly a decade in prison. And that is how I have to know him/ of him: as a poet who is more than a poet; he is a 'witness' who *really* saw, smelled, felt, heard, absorbed, experienced, lived, through the atrocious machinations of the al-Assad-ian political machine, a 'survivor' whose body, self, world, worldings, and very being was un-made and re-made by the sheer violence of this injurious infrastructure, a 'voice' that articulate-d/-s the pain, resilience, and hope of a people enduring the scars of war. His work, for me, breathes life/ brings living (in)to our discussions and understandings of the complexities of identity, exile, and the yearning for freedom, reflecting on living through violent-ly fractured (both in terms of severity and cause) identities – a reflection, that is at once deeply Syrian and martial-ly universal. It is imbued with a profound sense of nostalgia for a home/land/ home-land/ homeland scarred and scorched by conflict, and yet it also pulses with an undercurrent of resilience. It was Bayraqdar whose work, first, reminded me of the poems from Kashmir (of Agha Shahis Ali particularly whom you will meet in the epithet for Encountering Syrialism) and gave me the change to feel/sense my way through the echoes across those spaces, across his spaces and mine, across our lived experiences whether they were eerily similar and thoroughly different. In Bayraqdar's own words, for some of us, "In every sigh, a homeland weeps".
Like cooke, Bayraqdar too, has an uncanny ability to articulate the struggles of live-ing-through-violence-real-bodied-Syrians, allowing us, his readers, to glimpse the humanity behind the headlines. But for me, what is spectacular (both, striking and relating to a spectacle/ performance that forces the viewer to stop

and really look) about his poetry is his self-reflection. Bayraqdar writes in and of blood, but it is as often his own and it is of those whom he wishes to commemorate. He is, to me, the quintessential Syrian/Syrial 'Vulnerable Observer' (from Field Note: 1). These lines, here, for example on the first page of the Prologue were taken from his collection, "The Betrayals of Language and Silence". In the collection he talks to us about the struggle to articulate one's experiences amidst violence and oppression, revealing how language can both empower and betray us, how it can both betray us — in those moments when words fail us or mislead us and all we are left with, but not by choice, is a screaming silence — and also be our only tool/ method/ way/ road to reclaiming our worlds and selves. This is a theme we will keep re-turning to throughout the manuscript.

P.S. – Bayraqdar's work and workings, at least to me, also serve as a bridge between the past and present, capturing the voices of those who have been silenced by the inherited brutality of al-Assad-ian dictatorship, i.e., it offers us a lens through which we can understand the depth of loss and the strength found in community across "not only" the plurality of Syrias that constitute the on-going revolution, but also their internal multiplicities across/ along the Father-Son-al-Assad-ian line of entanglement. So we will find our way back to him when we encounter Khaled al-Asaad's beheading later in the dissertation.

[iii] Samar Yazbek

"I have lived in exile — even if at that time I could not yet fully appreciate the raw cruelty of the demon in whose lap I grew up."

Yazbek's writing has always felt like a rebellion against silence to me — a defiant act of a sahafiyat (female journalists working within the West Asian context in particular*) in the face of an almost unbearably tyrannical regime and its oppressive societal norms. Her words are always raw, and they carry with them the weight of someone who deeply understands exile, home-land-less-ness, and un-belonging, in a profoundly personal and political sense. When I think of the "feminine rage will change/ save the world" trope, her work and working are usually upfront and centre, and her unwavering commitment to documenting the stark naked real-ity/-ness of human experience/ living from within the horrors of war is a testament to that.

Take her memoir for instance, "The Crossing: My Journey to the Shattered Heart of Syria". I had encountered a short-er/-ened version of some of the ideas in there in Malu's & Zaher's "Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution" already where they described her contribution to the anthology as an entry where the author, "writing a diary of the revolution, travels through northern Syria where the rebel groups have been holding off the regime and uncovers miraculously peaceful scenes of rural life." What began as 'just' that – notes and excerpts from the diaries she kept over the years, both as she activist-ly participated in the first four months of the "Syrian intifada" and as she clandestinely re-turned to Syria over and over post-exile (by literally squeezing through a hole in the fence on the Turkish border), became, what I can only describe (especially when read in tandem with "A Women in the Crossfire: Diaries of the Syrian Revolution" which preceded it by a few years) as one of the most potent political-memoirs of the experience of living, resisting and surviving war and its violences, especially exile, that I have come across. Yazbek, who considers herself first and foremost a story-teller, has painted this memoir by systematically dissecting the embodied experience of martial violence on herself, her loved ones, her surroundings, her social networks, on those she interacted with, on those she purposively didn't, on the socio-political fabric of Syrian culture and society in its multiplicities and pluralities and as a whole, and done it all in an intensely affective register. When she meets her interlocutors for instance, both in The Crossing and/or in

her journalism, she seems to engage deeply with the atrocities they have witnessed, and sometimes perpetrated, moving between the fronts and machinations of the war-ing machine and offering space and giving a voice to those who had none. Her reflections on the dead, for example, and the displaced, haunt me as much as they haunted her. This, the way she captures the emotional and psychological toll of living between worlds, or rather of living without worlds, but still somehow in one/ all of them, i.e. living through and within a world un-made and re-made by violence, is one of the most powerful aspects of her work.

And this becomes even more prominent when she talks about 'exile'. In The Crossing, her reportage felt personal because it was — her connection to the victims was visceral, immediate but in A Woman in the Crossfire we saw the workings of this 'personal'-ization/-lity. When she talks about her exile, for instance, (in the latter and elsewhere) she argues that her exile began long before the Syrian revolution, with the very first experiences of being alienated from her society, which came at seventeen, when she left her family's home to live independently. Her relative's words, "We had hoped a train would run you over," had, then, brutally severed whatever little had persisted of the umbilical cord that tied her to Jabel. Yazbek openly, defiantly, nakedly, 'fiercely vulnerably', makes sensible to us in those pages that she didn't just face exile as displacement from her country; she understood it as a deeper estrangement and un-tethered-ness from the 'social' of her birth, that her struggle against this "demon called society" began way before the demonstrations and bombings. And this constant state of being in-displacement, both, led her to and away from the only *real* home she ever knew: an affective community of those who knew how it *felt* to live through dis-place-ment/ un-place-ing built through and around storytelling.

For this being displaced was also mirrored in/ intensified by the clash she left was hauntingly present between her role as a writer and as an activist and she thought of this duality as another form of self-imposed exile, when the revolution "overturned her beliefs" about storytelling. "My true home was once the realm of storytelling" and the revolution, at least at the beginning, stripped her away from that home/ stripped that home away from her. Her exile was not only geographical and socio-cultural-political, it was also deeply embodied, psychological, material, technological, affective, aesthetic... 'lived'. In speaking of that time, she has repeatedly said that her identities—sahafiyat, novelist, activist—merged into one, and she became "a unified personality" during the war. It was this exile from her own plurality, this abandonment of the storyteller within her, that weighed heavily. She explained that, after years of focusing solely on activism, she felt as if she had banished herself from her own core as a writer. She had smothered the imaginative spirit that once allowed her to find solace and truth in stories. She no longer felt like she belonged anywhere, not even to herself, and her ability to write creatively was suffocated by the immediacy of activism. I, for one, am deeply deeply grateful and awestruck by her resilience and the fact that she did, finally, make her way back 'home' to storytelling.

And this idea—that storytelling is as much a home as any socio-physical space— needless to say resonates deeply with me. For Yazbek, as for many of us I think, who are constantly in-transit/ transition/ translation our identities as writers, activists, and scholars becomes the closest thing we have to a 'home', to belonging, any sense of stability, and to the most personal/ precious of the things we can share.

References: (Yazbek, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2016)

ال غنية هي سيرة الشعوب الي لا يس.تطيع أ حد أ ن يسجنها، فالهواء لا يسجن، وال غنية مثل كل الفنون هزمت الموت وهزمت [iv] المستبدين

"The song is the biography of peoples that no one can imprison, as the air cannot be imprisoned, and the song, like all arts, has defeated death and defeated tyrants."

- Maysoun Shuqair (Writer)

"Flow, oh tears of the eye" (سكابا يا دموع العين), the revolution-ary (of the revolution, and 'involving or causing complete change') reimagining of a traditional Skaba chant, is how I first met 'Street/ Protest Songs of the Syrian revolution'. This Syrial-ly/ Syrvival-ly twisted version of a culturally inveterate song originally popularized by Sabah Fakhri, reimagined by Wasfi al-Masarani (in October 2011), found itself becoming an almost-anthem-of-sorts: an anthem of resistance that lamented – and venerated – the lives of those that had fallen/ of the martyrs of the revolution. It was a mourning that found in its righteous anger an achingly resilient voice of resistance, and after the tragic assassination of Mishal Tamu (a Syrian Kurdish activist, whose death is what brought the song to me/ me to the song in the first place), it became a resounding refrain for unity, sacrifice and defiance in the face of truly horrifying oppression.

And the Skaba was not alone. Songs like Ibrahim Qashoush's "Get out, Bashar! "(يلا ارحل يا بشار)" – a song and singer whose history/ historicity we will return to in the Theoretical Notes but, for now, can best be seen/ heard/ understood as "the first 'hit' of the Syrian demonstrations" that took inspiration from/ was a reimagination of the clarion call of/ from the larger ecology of the Arab Spring "Get out (ارحل)" – and/or Abdul Basit Sarut's "The hearts of the army are dead" "(الجيش قلوب ماتت)" & "The Martyr's Dream", each with its own rather complex histories, and/ or Shuqair's protest songs, including "Ya Haif" and "Mouzaharat," and/ or re-vitalizations of Ala al-Ruzana (a personal favourite whose stories/ historicities are a must-look-into and can, at least as a starting 'port' – you will understand the reference once you swim into the current – be accessed here), for instance, all emerged alongside this Skaba, each amplifying these refrains, differing-ly and differentially but repeating-ly.

I think, songs or music at large, much like 'art' here in the manuscript, are a form of cultural resistance, or rather, of resistance through aesthetic/ cultural production. Music, here is, like art, "a continuous revolutionary act".* Think, for instance, of how these songs were not only expressions of grief and/or rebellion; they transformed/ translated into "artistic acts of defiance," in turn/ by, transforming/ translating sites of massacre into symbols of resilience (for example), like the following lyrics from "Flow, oh Tears of the Eyes": "at Homs where the Shabiha are crushed."

Or of how they form a part of the Oral Histories (of living archives// archives of living that) we have spoken of here in the prologue, and will speak of again – and in greater detail – in the "Translator's Note" (Part: 3 of Section: 1).

Or, as mentioned above, about how this reimagination of the Skaba was in tune with a wider rhythm in Syrian music. Adel Bou Ilaq (a celebrated Syrian musician) called this a "qualitative evolution" in Arabic music, where the 'voice' of the song transcends traditional boundaries to embody art in its "purest form"- that of (i) 'shaping personal and collective memory into universal expressions', (ii) by 'reaching beyond linguistic barrier in forging a collective' (Dubois, 2013) of sorts (think here of how these songs reverberated across different cities, and formed, for once quite literally a 'refrain' in doing so) and (iii) through that art/music not only continuously, "wayward"-ly reimagines itself, but actively works towards dislodging, dismantling, twisting, and reimagining entrenched socio-political realities/ worlds and

worldings (which would explain, as these articles brilliantly do - Remembering the Syrian Revolution through Songs. & Song as a Revolution and an Immortal Documentation – why authoritarian regimes have historically feared songs/ chants that unify populaces seeing/ sensing/ making sense of them/ understanding them as accessible, empowering, agentic anthems that pose a threat to disciplining state/ governance/ 'official' narratives and figurations and why/ how a revolution, at least the Syrian revolution, through these war-songs also becomes a War of Songs.)

This music then, simply put, and rather eloquently I think, by Mahmoud Darwish, gives us a fiercely vulnerable reminder to/in/of/for Syrvival-ing through its resilient resistances, i.e., it reminds us that "We have on this earth what makes life worth living... a tyrant's fear of songs."

*And like with Syrvival, I wish I had come to Syrial/ Syrvival Music (particularly, to 'street songs of the Syrian revolution) at the same time/ before/ or reasonably after meeting Syrial violence so it could have found the place in this manuscript that it rightfully deserves (although to be fair, I think it deserves a manuscript of its own.) But, I didn't. So I am leaning heavily here on those that did give them the attention, time and care that is, again rightfully, theirs and the analyses they presented: Simon Dubois, Adel Bou Ilaq, Mohammed Abu Hajar, Noor Turkmen & Mayson Shokair, and I strongly encourage you to look into Syria Untold's series on Syrian Song).

[v] Sana Yazigi was the first person I ever 'interviewed' for this dissertation, which at the time of interviewing her, was not a dissertation at all. It was just an idea (and barely that), a 'pilot' study I thought I would run by writing a term paper on the "Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution" for my "Archives of the Everyday Class" with Professor Patricia Spyer. So, on December 5, 2017, I sat in S7, the room across from which 7 years later I would defend this manuscript, and we (Yazigi, Lubna Allam – a close friend who had agreed on being the translator if we needed one – and I) dove into the her life & living and that of the project.

It was Sana who began my obsession with – what I later found out, in class, was Hamilton's conceptualization of – the "living archive" (Hamilton, 2002a, 2002b). It was almost the very first thing she said to me (I had asked her to begin with the story of the title/ titling itself), "Creative Memory is an archive, but at the same time, it's not just an archive. It's something that is alive and constantly being updated."

She had come to the Creative Memory project with a background in graphic design, cultural curation (from her previous work on the Cultural Scene newsletter in/ for Syria), displacement to Beirut, and an unrelenting urgency that possessed her, one that demanded she "document this historic moment." She explained how her own obsession began in the early days of the revolution itself when she saw "a wave of creativity" surging across Syria in response to the violence and repression. Artists, activists, and ordinary people, 'everyone' wanted to – and was trying to – express their experience of living through/ with/within the martial through "paintings, graffiti, street theatre, music, films, posters." This flood of creative expression was, according to her, unprecedented, because "Syrians hadn't witnessed this kind of artistic production before." (Remember what we spoke of in the early pages of this chapter vis-a-vis the 'unique-ness' of the Syrian case?)

And, for her, with this urgency came a sense of responsibility. She was deeply aware of how quickly these memories – these stories/ these histories – were being erased, censored, lost, of how "If we don't document what's happening, these memories will vanish." This fear of amnesia, (which resurfaced quite pointedly towards the end of our first call already, albeit about 2.5 hours away from these beginnings, when I asked

her if the 'future of the archive' involved plans for its translation into a physical environment/ installation, a question that had her both amused and starry eyed at once, because, of course, indeed, it did, despite both of us agreeing that there were obvious benefits to its online-living), in tandem with a deeply, desperately, power-full desire to honour the sheer resilience and creativity (the creative resiliencies) of the Syrian people is what drove her to birth the archive. The way she saw it, "Even in the darkest moments, people were still creating, still telling their stories" and that gave her the hope/ strength/ resilience she needed when the emotional toll/ affect of curating such an extensive archive about/on/of living through/with/within injury, violence, and war became just a little too palpable, i.e., in moments she felt overwhelmed "especially when faced with the sheer volume of loss and suffering."

She and her team then, designed the Creative Memory archive as:

(i) "...an archive of national legacies; to protect it is to preserve the Syrian memory, a duty because of its total consideration of historical accounts of all Syrian people", i.e., an archive that sought to respect, appreciate and preserve the 'diversity' of voices/ histories and historicities of the Syrian Revolution,

(ii) by care-full-y, and collaboratively, collecting and curating, these artworks/ stories and creating a classification system that respected that "There isn't one narrative," she stressed, "but rather many stories and many faces of Syria" and yet sought to make the impossible vast-ness of this material navigable, and

(iii) accessible, a characteristic they actively sought to foster with the centrality of its 'online'/ 'digital'-ness (an attempt at democratizing access to its contents as much as possible),

(iv) with the hope of creating a "tool not just for Syrians but as a resource for the world to understand" the revolution as a whole, and its many faces, asserting how "It's important for people everywhere to see the human side of the revolution, not just the violence,"

(v) and how this 'counter-archive' of sorts, that could/ should/ hopefully would be operationalized purpose-full-y, i.e., hoping for "...the information displayed in this archive to serve as an archive for academic and journalistic purposes," as well,

(vi) despite the ethical shadows* that come with its active productions and performances

(vii) especially since, at least for Yazigi and her team, this project is "not finished because the revolution isn't finished", and won't be until then, if even then, because to them, this archiving is as integral to the process of "building a better tomorrow" as it is to keeping the memory of the Syrian revolutionary spirit alive and well in/through these artworks.

*When we discussed the specifics of the archiving process, Yazigi and her team were in the middle of a complete design-makeover, trying to move away from its earlier 'newsletter' styled design to a more 'app'/ 'dashboard' like user-interface, and this re-design is what prompted/ was aided by a (then) 'relatively new' method, which was the following: Yazigi and her team comprised of two groups of archivists. The first team, consisting of 5 archivists, worked daily to update the archive cataloguing and contextualizing each of the artworks uploaded. This was quite a rigorous process (of digital ethnography?) which involved scavenging through the internet for pieces in the public domain (exclusively), employing triangulation methods to ensure both accuracy and context for each artwork. The artworks were then meticulously classified by titles, cities of origin, author/ creators names, dates of creation, and descriptive keywords, making the collection easily searchable for specific themes or artists. Any artist submissions that were sent to the team directly were also added to the archive at this stage, after following the same

protocol. Through this process alone they were able to add about an average of 5000 -7000 unique pieces monthly.

The second team was strictly project focused. They would further arrange, rearrange, and (re)classify these artworks thematically, for example, arranging the artwork in a way that is grouped by city to create "The Map" of the Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution, or by date of publication/ creation that contributes to "The Chronology" project (creating a timeline of the revolution through these creative memories), or by the role of different forms of creative expression like in "Idlib Walls" which focuses on (as we did at the beginning of this chapter) the role of Graffiti in the revolution, or as is the case with their most latest project, grouped by pieces about "Detainees and the Disappeared". This was also the team that works on translating the website/ archive which is available in three languages: Arabic, English and French.

The primary ethical implications here, while 'archiving' works produced in a public domain – much like some of the aesthetic pieces incorporated in this manuscript – is that often they are operationalized (archived in their case, analysed in mine) without the creators' awareness, raising serious questions and concerns about ownership and representation. Yazigi acknowledged these complexities when we spoke and dove into how her team has been committed to creating and implementing a legal framework to address this through disclosure contracts and consent forms. (In our case, most of the pieces, at least the artworks that have been presented un-black-boxed, are presented here with the artists' explicit permission, and/or their editors' if they were taken from anthologies. In cases where this was not possible they have been properly cited with the original links to the artists' websites/ social media pages embedded in their description.)

[vi] Sara Shamma's art has always moved me in a way that I struggle to explain, more than the usual-struggle-for/of-translation that is. I think it is because Shamma's work is not 'easy' — not that much of, if any at all, Syrial art-work(/-ing) is – to witness, to observe, to digest, to sense, to make sense of... to encounter. It confronts the most visceral constitutive elements of human existence: life, death, grief, or rather, it confronts/ forces us (as the witnesses/ observers/ audience/ viewers) to confront the viscera of the most constitutional elements of human existence, of living, dying, grieving and surviving. Her artwork makes us encounter the viscera of living with/through death. None of these are, at any level/ through any mode of being, abstract phenomena/ metaphysical entities/ concepts for her; they are deeply embodied lived realities that find equally living translations through her canvases- realities/ artworks, much like this manuscript, birthed through a (visceral) desire to comprehend 'loss', 'injury' and the violence of it all, as a personally lived truth and a socio-politically echoed refrain.

And, they simultaneously, force us to "Look Away"
and render us, affectively, incapable of doing so.
(a concept/ reference you will meet in Section: 4, Chapter: 1- "Invitation to (a) Beheading".

What fascinates me, especially with Shamma's work and her story, is how she used 'critical distance' (something we will return to in Field Note: 6). Shamma was forced to flee Syria in 2012, following the explosion of a car bomb near her home, and while living in/ through the trauma and pain of the displacement that came with it, she also (and I continue to remain in absolute awe of this) utilized this distance (which she says gave her perspective) as a space/ point for/of reflection. It didn't "diminish her connection to the trauma" but gave her "enough room", taking off some of the edge of its all-consuming-urgency/emergency, to translate it, meaning-full-y.

Her "World Civil War Portraits" stand, I think, as a powerful testament to this incredible – in every sense of that word – feat. These paintings are emotional exorcisms, deeply personal explorations of the toll that violence takes on the human spirit... an exploration of the deeply embodied "stream of consciousness that experiences war" (Bousquet et al., 2020),. Shamma's art lets us feel what it's like to exist in the space between living and dying, relief and grief, between exile and the longing for home, between the Syrial and Syrvival.

Not to mention that her hyper-realistic(?) style, with a tough of surrealism/ magical realism(?) is utterly mesmerizing, I think, precisely because they give form to this horror-tasting-anxiety that grips our nervous (systems and) beings when we find ourselves in violently liminal spaces// liminal spaces of violence like the ones her protagonists occupy. We see this, for example, with the portraits – what even are they? I think they are somewhere between self-portraits and soul-portraits but more than each individually – in her "Diaspora" collection as well where each of the subjects — many of them children, including her own — are caught in a liminal space between reality and nightmare, between life and death, between surviving and decaying... between being un-made and re-made, violently// between un-becoming and re-becoming through violence, something she calls the "void" between experiencing the violences of the martial (particularly in/ through the diaspora) and understanding this experiencing. And she doesn't shy away from this tension, or even try to resolve it. She is 'simply' describing it. Or, if I had to translate it within the lexicon of our manuscript, she is simply interested (and remember from the abstract so are we) is thoroughly and 'thick'-ly describing what violence feels like as a "dimension of living" (Nordstrom & Robben, 1995).

In making them, she said she took inspiration from Goya, Delacroix, and particularly Fuseli's "The Nightmare", and combined them with influences from Latin American artists and the Sufi dervishes 'Whirling' movements (something we will return to in quite some detail when we are "Encountering Three Little Syrias" later in the manuscript) capturing both, I think, the nauseating vertigo and terrifying unstable fluidity of the violently-liminal.

And the sheer transparency in her brushstrokes, the ghostly – haunted and haunting (Auchter, 2014) – movement of lines, they seem to fleetingly arrest, but only barely, something intangible, like the lines are ready to run off the page and she is asking us to trace the stories they are reaching for. Each of these portraits, I think, is a reflection on how fragile and mangled, yet vital and resilient, living really is; especially in the constant companionship of death. And in that, they forces us to truly see/ sense, and make sense of, the traumas of war and its injuries, and simultaneously the beautifully stubborn resilience of/from surviving them.

"I used to think I was interested in life, death, and dissolution, but now I am interested in these topics a hundred times more."

\- Sara Shamma.

Theoretical Note: 1, 'On-life': Universe-ing Cases

I think it's safe to say, that by now we can all agree that the 'universe of cases' for this study/ project is the 'Onlife' of the Syrian Revolution. Though we will play with the shape of this concept – well into exhaustion – in Field Note: 4, I wanted to take a quick moment first to give you a sense of its texture- something we can use as an arm-float until we get there.

I first 'encountered' this term in Donatella's Shooting a Revolution: Visual Media and Warfare in Syria (Della Ratta, 2018) and pretty much since then, 'onlife' has been one of the primary nodes in the network of that book's theoretical infrastructure that builds (on/) the idea that ***"the enactment of violence has been structurally transformed in the presence of participatory media that make everything and everyone visible, archivable, and likeable"*** (ibid). To define this concept, Donatella argued that networked participatory communication technologies had ***"granted the utmost visibility and shareability to the most extreme violence, finally merging the physical annihilation of places with their endless online regeneration, producing a sort of onlife which gets renewed every time content is manipulated, re-uploaded, re-posted and shared, as meanings are combined and recombined in different, clashing versions"*** (Pg. 23). Now in practical terms, taking this conceptualisation of an 'onlife' seriously – at least here – would mean that we buy into – at least partially – the following arguments/ assumptions:

1. **Distance:** ***Here, the distance between the physical and digital worlds begins to collapse/ fracture/ transversal-ize/ "twist"*** (Hirsch, 2014) ***to the point that they become intricately intertwined***. (Now, some people, like me, would argue that this is always the case, and these worlds are superimposed and collaged, not distinct and linked, but for now, I am going to try to translate just Donatella's worlding as faithfully as I can- assumptions, arguments, answers, and all). It is as if the physical annihilation of a place, person, social-ity, becomes – within that exact processual moment of annihilation itself – irrevocably entangled with its digital correlative, not only through the act of filming/capturing/shooting of the process but through it being uploaded, manipulated, circulated, re-uploaded, re-posted, re-manipulated… through its online regeneration (in the plurality of its forms) as well. In ruination, in ruin, everything captured and circulated. i.e. everything that becomes communicable information ***(and this is a transmutation not a transformation because the digital rendition of the physical event/object is seen as a***

mirrored extension with different but echoing materiality, spatiality, temporality, morphology, agency, semiotics and other characteristics- the adaptation is seen one of 'state' not 'nature'; it is water and ice and not caterpillar and butterfly), leaves behind rather active debris; in/ through dying within the frames of a networked technology, the place/ the person/ the social-ity finds a life online: an onlife.

2. **Agency:** The creation of this onlife, for any piece of information, is made possible through a ***complex network of human and non-human actants that equitably (if not equally sometimes) participate in this process,*** i.e., "The sociality of networked images not only invests their human makers, but actually expands them, multiplies them, dispersing them into a wider spectrum of entities all equally responsible in giving onlife. Algorithms, interfaces, bots, AIs and other nonhuman subjectivities have the same agency as their human counterparts – if not more – in making and keeping the networked image alive." I tend to violently simplify this in my head as the idea that the camera, the network I choose to share something on, the "sourcery" (Chun, 2008) that keeps it up and running and what I think might audience might want to see (so my assumptions about the aesthetic vocabularies in place) all equally (or equitably?) – and the same valence as what I wish to capture – determine the shape that the 'post' will take online. ***The 'curator' and/or 'creator' (the apparatus generating, perpetuating, and sustaining) of any information here is, I think, a "cyborg" (Haraway, 2004)***.
3. **Semiotics:** What this effectively means is that all meaning, whether in the act of shooting as killing or/and as filming, is ***"dissolved into a plethora of individual and fragmented forms and formats, mere occurrences of divided and hyper-mediated selves that do not have enough strength to embrace any consistent, political, social, collective shape nor to propose any solution to the conflict."*** I have already spoken to you a little, about the "unmaking" (Scarry, 1987) and remaking of worlds and worldings affects of violence (and will do so in even more depth in the Translator's Note) and the twistings of relationalities that generates, when we were becoming Syrialism's confidantes. ***What is interesting here is that Donatella's argument effectively purports that the generation of an 'onlife' mirrors the same process of un- and re-making. It is, in its quiddity (almost) surreal, though there is a difference there in the 'levels' at which re-making occurs.*** This is because for Donatella, there is – at least to some degree – a cohesive meaning out there in the world that is rapidly unmade/ undone and fragmented, and when it is remade, it is remixed at this 'level' of distinct, individual, splinter without any intentional or unintentional aggregation (it is more an

explosion than an implosion). And it is precisely this impotence of onlives, or perhaps our impotence when engaging with them, vis-à-vis the clustering or accumulation of meaning that she mourns. It reminds me of the "Leftists and Infighting" meme-theme in its tragicness: here, (and I broadly agree) a cohesive shape, even if it isn't coherent, to political and/or social-meaning is a prerequisite for collective action.

4. **Morphology:** ***Speaking of shapes, this way of looking at the revolution, renders it a continuously accelerating, while simultaneously splintering and de-escalating rhizome.*** ***Donatella argues that because every incident has a multiple and plural 'onlife', there is no resolution of form, format or meaning and both, the physical and digital worlds of violence in/through their surreality, or Syriality, feed into each other's un- and re-making, such that, "The conflict should never end, but only circulate, reaching peaks, stopping abruptly and then re-starting again, in the endless sequence of attacks, bombings, sieges, evacuations, displacements, starvations and deportations that we have all sadly become accustomed to" just as its digital counterpart.*** In fact, as the audience, we actively participate in sustaining this circularity, i.e. ***"we are all condemned not only to watch this endless sequence, as we did with previous wars, but also to share it, remix it, hashtag and archive it, upload, and download it, 'like' or attach an emoji to it."*** And in/ through that we do not 'just' sustain this Ouroboros, we stimulate its fragment-driven spirality until "the perpetual state of acceleration in which networked media find themselves" finds congruence in the "escalation of the conflict and the proliferation of armed forces and politics interests on the ground".
5. **Space:** In Donatella's worlding then, ***the categorical feature of spatiality is that is it in a constant state of "expansion".*** The event-space expands from the physical to the digital, which in turn expands its visibility – or rather expands the spaces within which it is visible – and that expands the spaces in which this expanded information exerts its influence. What this effectively means is that the **there is (i) an expansion of violence**: the physical violence occurring in physical space and time, once 'shot' and uploaded expands through this process of documentation and circulation, **(ii) an expansion of and through this violence's 'onlife':** once uploaded and circulated, this information about violence/ violent information begins a seemingly endless cycle of online regeneration because it is constantly manipulated, downloaded, recirculated, and reshared, **(iii) which can be seen as the measure of an expanded social**: for any of this to be possible, or for us to understand how any of this is possible – the shooting of the revolution, so to speak, and the creation

and continued sustenance of its 'onlife' – we would have to "reassemble the social" (Latour, 1987) of this networked apparatus and take into account the agency of human, non-human, cyborg and other actants into consideration, and **that would allow us to also (iv) capture the expansion** – fragmentation and dispersal – **of meaning vis-à-vis the given/any violence-event** that we spoke of in point: 3: so we can productively track the plurality or, as Donatella puts it, "the plethora of individual, and fragmented forms and formats" of meanings that are tethered to even a singular given violent event// event of violence, **all of which subsequently allows us to conclude that (v) the shape of the networked revolution itself, and any given networked violent event, event of violence, is a circularity that is constantly** – if not also consistently – accelerating and **expanding.**

6. **Temporality:** ***And then there is the matter of time, which in a manner of speaking, expands too, and not only through linear extension but also topographically. It is an amoeba, multiplying, or at the very least, becoming double.*** As I will discuss in section: 1 of Part: 4, *"Invitation to (a) 'Beheading'"* using the photograph of Khaled's beheading as a particular example, 'information' (the event/ the place/ the person/ the social-ity) that acquires this 'onlife' lives in/through a Schordinger-ian timescape: it is in a 'state' of both being dead and alive, of this 'death' being both temporally fixed with a clear temporal terminus and also being completely temporally elastic and expansive, and this 'life' being, reversely, temporally fixed with a clear temporal beginning and also being completely temporally elastic and expansive. ***In perception and perpetration, an act of violence that acquires an 'onlife' becomes, infinite within the bounds of engagement and observability, i.e. until the networked information is being seen, circulated, and engaged with (in all other forms), and with the morphologies we discussed earlier it will most likely necessarily always be that case, temporally, it is immortal. And yet, also, constrained. It is a conditional immortality.***

*(What is that thing again about whether a tree falling in the forest when there is no one around to hear it fall still makes a sound? I suppose, given this argument about temporality, my answer would lie somewhere on the spectrum of "as long as there is someone, anyone, even one person/ thing/ non-human present to hear it fall, the tree's fall makes a sound. And whether or not it makes a sound in the absence of a witness – human, non-human or otherwise – is none of my *insert-profanity-of-choice* business because this entire thesis is lived, understood, translated and written from within 'embodied experience'. Realities outside of it, if there even are any, are none of my *insert-profanity-of-choice-again* concern.)*

Theoretical Note: 2, 'Lived Experience': Subject-ing this Study
Or, What the *insert-profanity-of-choice* does the needle look like?

Lived *insert-profanity-of-choice* Experience.

Throughout the manuscript, I often characterise this concept as a 'specter that haunts this text'. I am going to stick with that- in fact, I would argue, that if this dissertation were a haunted house-themed Dungeons & Dragons session, or a videogame, or 'Goosebumps', (you get the point – a scene that is haunted, haunting, investigative and adventure-y), then mapping Lived Experience would be the 'final-boss-fight'. It has been, by far, the most slippery of sticky signifiers (I think even more than Syrialism) to ensnare here. There was a very concrete effervescence to it… an intensity to its affect that was quite challenging, and frustrating, to map initially, though with retrospective insight I can now tell you that I was struggling to ***make sense-able, make sense-of and operationalise 'embodied experience' because it is the very "substratum"*** (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004) ***for the manuscript as a whole – the subject of study/ the subject being-made through this studying***. ***All of it – the archiving, the social-media, the critical reimagining, the 'Syria'-historicizing and Syrialism, the war, the violence, the living, the dying, the aesthetics and the affects, the multiplicities, the pluralities, the entanglements, the mapping and the very metaphysics of it all… every 'little' thing in this dissertation – begins with, feeds off of, sprawls away from and refracting-ly returns to the question/concept of 'lived experience'.***

So, let me tell you a(nother) story about 'lived experience'. Our worlds were being devoured (differently most recently, but repeatedly at that time), by nasty fevers, sore throats, body aches and incessant dreadful coughing, by the lack of breath, breathing and oxygen tanks, by the complete loss of taste and intimacy that accompanied the insanities of isolation, by the putrid politics of our different precarities, and by the formidable spectres of death – each a frightful marker of the coronavirus pandemic – when Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie first published an essay in the New York Times: "Notes on Grief" (Adichie, 2021). By the time I came across her words, the essay had been expanded into a book, and the world was now (then, and now, once again) being (re)gurgitated by invasion, continued occupation, mass-shootings, bombings and airstrikes, and seemingly, devastatingly, unending war(s). 'Grief' seemed like an affectively, existentially, ontologically, and therefore, a conceptually appropriate response to find myself entangled within and so I began chewing away at it.

The book, at least to me, was as raw, gently yet 'fiercely vulnerable' (this book is how I encountered this turn of phrase – it was really the only way to describe it), and acutely insightful as the cover itself[1].

In its pages, Adichie had wrestled through her own grief at the agonizing loss of her father and in that excruciating process had found a way to write intelligibly about the unspeakable – ***she had traced how 'grief', beyond/outside/past understanding/analysis/conceptualisations, is (often) sensed and made sensible through a more thoroughly collaged 'lived-ness'. It is (often) felt – sensed and made sensible – across every mode of being/every dimension of being: the 'embodied', the 'affective', the 'aesthetic', the 'material', the 'technological', the 'social', the 'semiotic' and their relationalities.***

From where I was standing, steadfast in my own heartache, all I saw was that across 30 short entries (their form, structure and to some degree their content eliciting the imaginary of a personal diary of sorts, or at the very least a "note(s)" book- the grimoire of any social-scientist) Adichie had meticulously, painstakingly (quite literally), ***crafted an entire lexicon for *this* experience of grief and in doing so, created an intimacy between us- an intimacy between the reader and her self-declarations of her lived experience of grief,*** and through which the book became a refuge/ a dictionary/ a workbook/ a guide for anyone who was/is seeking to comprehend acute loss.

Through her "Notes" she had shown us how grief ***feels*** like coming ***"undone"***, like a "vicious uprooting", like "shock", and "anger", and "fear" and "resentment" and "disbelief".

[1] On this cover, a thin slip of paper drenched in a blackened shadow slit through its middle by a small painted figure hunched over a laptop, face in hand.
Or, A dark open corridor – it's edges cascading over the cliffs of the book, a slightly opened door jutting out in the middle, a woman clad in ochre and aegean still as marble, a laptop that is obsidian...inky as the gaping void. No matter how I describe it, I fall short of words, of description when it comes to making sensible the 'intimacy' of Lossapardo's work. And that is exactly what the cover of the book, in fact, all of his works are, intimate.
They are Hopper-esque (something I will return to in Theoretical Note: 3).
Lossapardo's paintings take the viewer into the moments behind closed doors, in 'the upstairs bathroom stalls' (as my bartender tells me when I ask her where I can have a panic attack as I write the second half of this essay), in broom-closets, in kitchen corners, in zoned-out stares, in places where we would be truly, "intimately", vulnerably, our completely messy (in all the connotations of the beautiful disaster that that word is) selves. His work, and Adichie's – and I am hoping I can learn from them – take us into the 'inner world' of the socio-political self.
In Lossapardo's own words, "I paint a certain mood in every piece" and in doing so, I think, he (much like Adichie) captures, conceptualises, and conveys to the viewer the urgency, immediacy and intimacy of the lived experience. This "mood"esque quality of 'living-through/in/within', of the 'lived', is what this "figuration" (D. J. Haraway, 2016; Weber, 2016) ***of lived experience is hoping to grasp at and make sensible, especially when it comes to the 'martial'.***



Figure: 47- Illustration by Lossapardo, Book-cover for Adichie's "Notes on Grief"

There was "panic" and "resistance" in grief ***but also*** "laughter". It was simultaneously "an ungentle mourning" and a "regret" & "guilt"-ridden "relief".

There was "transformation" in it, and of it, and "pathos" and/or "nostalgia".

In those 80 pages, Adichie had cracked open her own body to show us how grief had engraved itself on her ***flesh and bones***. It tore through her in "screams", "stomach turmoil" and "sore muscles". It expressed itself in the "shaking" of her ***body***, in the "tapping" of her "fingers", in the "bobbing leg" and in the "outstretched hands". She sensed it through abject "weeping" and having "difficulty breathing", especially in moments where her heart felt like it would "run-away" from her "weighted chest".

She had mapped how her grief had come tethered to – and was experienced through – the "condolence register" at her father's wake, to his "radio" and "watch", to ***"photographs"*** and the "generator" and "tattoos", to her own "phone" and the very "floor" of her house- it had latched itself onto ***materialities*** that through its pain and trauma became almost votive.

And she had tried to make sense of her experience of this grief. For her, this grief had become ***a "cruel kind of education"*** one that upon "introspection" felt like an "opaque thing" marred by "shallow thoughts" and "denial", ***erratic flash-backs/forwards/laterals***, its "tyranny" expressing itself as a "receding memory" that was ***also/still*** somehow violently "possessive" of its "pain".

Instinctively, ***I knew that *this* was one of the war-stories that the 'on/life' wanted to make-sensible and make-sense of when it came to martial violence in 'Syria', *this* experience is what my interlocutors were trying to craft their Syrial lexicon for, *this* is what the 'silence' (as you will see when we encounter the 'first' little Syria) was 'holding', that I had felt echoes of *this* in Butler's thoughts on loss and in my own propinquity with Complex-Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, I just didn't know what *this* precisely was. More than that, I was convinced, or the second and third 'Little Syrias' (Chapter:¹, Part-2) had me convinced, that there *must*/ *had to* be a way in which the violences they were making visible to me, the injury-story they were making sensible, could be made-sense-of, by making *this* the protagonist of our war-story, here.*** I just had to find the "name" for our version of 'Grief', 'build' its 'character' so to speak and all I had to go on was that our 'protagonist'.

(i) ***Had a phenomenological temperament,***

i.e. it had to do with the experience of violence and its loss, grief, trauma, and the survival of it all

(ii) ***but "not only",*** because it was also about what shaped this experience, how it was sensed by the injured bodies experiencing it, i.e.

it was deeply processual, relational and complex in its morphologies,

(iii) it was entirely ***"embodied" in texture, but "not only".***

(iv) it was ***"material-semiotic"-y but "not only",***

(v) it was profoundly "affective", of course, but "not only".

(vi) ***There was an "aesthetic" dimension to it,*** not just in how we encountered it – as a thoroughly mediated representation of someone's experience of 'injury', but also in how injured bodies (self-declared that they) experienced said injury in the first place

but "not only",

(vii) and that this texture was also ***coloured through/by the social-entanglements (across both register- societal and social) and the cognitive/conceptual/ narrative life-worlds of the injured-bodies, but "not only".***

And then, suddenly – seemingly out of nowhere but somehow simultaneously as a result of chronic passive-obsessing – it hit me: ***Adichie thought that her grief, lived, had made her "porous" along her "edges"*** (Adichie, 2021)***. I think, it had also made her a 'collage'- allowed her to access, and translate, what violence/injury *feels* like as a "dimension of living"*** (Nordstrom & Robben, 1995)***. Adichie had translated for us here what the 'lived experience' (not only the embodied, the material, the affective, the aesthetic, the narrative, the socio-political and the semiotic experiences, individually, but rather the collage-esque/ simultaneous experiencing of the entanglements of all these experiences/ dimensions of experience) of 'grief' felt like.***

And that was precisely what the 'onlife' of the Syrian Revolution was doing.

At least one of the things it was doing.

At least, in part.

At least from where I was standing.

It was translating for us the 'lived experience' of injury in/of/from the Syrian Revolution.

Our protagonist now had a name.

All that I needed to do then was find an 'IR'-y way of grounding this concept work-build the IR-y parts of this character. And so, I returned to Scarry.

"One cannot say, 'Oh, I'll go through loss this way, and that will be the result, and I'll apply myself to the task,
and I'll endeavour to achieve the resolution of grief that is before me." I think one is hit by waves,
and that one starts out the day with an aim, a project, a plan, and finds oneself foiled.
One finds oneself fallen.
One is exhausted but does not know why.
Something is larger than one 's own deliberate plan, one's own project, one's own knowing and choosing."

"If I lose you, under these conditions, then I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself.
Who 'am' I, without you? When we lose some of these ties by which we are constituted, we do not know who we are or what to do.
On one level, I think I have lost 'you' only to discover that 'I' have gone missing as well.
At another level, perhaps what I have lost 'in' you, that for which I have no ready vocabulary,
is a relationality that is composed neither exclusively of myself nor you,
but is to be conceived as the tie by which those terms are differentiated and related."

"What grief displays, in contrast, is the thrall in which our relations with others hold us,
in ways that we cannot always recount or explain,
in ways that often interrupt the self-conscious account of ourselves, we might try to provide,
in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control."

"I tell a story about the relations I choose, only to expose, somewhere along the way,
the way I am gripped and undone by these very relations. My narrative falters, as it must.
Let's face it. We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something.
This seems so clearly the case with grief, but it can be so only because it was already the case with desire.
One does not always stay intact.
One may want to, or manage to for a while, but despite one's best efforts, one is undone, in the face of the other;
by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of the touch, by the memory of the feel."

"Is there a way in which the place of the body, and the way in which it disposes us outside ourselves or sets us beside ourselves, opens up another kind of normative aspiration within the field of politics?"

"To grieve, and to make grief itself into a resource for politics, is not to be resigned to inaction, but it may be understood as the slow process by which we develop a point of identification with suffering itself"

- *From, "Precarious Life: the Powers and Mourning and Violence" by Judith Butler (Butler, 2004)*



Figure: 48- An Illustration by Sulafa Hijazi titled Asylum, from the Ongoing Series
[Most of the Ongoing series was published on social media between 2011 and 2012 when Hijazi was still in Damascus during the first two years of the Syrian revolution. The series became very popular online and was featured in newspapers, websites, books, magazines, museums, and international touring exhibitions.]
Author Engagement: Mingled/Mangled Bodies looking for Asylum// Mangling/Mingling the Body of Asylum

War is "the most radically embodying event
in which human beings ever collectively participate."
- Elaine Scarry, The Body in Pain (Scarry, 1987)

The goal was simple, then: I wanted to find a way to systematically disaggregate and translate Scarry's words^ into a Deleuze-Guattarian lexicon for this 'onlife' and its war-stories about 'injury'. The 'living' archive of the Syrian revolution "wanted" / 'desired' it (remember, from the Prologue?) So, I did what I do best – I read.

(I really wish that was a whole job – just consumption of anything with representational value: reading, watching, listening without ever doing anything with it, producing anything from it, or having to translate it into anything or without being told what to consume, in the first place. I know it's gluttonous, but wouldn't it be grand?)

I looked around for a 'political', 'international relations', 'war', 'experience', 'martial' book, that was 'ethnographically' heavy, and ran into ***Bullets in Envelopes: Iraqi Academics in Exile written by Louis Yako*** and made a plan. I was going to figure out the definitional contours of this '*lived experience*' by reading enough of the "correct" literature, then reverse-engineer from the methods employed there how to map it in/through 'Syrialism' and outline the political and normative stakes of looking at this 'affect'. Well, what's that saying about well-laid plans and the road to hell vis-à-vis good intentions?

Yako's 'Bullets in Envelopes' was/ is an agonizingly mesmeric book that traces a ***"genealogy of loss"*** (Yako, 2021) – the coercive, violent (in every sense of the word) loss of land, language, of ways of life and living, of aspects of one's identity, of fragments of one's individual and collective histories and of the notions and comforts of home, all in light of the invasion of Iraq. Through the eyes of Iraqi academics, Yako attempts to map the ***"extent to which war, sanctions and the 2003 invasion have damaged Iraqi society (Pg. 8)***" and consciously – and I would argue conscientiously – begs his readers to move beyond questions and inquiries that 'only' outline "how things are at present", or where things can go from here, to asking the more fundamental question of "how they (things) became that way (Pg. 9)". ***His is an inquiry about process, about the becoming of loss and war and invasion, about the machinations of Iraq's socio-political environments from the Ba'ath Era, through the UN Sanctions and the different Occupations that came with it, to the Iraqi invasion in 2003 until now-ish (the last bits of his fieldwork being conducted only in 2015) – a period marked by intense Corporate-ism and living "lives under contracts" … it is an inquiry about 'how' (and more importantly "not only" why) this 'loss' was differently,***

differentially, sensed and made sensible by Iraqi academics through these periods as an embodied refrain and what that can tell us about the politics of living in exile, through forced displacement, of what constitutes home, of how to build a society when one of the key groups of social-engineers (the academics in question) are being systematically threatened. It is an inquiry about how Iraqi academics find themselves reconfiguring the state-academics-exile-society relationship all while living in a world where bullets are sent to their doorsteps nested in ominously white envelopes.

Yako has argued that through this inquiry, he makes three key contributions: (1) "It (the book/ inquiry) exposes the multifaceted and complex sides of the relationship between academics and different regimes of power"; (2) it "contributes to our understanding of how 'exile' and 'displacement' start at 'home' through violent political changes" and that therefore we must "trace the problems – and the solutions – for refugees, exiled and displaced populations all the way back home rather than the current location where these populations struggle or reside"; (3) academics are also citisens and, therefore, the political upheavals and violence they witnessed as a result of their positionality in post-invasion Iraq raise questions, as some scholars and analysts have previously suggested, about how sectarianism and ethno-nationalism are not simply chaotic consequences of the war, but perhaps the desired outcomes of it."

While these are exceedingly robust insights, for me, another key contribution of Yako's work is the incredibly intuitive (on his part) mapping of how the political and the politics of these concepts and their entanglements unfold through/within the lived experience, are sometimes/ somewhat resisted by it, and sometimes/ somewhat reproduce it. He makes clear quite clear that we were only able to arrive at his primary arguments by care-fully taking into consideration the lived realities of his interlocutors, by accompanying them to their offices, their department meetings, their homes, their chores (daycares and grocery shopping), having interviews with them in coffeeshops and in cafeterias, to their lectures and their libraries, to the festivals they participated in, and the charities where they distributed food, stationary, housing items to the Iraqi and Syrian refugee families that needed them. ***By tapping into this rhythm of their everyday lives – and at first his own – he was able to read the entanglements between home-exile-political formations-violence-occupation-social construction in check-in lines (at the airport) that were too long, through headphones "oozing" Turkman folk songs from Kirkuk, through the glaring absence of Iraqi passports and their replacements- Swedish/ Danish/ German/ Other EU passports, "Iraq's skies, lands, trees, roses, buildings, streets, faces, scents, and everyone and everything that had been living and growing" in the imaginations of those that have been away from***

'home' too long, in how uneven 'development' looked in the rural countryside… how much it resembled "destruction and impoverishment", through the validity of certain local ID cards, certain languages and dialects, certain faces. Yako was able to trace the violent indignities his interlocutors had to painfully endure and survive within the Ba'ath period not only through their grie(f-stricken)ving stories but also through changed occupations on passports (from "academic" to "housewife" or "freelancer"), through a couples' travels from camp to camp- from Syria to Palestine to Lebanon to Yemen, in a family of 4 sleeping on a single bed in Algiers, in samplings of roses smuggled out of Iraq that when planted in British soil do not smell like 'home', in a communist Iraqi scientist being hounded and stalked by (conspicuous government-y) cars, through forced asylum-seeking and sudden reshufflings of placements for Military Industries. Within the borders of the universities themselves these violences were sensed through mandatory courses like the "al-thaqafa al-qawmiya" ("National Culture") that outlined the party's commitments and history, committees like those "Intellectual Soundness" that monitored the 'quality of' PhD dissertations to "make sure that dissertations did not contain anything inimical to the ruling party", through "Big Brother stuff" like recording lectures that made sure the academics in question would begin "every lesson by praising the party", by being dragged by one's hair and kicked out of university buildings by intelligence officers, by threats of public shaming and shaved heads if one was seen observing the hijab, through nations IDs where ethnicities were changed from "Kurd" to "Arab" and those that identified as/ and were identified as belonging to minority demographics were "expected to bring a document proving that they were at least at the rank of Nasir (supporter) in the party". Before entering the gates of any Iraqi university, especially given that "There is no graduate from any Iraqi university who did not have to be at least a mu'ayyid [sympathizer]."

Similarly, the 'a'ffects of the UN Sanctions, for Yoku, were measured in math teachers selling cigarettes at make-shift kiosks hitched to their houses, in extra sandwiches that mothers would pack for school if they could afford to do so for students in their children's classes, in academic salaries that ranged from 3-6 US Dollars per month, in the inability to get any access to "new resources like journals, publications, books and scientific sources", but also in the sheer ingenuity and resilience of Iraqi academics who "were able to dismantle factories and equipment, hide them, protect them from bombing and reassemble them after the bombing was over" and of students who, for instance, brought a piece of cloth cut out from her father's underwear so she could continue to learn how to paint. These affects took the shape of UN inspection officers fearing that every bacterial overgrowth was an attempt at the creation of a biological weapon, their ban on "everything that could help them (Iraqi academics) do good research… leaving

academics to rely on materials, labs and resources that dated back to the 1970s and 1980s", of Sadam's government banning academics from going to conferences or publishing internationally or just interacting with any foreigner in any shape or form. These sanctions – this period where Iraqi academics "were caught between two power centres: the UN on the one hand; and the Iraqi state attempting to protect itself from the international blockade on the other" – were sensed and their violences made sensible in the moments where quite a few academics found themselves wandering the al-Mutanabbi Street (Baghdad's bookseller's market) to sell their collections, instead of building them… in the trade of books for bread.

And/Or the affects, realities, violences of the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq, and it's lived experience – i.e. the occupation as a "dimension of living" – was measured in "huge American tanks driving through the street", in "pain"/ "loss"/ "defeat"/ "humiliation", in the "Americanisation of the curriculum" and resistances to it, in students bringing guns to class, in the "distress and confusion" of not knowing who killed your colleagues and who would be next, in being stalked and surveilled, in brutal searches of homes and the confiscation of academic work/ documents, in assassinations/ assassination attempts … in being shot four times at close range and having "almost no brain left in my (one's) head after the attack", in the paralysing fear that the missiles that fell near one's home would be seen as being shot my them, in kidnappings and killing of family members, in incarceration over PhD dissertation topics, in the internal displacement of not just individuals but entire infrastructures that found safe-ish haven in Kurdistan, in the sheer precarity, "exhaustion" and "collapse" of "living under contract";

And in the bullets sent in envelopes with notes that read:

"Warning: you must, without further notice, leave the University immediately lest[sic!] you lose your life with a silencer, Dr. [name omitted]. Do not underestimate this warning. Save your and your family's lives. We will act on this threat. You have been notified."

- (Translated from Arabic by Yako).

There are a couple of things that reading across Yako and Adichie's books, became clear to me:

1. **Lived Experience, as a concept, is stuck somewhere between body, corporeality, lived-ness, experiences, (post-)phenomenology, positionality, and reality.** I think, the term has been squatting, more often than not, at the intersections of feminist and de-colonial theorising and (post-)phenomenological philosophy for quite a while now and after many wars waged mostly with myself, I can only concede to defining it as follows:

Lived "experience – conceptually, normatively, and politically – is rooted in any thought tradition that sees the "body as lived, as yielding the sensory experiences and lived intentionality of a subject negotiating its world" (Lennon, 2019)**.** ***In that regard, the lived experience becomes a conceptual tool for us to think through the entanglements of the(/a) lived experience of any socio-political phenomena i.e., it is the conceptual tool that helps us access, articulate and analyze how said socio-political is sensed (how it imprints and produces itself on the very bodies of the subjects it seeks to make-political), made sensible (how it finds reproduction – however hiccupped it might be – through these subject-bodies and becomes-political) and (is therefore) lived through (how this phenomenon operates "not only"*** (De la Cadena, 2015) ***as a phenomenon, a process, a practice, and/or a structure but as a "dimension of living"*** (Nordstrom & Robben, 1995)***.) There is a dual move here: 'lived experience' allows us to both take seriously the politics of 'being-in-the-world' and map how politics is (re)produced through this 'being', both.*** To take seriously, then, these notions of 'lived', 'living' and 'being' in a complex, ever-morphing, highly networked, multiple (and therefore "rhizomatic" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2009)) socio-political world, ***lived experience is best understood as the collective but not necessarily (or typically at all) coherent 'affect' of any given socio-political 'process' on any given person(-ality/ -hood/ -self/ -subjectivity) through simultaneously active***

(i) bodily cicatrisations,
(ii) sensory impressions,
(iii) material inscriptions,
(iv) technological traces/ tracings,
(v) emotional cognisance,
(vi) social subjectification,
and (vii) refractive reflections,
delimited within the territory of the person's positionality, that results in 'experience' being complex, compounded (in a collage-esque fashion) and processual (in its dynamic morphology).

2. Lived Experience was not just a phenomenon/ process/ mechanism that I was trying to grasp at and map. Instead, ***the "concept (itself) was a method*** (Taguchi & St.Pierre, 2017)***",*** and "not only" (De la Cadena, 2015) in the Deleuze-Guattarian shape of concepts being "acts of thought", which reinforces their place within empirical philosophy/philosophising, but rather because (as I will explain in much further detail

later in the text), ***the concept of lived experience when made sense of as a "figuration"*** (D. J. Haraway, 2004; Weber, 2016) ***actively, concretely, multiply and plurally participated in sharing our worlds.***

As such, at least ***within the confines of this dissertation, Lived Experience becomes an "ethico-onto-epistemology*"*** (Barad, 2007) ***onto itself:*** it is the ontological position of this dissertation that 'lived experience' is constitutive of our reality, and is also how we know what we know of our world, our epistemological methodology, (it is how we sense, make sense of and participate in worlding our worlds – a barely existing, dynamic, transparent membrane more a knot along a thread the self-and-the-world-continuing on either side of the string than a wall) and is our political and normative positionality (our politics and performances of it determined by being response-able and care-full towards it)[2].

3. ***In the context of the martial then, thinking about 'war' and its violences operationalizing 'lived experience' allows us to pick over the bones of stories/ histories/ testimonies/ accounts that detail what war feels like, how it is sensed, how it materialises, the technologies it finds expressions through and the bodies it latches onto- stories that detail the daily machinations of war.*** Writing away from worldings that build, understand, and articulate war through statistics or in the languages of groups, causes and structures/institutions, ***this "figuration" of the "lived", works through/with war-experiences as if it were a form of situated knowledge*** (D. Haraway & Knowledges, 2002) ***and with which/ within which the very experience of/through "mingled bodies"*** (Serres, 2008) ***becomes a site for care-full investigations into marital politics.*** It is then an answer to the clarion call of Feminist War studies best embodied by Sylvester's demand that we, ***"pull the bodies and experiences of war out of the entombments created by theories***

[2] P.S.- Ethico-onto-epistemology is (also) a torturously loaded term, I think.
So, I will very crudely try and outline what little I grasped of it from Barad's and Escobar's works and how I operationalise it here. What is important to note I think, is the '-' itself: the terms have been designed to ensure that we see ethical-ontological-epistemological concerns are intimately
entangled and effectively inseparable (at least normatively).
For me, this means that in a deeply rhizomatic world defined by entanglement, there is no distance between the being and knowing, between what we know of reality and how we know it, because the how shapes, delimits, determines, and opens up the what (there is no reality outside of the observer/ researcher's own relationalities with the world around her) and the ethics how research – of exploring, understanding, making sense of, and codifying any kind of knowing about the world – then must be imminent of/to the worlding itself because the ethics of knowing are that of being/ living/ real-ising. As Barad, herself put it, ***'ethico-onto-epistomology' is a concept which recognises that as beings we are constantly "becoming with the world" and that "the becoming of the world is a deeply ethical matter" (Barad, 2007).***

operating at higher levels of analysis and into the open as crucial elements of war (Sylvester, 2012)***".*** In following this call, by foregrounding 'lived experience' as a site of knowledge observation-production-politics we re-focus on the very minutia of the specific moments of ***"enactment of injury"*** (Scarry, 1987)– this injury being the primary task of any war – during any given war and reanimate these ***"in-between moments (of war) after causes and before endings"*** (Sylvester, 2013) by focusing on their experiential dimensions. We tap into the ***"stream of consciousness that experiences war",*** and try to speak of the unspeakable, such that we can trace how the unfolding of war is sensed on every individual's embodied surfaces and how it is then made sense of as an experience of ***"unbridled de-regulation of the senses and emergent subjectivities*** (Bousquet et al., 2020)***."*** We 'stay with the trouble' of thinking through the martial in all its complexity, multiplicity and processuality and are subsequently about to write and "figure" it as such- all of which we will return to in the next chapter.

4. ***In practicality then, to 'design'*** (Austin & Leander, 2021) ***research with and through lived experience as an ethico-onto-methodology allows us, at least me, to sense and make sensible (i) processes and phenomena that are personal, intersectional, intimate, and yet (ii) have a refrain that is strictly non-representational but nonetheless allows for a mapping of echoed difference and repetition in the affects of said process and (iii) care-fully and response-ably accommodate for methodological creativity and collaging that*** (for example, for exploring how oral history methods and those of/for creating and interpreting Living Archives can work together such that they) ***can reflect the multiplicity and plurality of the experience of the martial on "mingled bodies"*** (Serres, 2008)**.**

Theoretical Note: 3, 'Living with(in) Aesthetics': Site-ing this Study

Or, Where the *insert-profanity-of-choice* do we look for this needle – what exactly is the *insert-profanity-of-choice* is the position, shape and texture of our haystack – and what is our *insert-profanity-of-choice* plan to find it?

'Aesthetic' – scholarships, approaches, and modes of being – are the foundation methodological 'devices' and 'acts' for this thesis (the way Aradau & Huysmans intended, where 'critical' methods can be critically reoimagined "as devices which enact worlds and acts which disrupt particular worlds" (Aradau & Huysmans, 2014)).

Remember, in the previous experimental note, when I defined lived experience for us and mentioned the lived experience was the "substratum" for this dissertation? I think what I meant was that lived experience is the 'object' of/for our research inquiry- it is the thing we look at/for in the field... ***lived experience in and of the martial from within the three Little Syrias, 'just' in DeleuzeGuattari-an vocabulary***. But as with hell(fire) and pretty much everything else in this text, 'object of inquiry' has been slightly/ critically (I will leave that decision up to you) re-imagined, and the same stands true, here, for the 'site of our study' which is 'martial-aesthetic modes of being'.

To understand what the *insert-profanity-of-choice*, I will need to introduce you to the ***'Body without Organs'*** (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, 2009)

For the sake of your sanity, and mine, I am not going to 'define'/ 'explain'/ 'conceptualize' this because that would be like giving an alcoholic a glass of at least 12-year-cask-ed whiskey- if I touch that, we are spending the next 12 pages at the very least discussing the metaphysical construction, morphology, topology and temporality of the DeleuzeGuattarian world from the planes to the lines, especially when it comes to the constant-but-not-consistent-emergence-of-eminences. So, I am going to give you just the pool-floats that are necessary for us to return to Syrial lived experiences and whatever the *insert-profanity-of-choice* all this has to do with 'aesthetic modes of being with/ within the martial.'

[But here is a list of resources to dive into if you wish to swim arm-float-y free: (Braidotti, 2013; De la Cadena, 2015; De Landa, 2021; DeLanda, 2005, 2006, 2013; Deleuze et al., 1986; Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, 2004, 2009; Deleuze & Parnet, 2007; Lorraine, 2011; Massumi, 2021; Omura et al., 2018)**]**

1. **There exists a plane of immanence**.

   You know how there are all these "planes" we speak of when we are basically trying to talk about some dimension of lived experience but more in a spatial way than in a facet

or characteristic way? Like the material plane, or the physical plane, or the astral plane, etc.? DeleuzeGuattari come up with one of their own and call it the plane of 'immanence' or 'consistency' or 'expression'.

Think of this plane as a 'field', or 'network', or 'space', or the 'dinner table' (from Figure: 65 in Theoretical Note: 5)... just a "place" where all those "Iconic Conceptual Figurations" (like 'Lived Experience', 'Ruination', 'Syrialism', 'Affect', 'Process', 'Mapping', etc.) that we will meet soon and/ or all the 'virtualities' we speak of when thinking through maps (in theoretical note-4) have the space, chance, potential and agency to 'encounter' one another- to meet and affect one another and figure out their relationalities.

So, basically, all the ontological figurations that participate in the becoming of our universes, across all universes, have a 'place' to meet up and contest, collaborate and collage for agency and affect- this place of immanence. Conceptualizing it like this has several rather important connotations for the DeleuzeGuattari worlding (about 'thinking'/'the image of though', 'real-ization', for 'concepts', for 'being', for 'becoming', for 'connections', for 'affect' and so on) but what is most important for us here, is that you have to think of this plane, or at least I do, ***as the plane inhabited and reproduced by different lived experiences of 'lived philosophy'*** (here actual and virtual and reality :: empirics and philosophy and reality- I will return to this).

"[The plane is]...the absolute ground of philosophy, its earth or deterritorialization, the foundation on which it creates its concepts" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994).

2. **The plane of immanence is full of Bodies without Organs and is a Body without Organ itself.**
   Or, rather, Bodies without Organization.

This is one of the more dense concepts, I think, in the DeleuzeGuattarian world, and that's saying something. I think of it this way: in their world, 'things' (anything, person, entity, object, process, dynamic, idea) that exist are either Bodies With Organ(isation)s or Without (and this is a spectrum). ***Think of our 'figuration' for the word/concept 'thing' itself. What does a thing have semiotically, socio-temporally, performatively? A 'thing' is a 'thing' when it has clear-ish boundaries, enough to distinguish it from another 'thing' i.e. it can be stratified. It is a 'thing' when it is given a 'meaning' that is roughly/largely/broadly 'stable', i.e., it is given signification. And a***

'thing' is a 'thing' when it can continuously, in some form of a predictable pattern, perform it 'thing-ness' across socio-temporalities, i.e. it has achieved/received 'subjectivization'.
These are the characteristics that give the 'thing' it's organization, make it a 'body': it has cohesiveness. So what would a Body without Organ(isation)s look like?
If the 'thing' could somehow be 'fractured' to make more porous, make more transparent its boundaries. Or if its relationship with its semiotics was twisted, severed, rendered multiple. Or if we could see that there is actually a plurality of ways in which the thing can perform its many thingness. If we could do this, open the 'thing' *back* up, to make a 'body' without organization (without 'intense' signification, subjectification, and stratification- still a bit, it's a delicate balance we don't want to become completely disassociated, but far more open-ended) then we could again, sense and make sensible, the things continual becoming.
In effect, it would be like being able to access all the possible potentials of the thing itself before/after its 'collapse' into a 'thing' with a body… like being able to tap into the 'desire' by itself articulated but not signified or shaped (there is no answer to what is wanted yet, there is just want)… a plane of expression of the desire of all bodies.

3. Anyway, to further brutally butcher and 'reduce' an entire metaphysical world written against reductionism (among other things), when some things with bodies become so complexly entrenched in our worlds that they take the shape of ***"historical formations, positivities or empiricisms"*** **that they become *'sedimentary beds' for our realities i.e., become practices and worldings of "self-evidence" they can be called 'strata'*. *Families are strata, states, nations, caste, class, race, gender- all these are different strata whose bodies have 'sedimented' over time becoming the bones, as it were, of our worlds. And I think I can safely say for most of us, that these strata, to use proper academic terminology, *insert profanity of choice* suck.* As they stand right now, their consistencies, their rhythms, their intensities, their affects and their entanglements are constantly producing a reality whose texture can only be described, I think, in/through hook's** (hooks, 2009; Puri, 2022)**, and I have taken the liberty to add to it, *"White-Supremacist-Imperialist Colonial-Capitalist Patriarchy"*** (whom you will meet in the sometime in the next few pages or so).

We need to open up these strata! ***We *need* to sense and make them sensible as Bodies without Organs again so we can map different/ other/ antithetical (even) potentialities*** and find ways to actualize them (but that's a whole different step two that we can't think through yet, this is 'just' about the 'actual' and 'virtual' potentialities of reality). But how do we do that? ***How do we make/become a 'Body without Organs?'***

4. ***"This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization [the altering of a social relation, called a territory], possible lines of flight [linkages across existing boundaries], experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times. It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight, causing conjugated flows to pass and escape and bringing forth continuous intensities for a BwO. Connect, conjugate, continue: a whole "diagram," as opposed to still signifying and subjective programs"*** (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004).

And that is what I have tried to do with this dissertation.

"Lodge yourself on a stratum" : onto 'figurations of the the martial'

"Experiment with the opportunities it offers" : taken 'lived experience as our 'opportunity'

"Find an advantageous place on it." : 'aesthetic modes of being vis-à-vis the lived experience of the marital'

"Find potential movements of deterritorialization" : Syrialism

"Possible lines of flight" : 'martial' sensed and made sensible through 'surreal' 'processual' 'embodied' lived-ness.

"Experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there" : experienced as multiplicities and pluralities with deep partial connections

"Try put continuums of intensities segment by segment" : mapping differences and repetitions

"Have a small plot of new land at all times." : a Surreal IR.

i.e., in thinking through the aesthetics of lived experiences of violence, in particularly injury, as a body without organs we have been able to see it as the

part/ portion of the strata (the substrata) from within which/through which we sense, make sense of, and critically reimagine the 'figuration' of the 'martial' i.e., of war and its violences.

But,

What do I mean by that? Let's backtrack for a hot second. As I mentioned before, this 'lived experience' is a profoundly collage-esque 'Iconic Conceptual Figuration' that participates in the becoming of our worlds, so figuring out 'how' we begin to sense and make sense of it care-fully and response-ably – as we will see from the first episodic encounter – was half the battle here, in this manuscript. And as you will, also, see from my encounters with two of the three 'little Syrias' there – on-Syria (primarily focused on social-media 'representations') and art-Syria (on 'artbased' representations) – the answer came, to me, in the form of the aesthetic dimension of lived experience. ***It became the "portal" through which I was able to 'enter' the rhizomatic universe of lived-ness and encounter Syrialism and 'map' it's entanglements with the martial.***

In the pages to follow, then, we will see, ***these social-media and art-based representations, these "portals", of and to the embodied experience of war and its violences are critical sites of investigation because they allow researchers to, literally, see the "stream of consciousness that experiences war" (Bousquet et al., 2020).*** In fact, I think, an argument can be made that examining the representations of any political event is vital to a comprehensive understanding of said event. As Bleiker stresses, "aesthetic sources can offer us alternative insights into IR; a type of reflective understanding that emerges not from systematically applying the technical skills of analysis which prevail in the social sciences, but from cultivating a more open-ended level of sensibility about the political. We might then be able to appreciate what we otherwise cannot see: perspectives and people excluded from prevailing purviews, for instance, or the emotional nature and consequences of political events" (Bleiker, 2012).

For us this becomes ever more important because this is precisely the landscape in which Syrialism resides- one where the intimate experience of wartime injury can often be seen as absurd, senseless or slippery, "twisted", having a sense-logic of its own, and linguistic discursive vantage points have promising but limited potential for its description as we will see in the next chapter. Words cannot give words to the 'silence' around what this lived experience of the martial 'feels' like that has been stalking me/us since the first episodic encounter- as you will soon see for yourself.

And so, we turn to the visual, the 'aesthetic' and hope that (i) it will portal us to the affective, corporeal, material, conceptual, multiple, plural and

partially connected dimensions of living with and through war and its violences, i.e., it will take us to a place we typically can't access but can through this passage.

You will notice I am using aesthetic and visual interchangeably here but that is entirely a matter of personal theoretical convictions. Within International Relations though, they are both quite rich diverse, deeply entangled, but quite distinct fields of inquiry- the "Visual turn" being a different 'thing' as it were from the "Aesthetic turn".

The way I see it, either way, it all starts with Mitchell.

Or rather, Mitchell's seminal question: "What do pictures want? (Mitchell, 2005)" Through his work, Mitchell reminds us that visual artefacts are not simply inert objects that express meaning, rather they have agency of their own- they do things in our world, have impact on our affective, aesthetic and socio- political lives. Think back to what Bleiker said- they represent politics, but they also perform it and are sites for politics themselves, all at once. Effectively that means that when it comes to visual/aesthetic 'things' we, as researchers, seem to approach them either as (1) things that 'represent' a phenomena/ process/ idea/ event in the world (i.e., they mimic it- almost as a congruent illustration of the thing itself) and as such can be 'read' to understand the meaning of the phenomena themselves, (2) , and/or as things that are 'spaces'/places/sites where ^this meaning is contested and their politics decided on (i.e., whose understanding of the phenomena/process/idea/event is made into meaning by tying it to which visual) (3) as things, a little like the way we thought of methods themselves, that 'act' out politics- and this is the Mitchell/Bleiker way (i.e., as things that by representing certain things, and meaning certain things, and something saying more than what they were 'supposed to' represent and 'mean' 'want'/ desire us to see other/ particular parts of these phenomena and influence our worlds through this 'mediation'), or some combination thereof.

In the case of our ***digital content, for example, these visual artefacts primarily find significance because they tell a "different kind of war- story" (Nordstrom, 1997)- one that foregrounds this complexity, processuality and 'excess' (as you will see through our encounter with the 'second little Syria' very soon) that 'desires' to make sensible the "incessant becoming of war" (Bousquet et al., 2020). But, this content, these artefacts from the 'second little Syria' while giving us beautifully complex descriptions of this lived experience didn't quite give this 'lived experience' a name (at least most of the different-topological-sections within it didn't)- and unfortunately(?), at least for me, translating 'war experience' into 'war knowledge' required a name… a name that I encountered in the third little Syria*** (which is much more a sub-section… let's say an exclave within the 'second little Syria' – I promise it will all make much more sense in a bit when you have encountered them), ***through the artists whom this book is dedicated to: Syrialism.***

Here then/though, I am hoping to build on but also from their work a little and operationalize 'visual artefacts' a little differently- to think of them as 'portals' for us to become intimate with "the daily machinations" (as I call it in the next chapter) of any given political process/ phenomenon/event/ idea. ***This is to say that so far, most of the ways in which we have designed handling these 'hot objects' (these visuals) has to do to some degree with getting at, contestations over, or (re)producing meaning. But if we really look at them, really "sense" them, let them "affect" us and be affected by us, we see they have so much more to offer than 'just' being the keepers of meaning. They make sensible to us the 'how' of unfolding of the process/ phenomena/ event/ idea and that, to me, at least is their most powerful aspect- their 'portal-ness' is precisely what allows us to become 'intimately' acquainted with the corporealities, the materialities, the affects, the chromatic landscapes, the textures that are generative of the social-world being 'framed' in the visual itself, taking us, if we are willing to go, to the 'scene of the crime'. They choose through their own desires where they take us, how much they reveal to us, what they allow us to see, through what (windows, mirrors, doors, peepholes), and their mediation[1] foundationally, and fundamentally, 'affects' our 'access' and 'experience' of the thing/ event/ process/ mechanism that they are showing us/ re-presenting to us.***

They are modes of transportation rather than billboards.

[1] 'Mediation' is something we will return to in Field Note: 4 when we discuss what William Blake and Edward Hopper can teach us about the relationalities between the 'mode of being' and the 'experiencing of said mode of being'.

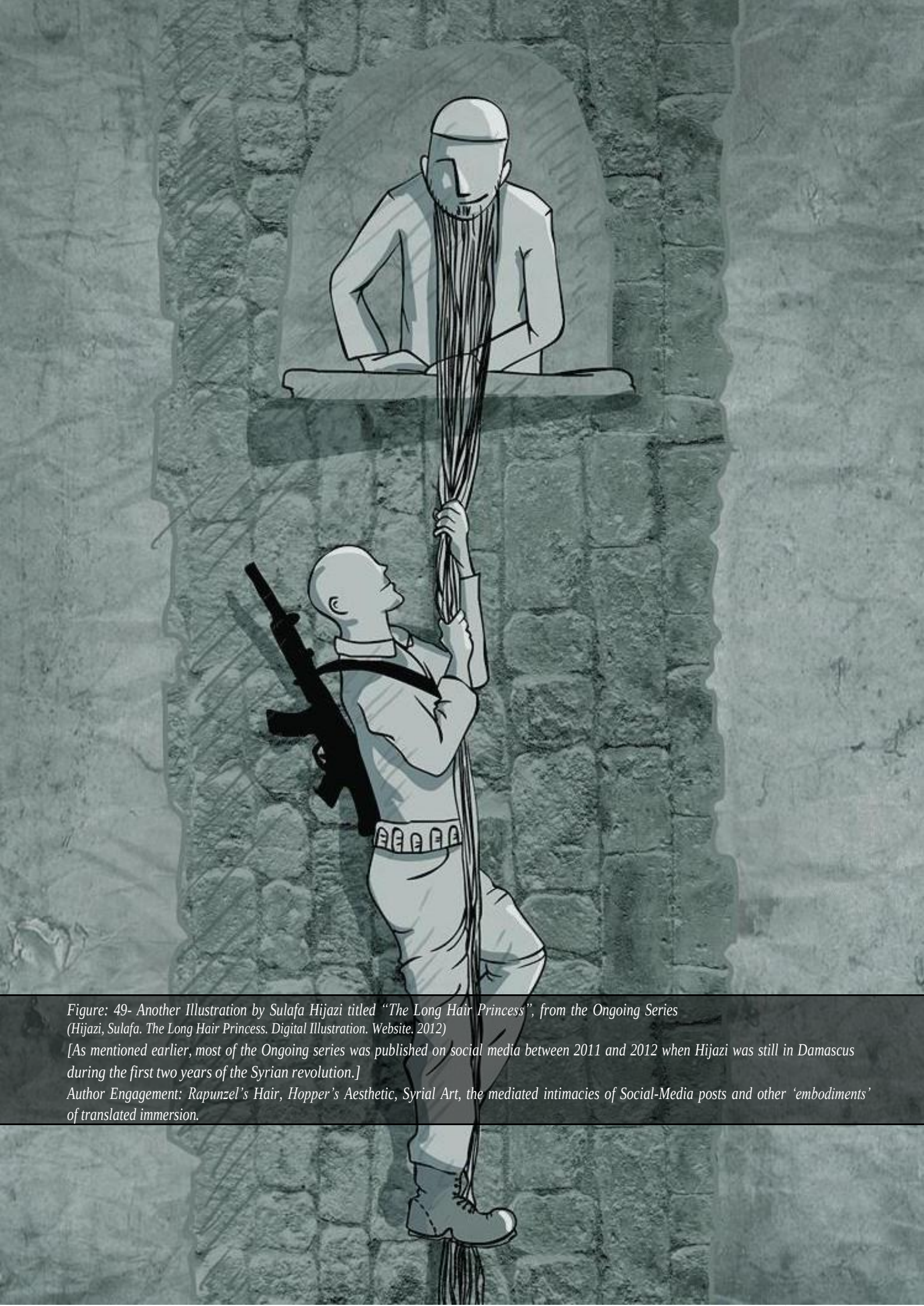


Figure: 49- Another Illustration by Sulafa Hijazi titled "The Long Hair Princess", from the Ongoing Series
(Hijazi, Sulafa. The Long Hair Princess. Digital Illustration. Website. 2012)
[As mentioned earlier, most of the Ongoing series was published on social media between 2011 and 2012 when Hijazi was still in Damascus during the first two years of the Syrian revolution.]
Author Engagement: Rapunzel's Hair, Hopper's Aesthetic, Syrial Art, the mediated intimacies of Social-Media posts and other 'embodiments' of translated immersion.

No-longer-Mandatory-but-perhaps-necessary

Blank-ness.

Exhale?
Unclench your jaw?
Maybe drop your shoulders?

A Dedication

وزهورها تضامناً مع داريا

وجدارياتها وصمودها

i.....

Figure: 50 – Poster by Al-shaab alsori aref tarekh (The Syrian People know Their Way)
Caption: Revolution until the Regime Falls

(The Syrian People Know their Way. Revolution Until Regime Falls. Poster. Print: Syria Speaks. 2014)

[i]



This dissertation is not for you[1].

It sure as hellfire[2] is not for me[3].

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[1]In the **"rhizomatic"**(-ised) (Deleuze & Guattari, 2009) "pluriverse" (Blaney & Tickner, 2017) within which this dissertation is embedded, and which it seeks to reproduce, the construction of boundaries, limits, and margins around the circumferences of research subjects, questions, methods, epistemologies, and ontologies is quite challenging, to say the least. These borders are completely liquid (dynamic, fluid, translucent, permeable, simultaneously absorptive & rinsing, and persistently uncongealing); especially when you are trying to write in a medium that is conscious, appreciative and (re)generative of this rhizomatic affect, i.e. that is the message//massage itself (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967). And so, the question of the 'audience', both in terms of who the imagined reader is and who the book is for – which is an important question for any writing/ any dissertation – became, for me, ever more important because I began operationalising it as a mapping device.

Practically, this meant that because relationalities (strong, partial, knotted, distorted, incomplete) are infinitely connected/-ing in this form of "Entangled Life" (Sheldrake, 2021)// 'entangled' living, and therefore points of entry (remember from page. (i) of the Preface?) and adjournments are almost always arbitrarily chosen by the researcher/writer, I chose to cease my tracking/tracing/mapping of the relationalities outlined here, no matter what the subject(ivity) was, once their 'a'ffects on the lived experiences of my interlocutors – who are my primary audience – seemed to dissipate a little. Or rather, where I (in my limited ability which was tainted by the power-dynamic complicit in all 'study'ing) felt/ sensed these affects evaporating when reading (into/) their embodied experiences.

My interlocutors, then, are not only the 'sources' for this study, but also my partners in conceptualisation (as you will see in Part: 2, Chapter: 3- Translating To/ For Syrialism: Critically (Re)Imagining the Drives of this Text) ***and my primary audience. They are the "affective community"*** (as you will see in Field Note: 4) ***that I am writing about, for and from within.***

[2] I know that typically it's "sure as hell" but, I am re-imagining it here – just "twisting" (Hirsch, 2014) it a little – as 'hellfire.'

In part, this is because I have never been sure about the 'Hell' of it all – eschatology of Abrahamic religions is not something I find myself particularly well versed with beyond quick erratic skimmings of a '100 Places to See After You Die' (Jennings, 2023) or dramatic readings of the 'Marriage of Heaven and Hell' (Blake, 1975). I am however a devout believer of/in 'hellfire'. I am not sure if it's all the climate change and global warming, watching the entirety of the 'Chilling Adventures of Sabrina' (Aguirre-Sacasa, 2018) at least six times, or if it is the seemingly endless hours burnt in therapy struggling and striving to unsnarl the bindings between trauma, grief and subcutaneously clotted rage, but either way, I am with Frost on this one: "Some say the world will end in fire // Some say in ice. From what I've tasted of desire // I hold with those who favour fire…" (2016).

Now, I am sure you are wondering why the hell*fire* am I bothering you with all of this before even beginning to say anything about anything really. ***Consider it an acquainting anecdote of sorts, one that buoyantly highlights the impetus and objective of this dissertation: Critical Re-Imagination*** (Mhurchú & Shindo, 2016)***; especially when it comes to our 'figurations'*** (Haraway, 2004; Weber, 2016) ***of war, its violences, their embodied-ness, the relationalities that allow for these 'becoming's*** (Faber & Stephenson, 2011)***, how we translate it all, and the textures and surfaces of IR's pluriverse itself.***

I had to go full *insert-profanity-of-choice* Dexter(!)[4]
on the lives and worlds of everyone I speak to and of in this book
(and perhaps also on myself).

Over the next few pages, I will relentlessly (if not irritatingly so) remind you how this manuscript, our worlds, researching, writing, thinking, feeling, being, living, existing, dying – all of it – is existentially rhizomatic, multiple and plural... is Surreal. It's all Everything, Everywhere All at Once (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022), all the time. The only split-second of singularity I have not deracinated from this text is here. So, if you get lost – as I did so often and so horribly in navigating my way through this grimoire – find your way back to a clearing by cantillating that the intention, motivation, justification, and ambition behind every word inscribed here, behind every affect produced, all converge at the notion that this dissertation is an/our (the interlocutors', theoretical concepts' and my) attempt at actively triggering certain Critical Re-Imaginations. Whether these come in the form of twists and nuances, like hell vs. hellfire, or are more noticeably pronounced, like the different definitional morphologies of/for some of the concepts worked with, is – at least for the sake of this argument – beside the point.

Just remember, please.

*Hell*fire* // i.e., Critical Re-Imagination // is my elevator pitch for this dissertation.*

In case of an emergency, summon it.

[3] There is a lot I would like to flag here about working with interpretivism, of the significance of introspection in (interpretivist) social inquiry, about the kaleidoscopic-ness of positionality and the ways in which the morphologies of any given text are foundationally and formatively framed by/within these dimensions. And I will return to it all later in the text (especially in Field Notes: 6 & 7), also diving further into how these research practices tessellate alongside/into performances of Narrative IR, Autoethnographic IR, Affective, and Aesthetic IRs; 'Collage'-ing (de Rijke, 2023) it all together so it (hopefully) approximates the profile on an 'unreliable narrator'. Soon. ***Until then, and even after that, I highly recommend reading this text with a marrow-deep seated cognizance – and hopefully, concession – that nothing remembered/ recalled/ written/ spoken of here can, should and/or could be bought into without/beyond 'reasonable doubt' (employed here in its legal register). Tear into it, quite literally if you are so moved to, as you see fit. Feel your way through it from within your own skins.***

And please remember, this is not an exercise in persuasion: it's not an encouragement to see the martial 'only' a certain/ my way, or an enticement to think of living with/ through/ within violence 'only' in the terms I have outlined here, or a cajolery to encounter, witness and remember Syria and its revolutionary realities 'only' like this- through Syrialism.

It is 'simply' an experience.

[4] If you haven't met one of television's most complex – and beloved?!? – serial killer Dexter Morgan yet, you absolutely should.

On second thought- don't.

Why violate, dismember, and disfigure your sanity over dissecting the life of a butcher?

Instead, allow me to briefly, and quite superficially, introduce you to him so I can talk to you about why his is the figuration (Haraway, 2004; Weber, 2016). I feel bludgeoned into projecting on both, the work that went into this manuscript and the process of writing it.

The series (Manos Jr., 2006) tails a forensic blood splatter analyst who works for the Miami Metro Police Department and moonlights as a serial killer. Or the other way around- depends on the day. Having witnessed his birth mother's sadistic murder (with a chainsaw, when he was three), Dexter's being and worlding are shaped by a sharply intimate understanding, consideration, and appreciation for the traumas of the lived experience of such violence.

And so, in the spirit of vigilantism, he only murders those who have committed heinous crimes and evaded justice for them. And he unapologetically lives in/through this absolute multiplicity- thinking, feeling and living through his different selves (because an argument can be made that there is also a third Dexter- one that deeply craves a 'normal' social life) as distinct but tenaciously connected parts of a constantly interacting and tenaciously connected whole.

There is cohesiveness to Dexter, though not constancy or consistency.

And all Dexter-s are pathologically meticulous.

He has plastic-wrapped "kill rooms," he always wears gloves, and he 'pain'stakingly and diligently – with an almost clinical precision – carves up the corpses of his violated 'victims', dissecting, disfiguring, and dismembering them, before disposing of them in Gulf Stream of the Atlantic.

Now, I am not a serial killer (yet) – "for legal reasons that's a joke". And the unquestionably brilliant interlocutors whose words, works and worlds form the very substratum of this dissertation are most definitely not criminals in any way, shape, or form. But there are quite a few motifs here, in Dexter's multiverse, that have found recurrence – a repetition albeit with/through difference (Deleuze, 1994) – in the research-writing process of this dissertation.

The moral ambiguity baked into the very premise of the show, the 'stun'ning force of the sheerabandon with which psychological complexities and their sociological twins are confronted, and the discussions this all prompts about trauma-identity-disguise-performance-socialization and their relationalities to violence all seem to have acquired replication within the pages that follow. But this is especially true, first, for the "multiplicity" (Mol, 2003) of it all and how categorically foundational it is to the very metaphysics (both sense-making and world-making mechanics) of this (show's) - and this (dissertation's) - understandings, articulations and translations of the lived experience of violence, and, second, for the underscoring of the processuality (Lisle, 2021) therein.

Dexter is constantly "becoming" (Faber G Stephenson, 2011) Dexter through the repeated, interrupted, "partial" (Strathern, 2005), "bumpy" (Lisle, 2021) obsessings with embodied violence and/or the morbid fascination (quite literally) with the processes of killing and/or the rituals of clinicality in the management of all that gore and/or the striving for a place within the shifting structures of social relationalities and the very interaction-effect (/interaction- 'a'ffect) of all the processes - constantly but not consistently - making and unmaking - again, constantly but not consistently - all the Dexters.

Just like this dissertation, and the author, and the readers are constantly "becoming" that dissertation, and this author and you readers.

And so, Dexter's is the figuration of research/researcher/writing/writer that I am going with.

Well, because of all this, and of course, the mirrored at-home-ness in bloodshed, carnage, slaughter, butchery, and grime (as you will unfortunately see).

This book is for them.

All of them. Any of them.

Figure: 51 – Poster by Alshaab alsori aref tarekh (The Syrian People know Their Way)
Caption: Wanted (Bashar al-Assad) for Crimes Against Humanity.

(The Syrian People Know their Way. Revolution Until Regime Falls. Poster. Print: Syria Speaks. 2014



Figure: 52 – Photograph by Lens Young Dimashqi (Damascus)
Posted on their Facebook page in May, 2021
(Damascus, Lens Young. Photograph. Facebook. 2021)
Caption:

ناء تأدية رئيس العصابة قسمه معاهداً حفظ البلاد والعباد كانت طائراته وروسيا تحلق فوق رؤوس المدنيين لتنتزع أرواحهم وتغرقهم بدمائهم ليبرهن دمويته المتجددة، ويبتدئ سنواته الجديدة بما تعاهد عليه مع أبيه من قتل وتدمير وتشريد واغتصاب

للحقوق والمناصب ..لعائن الله تطوقه وزبانيته ساحة الساعة، حمص في

Translation: As the gang leader fulfilled his oath, pledging to protect the country and its people, his planes and Russia were flying over the heads of civilians to snatch their lives and drown them in their blood, to prove his renewed bloodiness, and he would begin his new years with what he had pledged to do with his father, including killing, destruction, displacement, and the usurpation of rights and positions... May God curse those who encircle him and his thugs. (At the Clock Sqaure in Homs).



[i]"Graffiti is our ink, and the walls of Syria are our paper.
We write our history in the streets, where it belongs."

- Member of Kesh Malek

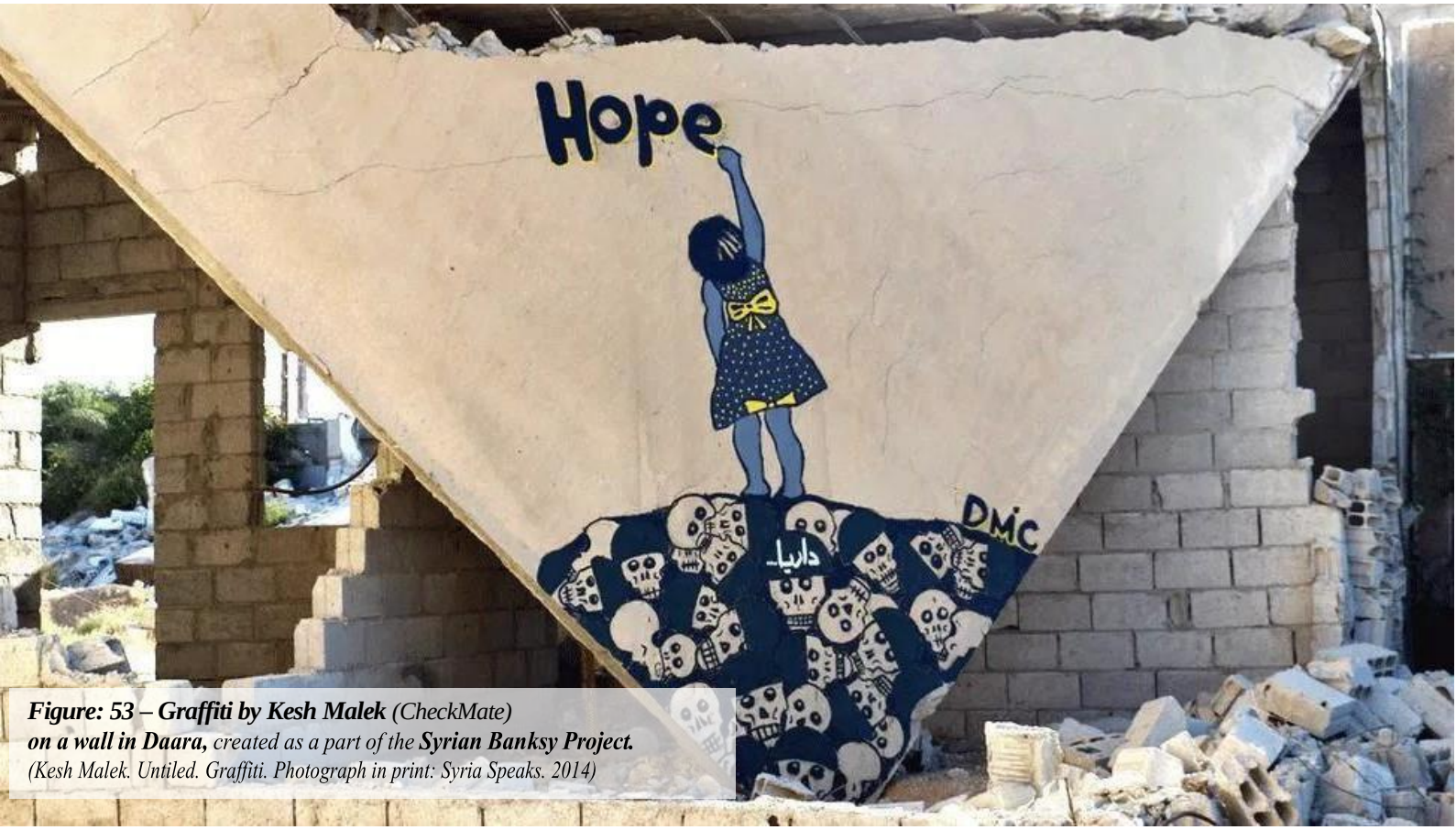


Figure: 53 – Graffiti by Kesh Malek *(CheckMate)*
on a wall in Daara, *created as a part of the* ***Syrian Banksy Project.***
(Kesh Malek. Untiled. Graffiti. Photograph in print: Syria Speaks. 2014)

Remember at the beginning of the Prologue when we talked about the role of 'Graffiti' in the Syrian revolution and had the chance (honour?) to briefly meet Mouawiya Syasneh? Or even earlier in the Content-pages for this manuscript when we met Kesh Malek's first mural presented here alongside posters from Kartoneh? Or just a page or two, or three-ish, ago when we saw a poster by al-Shaab al-Soriy aref Tarekh (the Syrian People Know their Way)? Think back to these contexts and hold them close, especially when you think of Daraa and her place in the Syrian Revolutionary landscapes and why this dedication has a dedication to her, her ruined walls, her resilient resistances, her graffities and her flowers.

In the meantime, let me introduce you to Kesh Malek. In the early days of the Syrian revolution (March 2011), a group of young activists (much like Lens Homsi, but also completely different-ly) from Aleppo came together with a singular demand for democratic transition in the Syrian society – one grounded in justice, freedom, and dignity – and created a community engagement and outreach strategy that has since proven to be one of the most sustainable grassroots-efforts to have spring in/from post-2011-Revolution-Syria. The group – now a production house, committee and foundation – chose to call themselves Kesh Malek, "Checkmate," a purpose-full, if not power-full name I think, chosen to quite literally symbolize

their goal: toppling the 'king'—the Assad regime. The (mostly) anonymous collective played a crucial role in mobilizing protests, raising awareness through advocacy, organizing localized civil society initiatives (especially after the 'liberation' of eastern Aleppo in early 2012), all the while creatively resisting (as well) by doing everything humanly possibly, from printing underground flyers to, yes, perhaps most (e/)affectively, painting street art. Graffiti for them – echoing the refrain felt within the larger melee of the Syrian resistance fabric – became one of the most symbolically charged tools to operationalize for their activism: a 'tool' that did not just allow them to amplify their cries for justice, or calls for solidarity, or commemorate all that was lost, or advocate against the 'king' they sought to topple, it also became an 'act' of reclamation and self-declaration. It is how they began to reclaim public spaces – not just as a people visually (re-)occupying their own lived-lands/ not just as a visual representation of a people overthrowing the regimes-occupation over their living-land but also/ – and operationalize them, and/ through the graffiti-ing, to reconstruct and rebuild through a local council (which as of 2016 was one of the only towns to have such an initiative, especially one where the civil actor was the coordinating body for the military branch).

"We cannot just say, 'We want to topple the regime.'
We must make clear what the alternative is.
From now on, instead of graffiti cursing the regime, our new slogans will be lessons.
We will write the principles of our revolution – equality, law, non-sectarianism.
We will offer a better vision of the future."
- A member of the local council, (2016)

One of these projects – The Syria Banksy Project — one of Kesh Malek's most resonant initiatives, where the team used graffiti to project Syria's struggle (on-line/)to the world. The project aimed to "transfer the civic voice in Syria to the world using graffiti art," amplifying the values that the collective, and an argument can be made that the revolution as a whole held dear(-er than literal life): those of freedom, justice, and democracy. They 'Banksy'-ed their walls and drew attention not just to the human rights violations and war crimes that were governing life/ living in the country, but in making this (partial-) connection to 'Banksy', also found a way to tap into/ channel/ amplify/ contribute to/ add to the larger refrain of global-movements-of-fighting-or-justice-and-human-dignity-through-street-art.
And here too, like the musician-activists from the Prologue and the artist-activists from Living through Syrialism, they were not alone in this endeavour. Groups like al-Shaab al-Soria aref Tarekh (The Syrian People Know their Way) and/or Kafranbel stood in strong solidarity with them. Through them, graffiti became, not only an act of defiance/ resistance; but a way of crafting (/ mode of living through), or rather writing (quite literally), an 'alternative' history (a counter-archiving) of the Syrian revolution- one written by, through and in 'the local'.

[ii] "Daraya was a star before the revolution and a star during.
What the young men and women of the city built took immense efforts and resulted in a small exemplary model for the future of Syria, the one we dream of.
The activism in the city never seized to amaze us for a minute.
It was in Daraya where the peaceful protestors first carried roses and water to the soldiers of the Syrian army that persisted in killing them …

In Daraya, the signs calling for co-existence continued to be held high
even when the entire country was falling into despair following every new massacre."

- Razan Zeitouneh,
Syrian Human Rights Lawyer and Civil Society Activist,
Founding Member: Human Rights Association in Syria
Founder: the Syrian Human Rights Information Link
Founder: Violations Documentation Centre in Syria (in April 2011)
Member: Committee to Support Families of Political Prisoners in Syria
Reporter: Human Rights Violations, Local Coordination Committees of Syria
- Kidnapped on the 9th of December, 2013
(current position(ality): unknown but presumed, deceased)

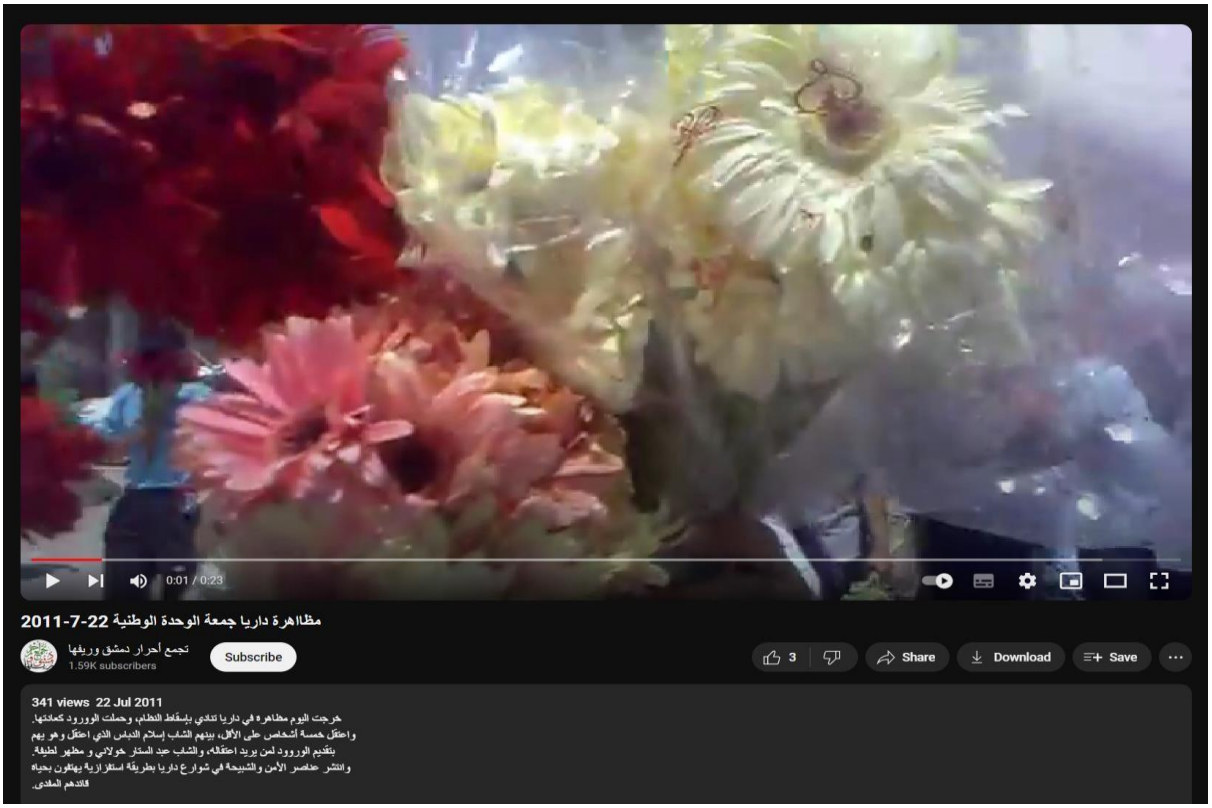


Figure: 54 *– Still from a video titled,* ***"Darya Demonstration, Friday of National Unity"***

In the previous footnote, when we spoke a bit about Daraa and her place in the Syrian Revolutionary landscapes I had asked you to think about the anonymous collectives making graffiti and "why this dedication has a dedication to her, her ruined walls, her resilient resistances, her graffities and her flowers." This is the story of these / her flowers.

Daara, as we have spoken of here was not only the town that endured the first arson through Asaad-ian martial violence, it was also the space that resiliently, repeatedly, resisted this violence, bore its injuries, in/ through/ with heartbreakingly non-violent grace. These Daara-ians/ Daara-ns chose demonstrations, public space occupations, petitions, creation of local committees, and flower-protests in the face of (not only sieges &/or 'riot control violences', but also) forced disappearances, unlawful detention and the

horrifying torture of their loved ones and themselves, echoing Yahya Shurbaji's sentiment, "I would rather be killed than be a killer".

In one of these protest – which soon after became a form of repetitive protest practice – demonstrators handed out flowers and bottles of water to the very soldiers and police aid that were trying to oppress them/ suppress the protest. For them, the flowers were a symbol of (hope-full) peace and the water a gesture to "nourish the idea of life and growth" despite their differences. And though the peaceful resistance was met with unspeakable, (yet, at least in the Asaad-ian-ruinously-inclined-martial worlding, unfortunately, not unimaginable) cruelty (with flower-holding-disappearing-activists, for instance, whose families were only informed in July of 2017 that their children/ siblings/ partners had all been executed in 2013), its legacy was not only one of loss; it birthed a genealogy of a deeply Syrial survival, a Syrvival, as well.

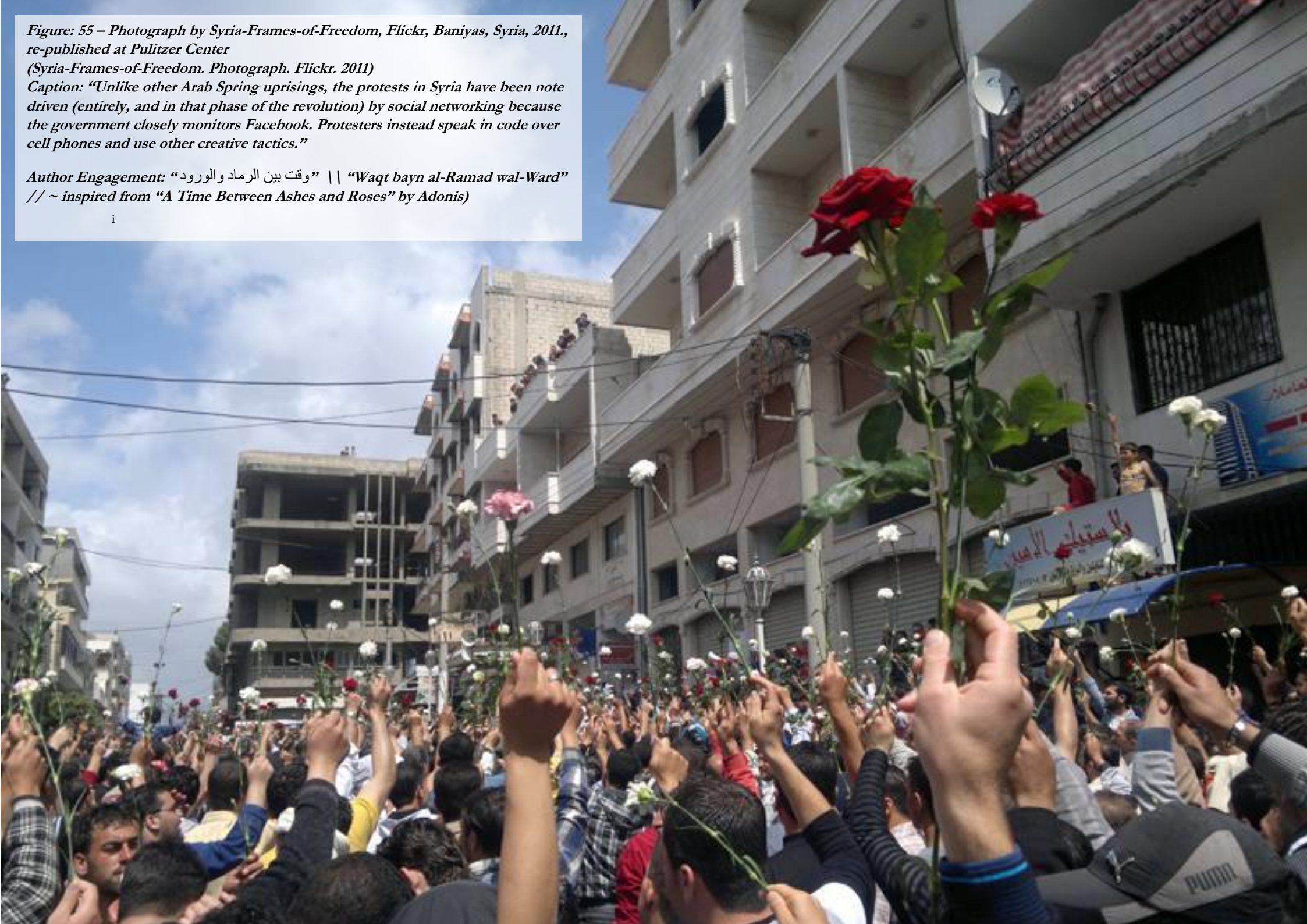


Figure: 55 – Photograph by Syria-Frames-of-Freedom, Flickr, Baniyas, Syria, 2011., re-published at Pulitzer Center
(Syria-Frames-of-Freedom. Photograph. Flickr. 2011)
Caption: "Unlike other Arab Spring uprisings, the protests in Syria have been note driven (entirely, and in that phase of the revolution) by social networking because the government closely monitors Facebook. Protesters instead speak in code over cell phones and use other creative tactics."

Author Engagement: "وقت بين الرماد والورود" // "Waqt bayn al-Ramad wal-Ward" // ~ inspired from "A Time Between Ashes and Roses" by Adonis)

i

[i]

يأتي وقت بين الرماد والورود
عندما ينطفئ كل شيء ويبدأ كل شيء

There comes a time between Ashes and Roses
When everything is extinguishes and everything begins.
- *Adonis, A Time Between Ashes and Roses.*

I am never quite sure how to introduce 'Adonis', ever. The way I see it, Adonis (which I think is true for most 'single-word-named/pseudonym-ed' authors/ artists/ poets/ singers that we gravitate towards) is more of a phenomenon than a person/ poet-activist (hooks' words, and cooke's practice, for wanting to operationalize small-case letters for her (pen/)name to shift emphasis from herself-the-author to her ideas come to mind). And I am not just saying this because my quite-literally-bedside-copy of "If Only the Sea Could Sleep" has been worn so thin it's waiting on a burn-out diagnosis.
Adonis (born as Ali Ahmad Said Esber) is more than a poet — he is the 'OG' revolutionary-in-exile, a 'rebel' who has spent his life disrupting/ rupturing/ twisting/ 'critically reimagining', both, the political and poetic worlds and worldings of West Asia. He is also the OG Arab Surrealist (Abdulla, 2009; Arabi, 2015; Bellan & Drost, 2021; Cumberbatch, 2013; Eburne, 2021; Hadavi Khalil-Abad et al., 2022; Howarth, 2005; Irwin, 2005; Karimi & Saedi, n.d.; Robbins, 2024; Shamsizadeh, 2019; Wardeh, 2010).
Think with me here. Think of his name alone. This need/ desire that possessed him/ that he possessed to constantly, consistently, consciously and conscientiously, critically reimagine everything – the worlds he inhabited, the times and places he lived through, the realities he encountered – was so existentially centric to his very mode of being that he chose his own name (and with that his own figure/-ation) 'Adonis' at 17, after facing several rejections from publishing houses and magazines, to, as he framed it himself, "alert napping editors to his precocious talent and his pre-Islamic, pan-Mediterranean muses". <- ***This is Adonis, at least to me: a personification of the terrifyingly unyielding power and energy of a will that has found absolute resolve and is – in/ through/ from within a truly embodied knowing of precisely how (where and when) (in/)affective this resolution can be – determined to critically reimagine our worlds/worldings.*** *And this was one of the primary reasons, at least for/ from within this manuscript-pluriverse, that I was reminded of Adonis, well this, and****: (i) the Syrialism of Adonis' work (in both, his treatment of history and of spatiality), (ii) his work with/on the conventions of language itself and (iii) his political engagements with the martial, of course.***

"Why did the past end and yet not end?
Why this Earth, that begets melancholy days, this monotonous Earth?" (p. 31).

I think these elements of his oeuvre find a particularly fascinating crystallization in "A Time Between Ashes and Roses" (Toorawa, 2004). It is a collection of three poems, "An Introduction to the History of Petty Kinds", "This is my Name" and "A Grave for New York" that immediately pulls the reader into a dense, surreal worlding, where stories and histories, myths and mythos, collide, converge and corrode to form a worlding of exile steeped in violence and resilience/ to give expression to a violent & resilient – violently resilient – worlding of exile. In Adonis' universes, poetry – and the times and spaces it evokes – does not follow a single red thread; it unravels simultaneously in all directions, spilling, overflowing, retreating, challenging, provoking, and ultimately revealing both, the fissures in our figurations of history, violence and identity and in our understandings of these figurations. Adonis's (re)figuration of (counter-?/ local-? oral-?)history, at least in A Time Between Ashes and Roses (born in the aftermath of the 1967 naksa), is that of a phantasmagoria: a surrealist landscape "haunted" by figures of the past — Kufa, al-Andalus, 'Ali, Gibran, al-Hallaj, al-Mutanabbi, figures of resistance, poets from West Asia, historical icons of resistance — all of whom find equitable footing in this history/ historicity not only to create a narrative of political critique and resistance therein, but also one that critiques, resists and "critically reimagines" (Mhurchú & Shindo, 2016) the very ideas, ideologies, thoughts, customs, norms, structures... the very "figurations" (Haraway, 2004, 2016) that build our worlds and us, and that we build for our worlds. And he does it all, by "twisting" (Hirsch, 2014), by rendering strange – or "uniting strangeness with strangeness" (Breton, 2020), the 'givens' of our worldings to shake us out of the 'normalizations' of different violences/ violent realities and relationalities, laying bare the lived experience of living through/ with/ within them.

And it is precisely through this surrealism – Syrialism – that he, like us (my interlocutors and I) – can/ has mapped, traced, and/or created partial connections between all these violences/ violent realities and built affective communities in their wake (built 'insides' as you will see in the next quote) ... it is through the echoes, the refrains, of this surrealism/ Syrialism that he (like us) has found that these violences/ violent realities derive their vitality, adaptability, and resilience from the rhizomatic connections they share with each other// it is through the echoes, the refrains, of this surrealism/ Syrialism that he (like us) has found that these resistance- realities/ realities of resistance derive their vitality, adaptability, and resilience from the rhizomatic connection they share with each other (something he has discussed himself quite extensively in "").

"Harlem, / I do not come from outside:
I know your hatred, I know its delicious bread.
There is nothing but sudden hunger for famine, nothing for prison but lightning bolts of violence" (p. 149).

Mandatory ~~Mad~~

Blank-ness.

A Translator's Note //
A Note on Translation

Living through an Experiment in Syrialism ¦

¦ Living Through a Syrialist Experiment

إلى شهرزاد والقصص التي تبقينا أحياء

A Translator's Note/ A Note on Translation:
Living through an Experiment in Syrialism /
Living Through a Syrialist Experiment

'Injury', a syrial affective community, a desire to make sensible the lived-ness of the martial, a – continunously and relentless frustrated – drive to make sense of it, and war-stories injured bodies are telling about themselves on/off-line: that is how our story begins, in Syrialism, with the violations and violences of the martial and the "imperfect struggles" (Baroni, 2022) of translation.

In the Prologue, a few pages ago, I had asked you to think/ live through this text as if it were 'simply' a performance. And now, adding some texture, direction and definition to it, I am asking you to think/ live through it as a performance of/in 'Translation', and to give me a moment to introduce the Dramatis Personae for it.

Protagonist/ Deuteragonist..... A "Different" Kind of War-Story

A war-story – like the one we met in the Prologue – where the 'subject' of 'study' is the 'morphologies of the lived experiences of martial violences and the axiologies of thinking through war at/ through/ from within them', one geared:

i. Towards 'injury'

1. Away from 'Bounded Figurations of Violence'
2. Away from Cause and Effect
3. Away from 'Measure for'
4. Away from 'Actors'

ii. Towards 'living experience'
(Theoretical Note:)

1. Within Grounded theory
2. Within Non-Representation
3. Within Syrial Lived Experiences
4. Within Lived Experiences of Syrially-identifying-Injured-Bodies

iii. Towards 'sensing and making sense-able'

1. Through 'encounter'
2. Through 'aesthetics'
3. Through 'design'
4. Through 'affective' 'speculation' & 'story- telling'

iv. Towards 'mangled bodies'
(Theoretical Note: 2)

1. Through 'embodied-ness'
2. Through 'sense-scapes'
3. Through 'materialities'
4. Through 'place'
   (space, time, coagulation of semiotic inscriptions & socio-politicalities)
5. Through 'affect' / 'aesthetic'
6. And the aesthetics of it all / and the affect of it all

v. Towards 'Affective Communities'
(Theoretical Note: 4)

1. Through 'refrain'
2. Through 'refracted belonging'
3. Through 'reflection'

Protagonist/ Deuteragonist..... Translation

A performance through which we are able to access, encounter, comprehend, conceptualize, design, communicate and live-out this^ "Different" War Story, a performance that takes place:

vi. Across stages:

1. War Experience into War knowing.
2. War knowing into War knowledge.
3. War knowledge into War Story.

vii. Across spaces:

4. Embodied Experience
5. Aesthetic Lexicons
6. Figuration-al Interpretations
7. Positional-ity Hiccups
8. Critical Reimaginations

viii. Across performances:

9. Translation as 'Ethnographic Sensibility'
10. Translation as 'Not Only'
    i. Deconstruction
    ii. Multiplicity
    iii. Resistance
    iv. Re-Figuration
11. Translation as Collaboration, 'Concept Work' and Design-ing
12. Translation as 'Critical Re-Imagination'

ix. Across authors:

13. 'Users' of generated content
14. Artists and their Resistance
15. 'Unreliable' Authors
16. Participatory Audiences

x. Across figurations:

17. Syrial War Experience
18. Syrialist War Knowing
19. Syrialism and War Knowledge
20. Syrial War Story

xi. Across worldings.

21. Through Complexity
22. Through Processuality
23. Through Relationality
24. And the Politics of it All

i.e, working 'through Translation as Mediation' to think/ live through a 'Different' kind of war-Story about the 'lived'-experience of the martial, one that is designed to be an:

Empirical Philosophy**.....** Built with/ from within

Care-full-ness**.....** To stand in

Solidarity**.....** with (certain/ Syrial) self-declarations of (certain/ Syrially identifying) injured bodies.

Bear with me. I will explain all of this soon enough-ish, or sometime later, but at some point for sure. For now, let's first begin with getting to know more about 'injury'- the 'object' of the study/ the 'objective' of study, the particular phenomena/ dimension/ thing of 'lived experience of the martial' (the subject of our study as we saw in Theoretical Note: 2) that we are trying to observe, capture, sense and through which we are measuring/ trying to make sense of this martial livedness. Then we can begin grappling with the what-s and how-s of 'design' an experiment such as this one – an injurious experiment/ an experiment on injury, and finally from there map out what 'translation' 'does' (and not just 'mean'- a distinction that will be made more clear in Chapter: 3 of Part: 2- Translating to/for Syrialism) in/ through its entanglements with injury and design for/ in this text.

Doing 'Injury'

"It so happens that for many years now,
I have been ***engaged in thinking and writing about violence***
and asking ***what kind of work anthropology does in shaping the object we have come to call violence.***
I have a picture of this book as some kind of map (or a fragment of one)
of the distance that I have traveled since I first realized
how much of my intellectual biography was tied up with questions around violence:
my journey is not about going forward, but rather turning back,
about collecting words and thoughts
that I think of as having forged connections
between me and my interlocutors in the field.
Two major events have anchored my ethnographic and anthropological reflections,
but the book is not about these events *in the sense that*
a historian or a psychoanalyst might construe them.
Rather, it ***narrates the lives of particular persons and communities who were deeply embedded in these events,***
and it ***describes the way that the event attaches itself with its tentacles into everyday life***
and folds itself into the recesses of the ordinary.
My attention is captured in this book by both the larger possibilities of phenomena and the singularity of lives."
- Life and Words: Violene and the Descent into the Ordinary (Das, 2006)

Of the many contemporaneously relevant socio-political martial, and other, processes that the 'on/'life of the Syrian Revolution makes intimately accessible to us, this dissertation addresses only/merely one: ***"injury"*** (Scarry, 1987).

To paraphrase Das's insights into the why-s and how-s of writing "*Life and Words*: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary" mentioned above and/or 'translate' them vis-à-vis this dissertation, I would say that for many years now, I have been engaged in thinking, and hoping to write, care-fully about 'injury'- the "***main purpose and outcome of war***" (ibid). And I think there are three intertwined reasons for this (the academic/ the professional, the personal and the political) each teasing out, generated by and generative of different conceptualizations/ understandings/ dimensions/ aspects of 'injury' but sharing a 'refrain'/ an echo – a silhouette that lingers, haunting, each figuration – ***one where injury is sensed and made sense of as the physiological damage (or rather the psycho-scoio-physiological damage) to the 'living'/ 'life' tissue of any actant, whether human, non-human, material, technological, normative or conceptual and where, as such, martial-violence becomes at once the act/ practice/ performance through which injury is performed in service of war/ the martial and where the 'martial' is an extension/ a mileu/ an ecology/ an assemblage/ a practice/ a performance of injury-ing by a different means.***

Academically/Professionally, I think, I focus on 'injury', or what I call 'the violences of war', here because I have spent the past 12 years 'awkwardly joking' about how the Revolution has had a similar impact on my subjectification as a 'social scientisit' as 9/11 did – in my limited grasp of the sociology of knowledge production within International Relations, War Studies (Critical or otherwise) in particular – on cohorts above/ ahead of mine, at least in the Western rendition of IR, and/or an impact similar to the one the Iraq War had for Media Studies as a discipline (within its Anglo-Saxon register).

I was fifteen when the revolution began, seventeen when it became a permanent fixture in my online world, and eighteen – dawdling around in my academic diapers – when I admitted (or decided?) that it would eclipse my (at the very least) intellectual lifeworlds. And in this past decade or so, since, whenever I have tried to map and comprehend the socio-political rhythms 'on/'life of the Syrian revolution, tried to sense and make sense of the processes of "injury" within this martial reality in particularly, from within/through the sensory and epistemological regimes that dominate (at least the historiographies of IR that I have encountered in my research trainings) IR's 'concept-work' vis-à-vis 'war' and its 'violences', I have stumbled into a discrepancy of sorts, a gap or a chasm (depending on the day/ theoretical framework). Something never quite adds up, not congruently anyway. Repeatedly, ***there is an 'excess'... an "abundance" of sensory and affective***

experience that goes unnoticed/ un-analysed/ un-articulated, at least ('scientific' / 'academic') categorically and verbally, i.e. war, and its violence, in/ through the 'on-'life of the Syrian Revolution, at least in/ through 'testimonial' digital content (designed, archived and circulated to generate intimate stories about the daily machinations of the martial and its deeply embodied affective politics), repeatedly, feel too 'chaotic', 'absurd' (Arendt, 1970), 'slippery' (Taussig, 2007), 'surreal' to be captured within these, given, theoretical frameworks as if the "stream of consciousness that experiences war" (Bousquet et al., 2020)***, can never quite find clear comprehension within these frameworks.***

In thinking with Sylvester, Brighton, Bousquet, Grove, Shah, Barkawi, Das, Parashar, and others, I think this is because, there is a ***"conceptual blackhole surrounding the notion of war"*** (ibid) in IR. "The defining schools of International Relations theory consistently 'decentre' war" through explaining it as an outcome of more fundamental processes and relations" (Barkawi & Brighton, 2011). War, first, is something to be explained through a totalising account of that which 'causes' it" and in/through that practice of IR – one that ***"has a penchant for matching conceptual abstractions with system-level dynamics that embroil states but not humans in wars" to the extent "that people's experiences are coded as casualties or collateral damage and are seen as the consequence of war but not the main point"*** (Sylvester, 2012) – ***the plurality of actors that are affected by/affect the daily performance of war is obscured; or, the entanglements war's violences have with violences of everyday governance and politics (which effectively deconstruct that dichotomy) are rendered invisible, as are the legacies/durabilities of different violent/violence ecologies on the daily minutiae of the performance of war.***

Here, the 'enactment of injury' (Scarry, 1987) – war's primary task – somehow[1] loses its corporeal, experiential, lived dimension in such a way that this 'injury' becomes a logistical aftermath, an unfortunate necessity that takes the shape of justifiably collateral damage (and can be measured as such), a sociopolitical residue or an afterthought in analysis.

[1] Scarry's argument here is that when this obfuscation takes the shape of complete invisibility it is through 'omission' and 'redescription' and when its morphology is defined by rendering-marginal instead of completely invisible, it does so across four paths: (a) ***by conceptualizing 'injury' as the byproduct of war, or*** (b) ***through the notion of the accidental, and/or*** (c) ***as the 'cost' of war and/or*** (d) ***as a "continual act of extension, as though it were the umbrella on an ever-extending shaft"*** (ibid), a stretchy abstract and not a deeply embodied and lived reality.

Figure: 56- Conceptual Photography by Omar Imam, from the Syrialism Collection
(Imam, Omar. Conceptual Photograph. Omar Imam Website. 2018)
Title for the Artwork by Omar: (quoting his interlocutor) ***"I served for both the Syrian army and the rebels. In the field only the 'morality' of war exists."***
Author Engagement: ***Escape-ing: 'Out of Entombments'***



Knowingly or otherwise, these conceptualizations, these structural/institutional sensory and epistemic regimes, have created a repertoire of surreptitiously socio-politically contingent theoretical models/universes that have systematically evicted theorizing the processual nature of war (and violence) from the domain of IR. There is very little room for war, beyond the "logics of instrumentalization" (Brighton, 2019) to be seen as a "social institution" (Sylvester, 2012, 2013b, 2013a) and for its violences, its desire to injure, to be seen as a "dimension of living" (Nordstrom & Robben, 1995) in its own right, not a means to an end- and this is precisely what the 'on-'life of the Syrian Revolution, I think, makes painfully (quite literally) sensible. It demands that we reimagine our figurations of the martial and its violence by taking seriously ***how war's injurious processes "unmake worlds, both real and conceptual"*** (Scarry, 1987; Sylvester, 2012) ***and, I argue further, remake them, grotesquely reassembling – "twisting"*** (Hirsch, 2014) **–** ***relationalities between materials, spaces, temporalities, technologies, bodies, affects, senses and sensibilities*** ***and can as such, best be sensed and made sense of through/ by tapping into the processual "tumult of conflict (that) periodically unsettles and shatters the reality principle of our understandings" through an "unbridled deregulation of the senses and emergent subjectivities"*** (Bousquet et al., 2020)**.**

Personally, and politically, my drive to work through/ from within/ with 'injury' – martial or otherwise – was deeply grounded in an alienating anger and sadness at not being able to 'find' a 'theory' that I could 'apply' to my own lived experience of violence/ injury. I was struggling to find ways, methods, categories, concepts and frameworks through which I could sense and make sensible the 'surreality' of what violence, violation and injury ***feel like*** in/ through a truly 'lived' dimension, i.e., ***what violence*** (in both the registers that I was intimately familiar with, intimate-partner violence and the occupation of Kashmir, differently but repeatedly) ***feels like through the body; through noise, sight, sound, smell, touch; through materials, technologies; through cruelty, duress, ruination and fear… how war and its violences are an intensely embodied experience/ lived processes, how injury can be sensed and made (un)sensible as an unrelenting onslaught on an individual's body, mind, emotions, sensibilities (aesthetic and otherwise) and materials through (other) bodies, (other) minds, (other) emotions, (other) sensibilities and (other) materials and any act of violence, then, can potentially be experienced as an avalanche of complete and utter mutilation across every "dimension of living"[2]*** (Nordstrom & Robben, 1995) ***… and***

[2] I am flagging this content here as the singular theoretical assumption for this text that is 'simply' taken as a 'given' from Nordstrom and Robben (as editors) and their authors profoundly care-full work in "*Fieldwork Under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Culture*."

what it means to live through/ with/ within these "hauntings" (Auchter, 2014) (a concept that will haunt us until we finally meet it with Syrvival in the concluding pages of this manuscript), ***to exist, survive and re-learn to live through/ with/ from within these injuries, and from within our own now-injured bodies, that can no longer make/ buy-into/ re-turn to living through a delineation between life and death, between living and dying, regardless of however porous or impenetrable the demarcations might be.***

What I found instead was an ***affective community*** within/ through the digital content of this 'on/off-life' of the Syrian Revolution- ***a community that was comprehending, for itself, and laying bare through an archival of its own violent experiences – its trauma, its grief, its resilience – precisely this: precisely what the affective politics of martial violence were.*** And the 'on-'life of this affective community – of my interlocutors and I – demanded that we reimagine IR's figurations of war and toy with questions like the ones we outlined in the Prologue, particularly: ***How do these mangled bodies, themselves, sense and make sense of this injury? And what can we learn about war, i.e., what kind of war-knowledges can we generate, if we begin our war-stories from within these articulations of embodied experiences of the martial?***

But 'not only' because from within this place of injury, this affective community also demanded that we specifically look for answers to questions like: ***How do we write 'war' and 'violence' in such a way that we can capture the complex processuality of "war's incessant becoming***" (Bousquet et al., 2020)? How do we "pull the bodies and experiences of war out of the entombments created by (IR) theories… into the open as crucial elements of war" (Sylvester, 2012)? ***Where would we even begin- what kind of 'data', of 'fields', of 'methods' would we need to live/think through to 'access' this plane of the 'martial': one where its violence was a "dimension of living"*** (Nordstrom & Robben, 1995)***? In other words, how do we (1) sense and make sensible martial-injury as if the 'lived experiences' of these onlives, of this affective community, mattered, and (2) how do we translate this 'war-knowing' into a kind of 'war-knowledge' grounded in and driven by the 'war-experience' of these injured bodies?***

Figure: 57 – An Illustration by Sulafa Hijazi, titled by the Artist as 'Untitled, 2012' *from the Ongoing Series (referencing the Syrian Revolution)*

Author Engagement: ***Living Within/ Through Death || Life in/ through Dying || Birth(-ing) (and) the Martial***

(Hjazi, Sulafa. Digital Illustration. Website. 2012)

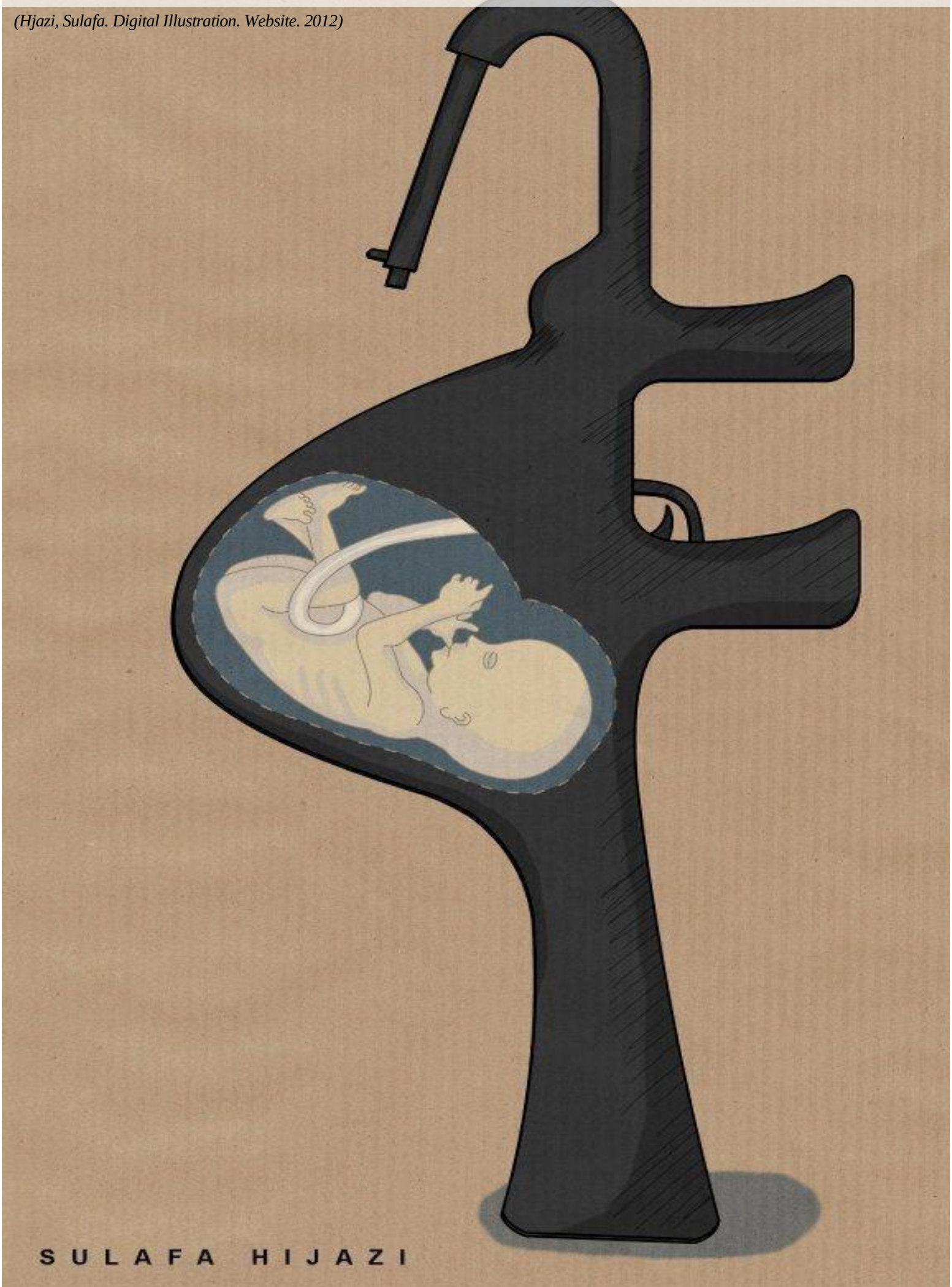




Figure: 58 - Photograph by Sameer al-Doumy *(whom you will meet in To/ For Syrvival).*

Title by Artist- "Abu Ali al-Bitar, a 45-year-old house painter who collected dozens of rocket debris and spent ammunition casings, ***flattens bread dough using leftover rocket*** *in the city of Douma) Author Engagement:* ***The Cost of Living with Death \\ The Resilience of Life within Death // Eat(ing) (and) the Martial***

(al-Doumy, Sameer. Photograph. Website. 2018)

Doing Theory

To explore these questions then, to tease out ***how martial violence and its injuries*** – how taking seriously the lived experiences of what the daily machinations of injurious processes of martial violence feel like through/in a social-media-ly mediated Syrian pluriverse ***– can be made sensed and made sense of in a way that allows us to stand in solidarity with those injured bodies I propose a "haunting/ haunted"*** (Auchter, 2014) ***experiment of "empirical philosophy"*** (Mol, 2010) ***across two stages.***

In the first stage, we – my interlocutors and I – try and find a ***'name' for the descriptive/ theoretical framework – a "working concept"*** (as you will see in Chapter: 3, Part: 2: "Translating to/ for Syrialism") – that taps into this lived-experience i.e., I try and name, conceptualize, categorize, and ***work on crafting a concept through which this lived experience – this war knowing – can find an academic/ theoretical translation (i.e., find/ become war-knowledge).*** To do this, in "Syrial Surfaces", across Chapter: 1- Encountering Syrialism, Chapter: 2- Living Through Syrialism and Chapter: 3- Translating to/for Syrialism, I (i) introduce you to Omar Imam, Khaled Barakeh, Ayham Jabr, Sulafa Hijazi, Malu Halasa and Zaher Omareen, Syrian artists and critics whose works, ideas, positionalities and worldings are the very substratum of this

manuscript, and their war-stories. (ii) From/ through/ with/ from within these stories we show you what actively 'living' and 'being' in violence feels like, collaging and naming as many dimensions of this lived experience as we could, mapping injuries across all of these surfaces, (iii) and **In/ From/ Through/ With this (first) moment of translation, of translating lived Syrial 'war-experience and war-knowing' into a grounded Syrial 'war-knowledge',** we see/ show you/ try to make sense-able the idea that a given instantiation of martial violence can (potentially) be intimately, flesh-ly, sense-ly, experienced as being **(I) processual, (II) embodied, (III) multiple, (IV) plural and (V) partially connected**, constantly but not consistently, to other violent worldings, i.e., **martial violence can be experienced as Surreal**. Or rather, in this case, as ***Syrial***.

Here, we knit – and knot – together 'feminist', 'post-colonial', 'aesthetic', 'material', and 'affective' scholarships to re-figure how this Syriality can also (then) be operationalized to tell a 'different' kind of war story, collaboratively coproducing in that moment, a 'coding'/ 'concept'/ 'parameter'/ a 'grounded theory'/ an ***"ethico-onto-epistemology"*** (Barad, 2007), or rather a ***"device"-ive methodology"*** (from Chapter: 3, Part: 2), that can be 'applied' to study a given process of martial violence and in/ through this 'application' could/would allow us to write war stories about said injurous processes by care-fully pulling their 'bodies and experiences' out of 'theoretical entombments' and from within 'war's incessant becoming' (as mentioned above) by bringing the actual machinations of the injuries of war and the particulars of how it is sensed and made sensible into focus. And in doing so, we encounter – and reproduce – the real-ization that Syrialism, at least within the parameters of this dissertation, can perhaps (best?) also be understood as a ***"machine"*** (Deleuze & Guattari, 2009; Kleinherenbrink, 2020), i.e., it wants to be – and be seen as – an **"act"-ive method i.e., as a method that seeks to descriptively re-figure, re-build, re-form(ulate) our sense of and senibilities towards the lived experience of martial-injuries and in doing so generates a critical reimagination of 'war' itself, and in this moment of simaltaneous representation and production, it becomes an act of poesis: it enacts a Syrial figuration of 'war' and its violences.**

To arrive at this 'naming', I
(i) practice a form of 'visual analysis' on/with/through these artists' works that sees them as 'portals' of and to the lived experience of martial injury, and therefore as critical sites of investigation because they allow researchers to, literally, sense – see, hear, smell, touch, speak of, and feel/think through – the "stream of consciousness that experiences war" (Bousquet et al., 2020),
(ii) compliment my 'findings' – that the 'concept' we can/should/would work through could be Syrialism – with narrative interviews with these artists that have experienced the violence, violations, and injuries of the Syrian revolution firsthand, and through this,

(iii) collaboratively concept-work with the artist-activists to develop a framework through which to engage with, and operationalize, this aesthetic-affective lexicon.

In the second stage of the experiment, to test this 'hypothesis', or rather to see how this 'concept' can 'work' – and whether it does work – I pivot from within the Syrial aesthetics-affects of the Three Little Syria's, and become a "death tourist", a "death connoisseur", and a "death tour guide" (Auchter, 2018) drag you through some atrociously violent worlds, inviting you *to* ***syrially witness a beheading*** with me in Introduction to, Living Through and Translation for (a) Syrial Beheading (the three chapters that form Part: 4 of this dissertation).

Through these chapters we encounter, Syrial-ly, Khaled al-Asad's beheading – a beheading whose on/off-line intensified the world's and DAESH's relationships with Palmyra/ Tadmur – and wrench out from this ***"small world"*** (Austin, 2017) ***the actual machinations of how its injuries were (re)produced***. ***We 'map' (i) how beheadings can syrially be sensed and made sensible, (ii) what the martial politics are that they are syrially entangled with and (iii) how they affect our socio-political worlds, if we live/think through the beheading process as 'syrial'***, i.e., ***we map how beheadings – if and when seen through Syriality/ as Syrial – find themselves to be, and show us how they are, deeply entangled (albeit bumpily) with an a politics of Ruination and its imperial, friction-al, durabilities forming turbulent but affective partial connections with/to other syrial violent worlds and perhaps, even more importantly, to worlds/ worldings of wayward Syrvivals against them***. And In/From/Through/With this second moment of '***translation***' then, of/ from operationalizing the Syrial war-experience and war-knowing to generate war-knowledge about beheadings, we (re)learn, that our "pluriverse" (Blaney & Tickner, 2017) – from within and outside of beheadings – is/continues to be ***martially*** 'occupied' (/occupy-ed) by, among others, this affective politics of ruination (and cruelty).

For this 'testing', I generate a "haunting"-ly "thick description" of the beheading of Khaled al-Assad, working through and/with a histography of Tadmur itself, its relationalities to 'Palmyra', its entanglements with the Assad-ian imperial apparatus, and the ways in which Ruination has made itself home within this mêlée. Working through a 'dataset' of digital content scraped primarily from publicly accessible online outlets like Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Facebook and LiveLeak, with visuals including photographs, videos, artworks and shortfilms from this event and others, coded along the following elements: date and place of origin of content, content creator/ curator, platforms they were uploaded on, captions accompanying the content, technological devices operationalized

for content, spatial dimensions and built environments, material objects utilized, sensory information recorded (particularly sound, touch or taste), and notes on the aesthetics of the content, I try my best to give us a clear map as to the doing of this beheading in its on-off-life. These descriptions were designed so I could present to you (i) a thorough listing of the human, non-human, material, technological and spatial actants that participate in assembling this violent event and others that I could find entangled with it in one form or the other, (ii) map their relationalities, (iii) render sensible the affective politics of these entanglements and (iv) make sense of them through/within the traces of imperial ecologies, through, as we will see, Ruination.

And I write, care-fully, hiccupping, mirroring, invoking the Syrial rhythms of the embodied experience of martial violence itself because that is, in a way, the crux of this 'experiment' (remember from the Abstract, the Prologue, and/or from a few pages ago): ***to be able to write a war-story that describes a lived-ness of martial-injury – to generate a war-knowledge – by translating (from within) war-experience and war-knowing***, i.e., to be able to critically re-imagine our figurations of war by designing them from within/ through reimagined concepts, hypothesis, arguments, discussions, analyses and styles of writing (keeping in mind that the "medium is also always the message" (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967)), these reimaginations reflecting and reproducing (or trying to, at least):

(i) the "messy practices of relationalities and materialities" (Law, 2009),

(ii) and the processual-ness of violent/ violence worlds, their partial connectivities, their multiplicities and pluralities and the processual-ness, multiplicity, plurality and partial connectivity that come with performing such martial translations,

(iii) through "wolfing moves" (Taussig, 2010) that immerse us into the affective and aesthetic lexicons of the Syrial pluriverse

and (iv) allow us as social scientists and 'empirical philosophers' to question, deconstruct, displace, destabilize, and re-'design' the analytical categories that participate in the becomings of our socio-political martial-world and through this redesigning perform a queer-feminist-decolonial science that seeks to cultivate a pluriversal understanding of the lived dimension of martial-injury.

In a manner of speaking then, this very act of writing – the way this text has been designed – is almost a ***third moment of translation***: one designed to enable, facilitate and

encourage your engagement with this text as being "a portal to your 'experiencing' of martial violence, intimately, as a "dimension of living" " (from the Abstract).

Here, footnotes are theoretically charged and methodologically weighted. The text is colour coded to reflect the messy-note-taking of/for a 'messy' world, there are experimental aporias explicitly wrestled with in 'theoretical field notes' that accompany every segment and/or chapter, and there is rhizomatic hyperlinking throughout the text to produce/ mirror generative non-linearity in an intensely connected world.; And the 'open-ended-ness' the care-full-y-not-only-ness of this 'translation' is practiced here through extensive intertextuality across all sensory registers: fiction, music, smells, chromatology, pop-culture, i.e., this 'referential' instinct , this instinct to translate and communicate by translating one's ideas by borrowing from a different/ another semiotic lexicon – inspired from the artists' attempting this themselves, that finds articulation here through exercises in critical reflexivity within the parameters of autoethnographic/ autobiographical IR practices (Beattie, 2014; Brigg & Bleiker, 2010; C. Dunstan, 2021; Dauphinee, 2010; Doty, 2004; Hülsse, 2010; Inayatullah, 2003, 2010; Jarnecki, n.d.; Krasner et al., 2009; Mandaville, 2011; Masson, 2022; McNee, 1997; Neumann, 2010; Schmitt, 2018; Stump, 2010; Vrasti, 2016; Wang, 2016), or forging rooting-s in and from works that aspire to make creative interventions in/to IR, especially as/through Narrative Politics (Bilgin, 2016; Dauphinee, 2015; Holden, 2003; Inayatullah & Dauphinee, 2016; Picq, 2013; Ravecca & Dauphinee, 2018; Roberts, 2006; Spode & Olivieri, 2019; Stanley & Jackson, 2016; Tickner, 2003) and IR as Storytelling (Ann Tickner, 2011; Daigle, 2016; Danchev, 2011; Edkins, 2013; Kashyap, 2020; Ling, 2014; Park-Kang, 2015), or by making for and because of them all, a 'graphic'-short-story that seeks to sensorily articulate and communicate the shapes that 'Iconic Conceptual Figurations', and their relationalities – finds multi-modal/-medium articulation in this manuscript.

Or, simply put, here:

Design[3] Character	Design Choice

[3] 'Design' and 'Designing' here follow from Austin and Leander's call to reimagine the praxis of International Social Sciences as going beyond "word counts and abstracts" and doing "little more than writing texts and give(ing) lectures with - perhaps - the odd foray into photography or filmmaking" by working from within a worlding of International Political Design grounded in "***embracing the material-entanglements of world politics, the centrality of affect and emotion to human praxis, and relational ontologies of emergence, prefiguration, and complexity***" (Austin & Leander, 2021) so we, as social scientists, can broaden the range of material-aesthetic practices of/ for ISS which to them, and I concur, is not only an intellectual necessity for the growth of ISS but an "ethical imperative" for its practice.

Or, we could say, that 'design' and 'designing' here follow from Hijazi's "the Cycle" (presented below).
"In 2015 the red color was occupying not only media screens but also artists' canvases.

Art at the time of conflict becomes a violent act itself."

My first encounter with Sulafa's "The Cycle", left me utterly mute. There really is no other way to describe that initial confrontation- I was... word-less (not just speechless). **The sheer force of the raw 'immediacy', or rather, of the raw 'immediate intimacy', of what she had created, of how she had translated the violence of her realities, quite (literally) violently, producing a work of art that was somehow, simultaneously, an unflinching re-presentation of the processes of martial violence/ of the violent processes that constitute the martial - torture in particular - and a fiercely uncompromising act of protest was... surreal.**

Everything about this artwork was surreal: how is was conceptualized, where it was conceptualized, how, where and when it was created, how it was displayed, how it was exhibited, and how she came to translate it, i.e., **everything about how it was 'designed' was actively surreal/ the surrealism was actively present in/across every part of its 'design'.**

Sulafa created 'the Cycle' in 2015, during her time at the Städelschule (Frankfurt) a formal dinner (of all places) with art collectors. Prior to the dinner, **Hijazi had sourced military tools from an army surplus store** (located near the European Central Bank- a fact that becomes important for Sulafa later, when she discusses how "I thought, being in Frankfurt, home to the European Central Bank, and seeing how tough life can be here economically made me think of violence in another way: how the root of violence can be traced to economic issues and the regimes it creates"), **focusing particularly on tools that are used as instruments of torture, transforming them into her instruments of art. Different kinds of whips and batons, two tasers, a belt, a tactical knife, a paddle, a distaff, a wrench** (etc.) **were all made available to the diners who were then invited to perform "a ceremony of torture against the painting",** and as the evening unfolded, **we saw them** (in a recording of this performance art piece) **slowly - at first uncertainly, then cautiously but curiously - then all at once, as if in a violent trance of sorts, stab, rip, whip, paddle, electrocute the canvas, particularly violating the thin layer of plaster which formed a rectangular patch of skin over it. Once they were 'done', this skin is bore the scars of their violence against it, coalesced in the form of a 'painting' that for Hijazi was a "sacrifice" they had created/ offered "not only to the military regime but also for the market of the art industry".**

> *"In the period that I spent in Syria in 2011 and 2012, violence for me was more an existing reality rather than a conceptual question. It was only during my studies at the Städelschule Fine Art Academy in Frankfurt that I began reflecting upon the concept of violence. The amount of violent images and videos that the media shared during the war in Syria was a daily assault. In many ways this made it 'familiar', and I think in turn simply spurred on more violence. This is when I began thinking about the ethics of using violence in art in general."*

There is a lot that can be said here about how Sulafa redefines the relationship between the artist-collector/ artist-viewer/ artist-audience here, or what collaborative production means, or about the 'performance' in a performance artwork, and/or about the setting of a dinner-table-conversation-and-volatility (something I return to quite a bit once you have met the other dinner tables of/for/in this manuscript: the dinner tables of Omar's 'Syrian Last Supper', Khaled's 'After the Last Supper' and my '*That* Syrial Supper'), our complicity/ participation/ place within the violent ecologies of the martial, and so on but for now, let's zoom in on the 'design' of it all. I think by twisted-ly recreating an act of martial violence in such an embodied form, and twisting-ly disrupting – effectively rendering porous – the boundaries between the lived, expressed, aesthetic and affective in making the canvas itself the injured body & in making the diners/audience/collectors the artist-torturers, Sulafa practiced the 'designing

Textual Elements	
The Segments	*The text has been divided into 6 'segments' (more than sections, different than 'parts', think of them of as the sub-level aggregated constitutive elements):* - ***5 Parts:*** *- the first being,* ***Syrial Prelude****s, which encompasses the 'front matter' and all its intricacies forming the set-up/how-to-use-this-book portion of the manuscript. It includes a Prologue, a Dedication and a Translator's Note.* *- the second called* ***Syrial Surfaces****, in which I walk you through Three Little Syrias and we see how (i) "Encountering Syrialism" worked/ works, (ii) how we can sense and make sense of "Living Through Syrialism", and (iii) how we can then, potentially, begin "Translating to/for Syrialism".* *- the third,* ***Syrial Interludes****, where I have listed and detailed – think of it as an almanac almost – the theoretical concepts, contradictions and conclusions that have shaped this manuscript in the form of philosophical field entries/ "Field Notes",* *-* ***Syrial Sites,*** *the fourth section, where I stage for you, an "Introduction to (a) Beheading", detail for you for "Living through (a) Beheading" could/ would feel like, as a dimension of living, if we approached it Syrial-ly, and in "Translating to/for (a) Syrial Beheading" attempt to map the ruinous stories this syrial story can tell us about martial violence.* *- and, finally,* ***Syrial Postludes,*** *the fifth section, in which I give the floor to the truly heart-beratingly consistently absent-present Deuteragonist of this manuscript: Syrvival, and hope to make some small amends for its 'only' haunting status.* - ***Artist-Activists' Profiles***

differently' that Austin and Leander were alluding to. **She created a piece that became a form of "worlding" on its own where participants/artists/viewers could confront the realities of the structures of war, economy, and the art industry, the pervasiveness of martial sensory regimes, the movements G actions that sustain these entanglements, and this overwhelmingly sense-full/ sense-ing-ly 'doing' of 'violence' to simultaneously 'experience' G 'translate' its 'lived dimension' into a form of 'war knowing' created an encounter where Sulafa found a way to 'making sense' of that aspect of its lived-ness that, until then, for her had been the 'silence' we spoke of in the Prologue. She found in 'the Cycle' her 'Syrialism' and 'twisted'/ surreal/ 'syrial' as it sounds, it took her twistedly-performing-the-very-violence-she-abhored-and-had-been-injured-by to capture these aspects of its machinations.**

This whole experience - encountering the artwork, learning about it, writing about it - had me gravitating back(?) towards Dalí's paranoiac-critical method (that I hadn't visited since 2017!) and my own engagement with some of the images, texts, artworks I have presented to you here, and I will return to all of this, and more, when you meet "Shape -s/ -ing" in an "Introduction to (a) Beheading."

For now, just hold onto this^ as the rough-ish conceptualization for what 'designing' means here.

	- ***Theoretical Notes (5)*** - ***Field Notes (7)*** - ***Episodic Encounters (2 and a half-ish)*** - ***Compositional Elements of the Mise-en-scène*** - ***Footnotes***
The Prologue and the Translator's Note	***The Prologue*** *(Greek πρόλογος prólogos, from πρό pró, "before" and λόγος lógos, "word")* ***is presented here as the 'empirical' opening story*** *that hopes to walkthrough the larger-Syrial-ecology of this manuscript with the reader,* ***and in contrast/complementarity, the Translator's Note can be thought of as the 'theoretical' opening story****. While this distinction is extremely arbitrary (& porous) and quite counter-intuitive to the deconstructionist inclinations of the author & the rhizomatic inclinations of the text, linearity of text-ure, of human capacity for knowledge articulation and comprehension and just simple 'ease' of (though there is hardly anything 'easy' about this text) accessibility and navigation rendered it, also, necessary.*
The Dedication	***The dedication, here, is an amuse-bouche.*** *It not only, quite literally, identifies the affective community that this manuscript is dedicated to (whose lives it is based off of, whom it is written for, and who – at least collaboratively – it is conceptualized by) but has been specifically designed to act as 'a single, bite-sized hors d'oeuvre' that not only prepares the audience for the meal/ text to come, but also gives a glimpse of/ reveals a bit of the author's/manuscript's style, i.e.,* ***it is a gesture to acclimate the audience to both the style and substance of the treat to come.***
Footnotes	***The 'theory', here, is in the footnotes.*** *"This is in part because I get immense pleasure from* ***experimenting with the stylistic hierarchies*** *of a journal article (here 'academic manuscript') – whether in terms of preferred voice or the character of footnotes and the power relations therein (Grafton, 1997; Sylvester, 2007) – but mostly it is because I am trying my best to* ***fortify the flow, style and surreality of the narrative****. The medium is the message (McLuhan and Fiore, 1967)? Walking on the narrative-international-relations-brick-road-that-is-indeed-yellow-in-my-head, I take inspiration from the deliciously rich scholarship in narrative international relations that explores the entanglements of narration/storytelling, lived experience and the politics of the latter (Choi et al., 2019; Daigle, 2016; Dauphinee, 2013; Edkins, 2019; Inayatullah, 2010; Inayatullah and Dauphinee, 2016; Löwenheim, 2010, 2014; Nagar, 2013; Park-Kang, 2015; Ravecca and Dauphinee, 2018; Welland, 2021). Working through them,* ***I have cautiously designed this text to (hopefully) invoke 'openness, contradiction, ambiguity, fracture, surprise'*** *(Ravecca and Dauphinee, 2018:1)* ***and a deep engagement with surreality – or, rather, Syriality.*** *I hope that this engagement, like fingerpainting, will be bumpy and messy and chaotically productive, and that the text, like Mitchell's (1996, 2005) image, will have an agency of its own.* *(Disclaimer: the distinction between theory and narrative*

	assumed here is purely fictional and meant to ensure that readers read through the footnotes as well. Any resemblance to dichotomies popular or obscure is simply coincidental. No narratives or theories were harmed in this process – it is intended that all narrative is a form of theory-crafting and all theorizing is a form of narration.)" (Gabriel-Puri, 2023)
Theoretical Notes	***The theoretical notes act as almanac entries/glossary entries*** *and are designed to give the reader: (i) a bit of a breathing room after a theoretically dense encounter, (ii) more than 'just' an 'arm-float-y'* ***explanation for how the theories/ theoretical concepts "work" here and how they were "worked on"/ "worked through"*** *(Stoler, 2016)* ***to get there****, (iv) give a somewhat deep-ish account of how they relate to other concepts, theories, observations, and reactions in the manuscript, and (v) in doing all this, act as handbook chapters (almost) for everything that underpins the philosophical component – itself, and the philosophical component that explores the relationship between the empirical and philosophical – of the "empirical philosophy" (Mol, 2003) here.*
Episodic Encounters & Field Notes	*Given my attempt at deconstructing, diminishing, devaluing, destroying, destabilizing – you get the point – the distinctions and distances between the empirical and philosophical (and instead try my best to 'empirical philosophy' here) the episodic encounters and the field notes should be seen as twins. Though the episodic encounters form what would more conventionally be called 'field notes' detailing insights from what little field work I could do (thanks to COVID-19 and a lack of funding), they are also equally composed of their conceptual/ philosophical parts (and in fact quite a few of our more ethnographic-sensibility sensitive terms/concepts have been worked on and through in those pages).* *Similarly/ Conversely, though 'field notes' are conventionally strictly empirical, since the realms, subjects and objects of the conceptual, aesthetic and the affective were as much a part of the 'empirics' here as they would traditionally be of the philosophical, these notes can best be thought of as detailing the 'empirics' of living with/ through/ within this manuscript's 'philosophy', i.e.,* ***as "field notes from Syrialism as a dimension of living"*** *(Nordstrom & Robben, 1995).* ***On both counts.***
Artist-Activist Profiles	*Towards the end of every chapter, there are Artist-Activist Profiles presented- a concept that is borrowed here from mariam cooke and introduced, for you, in the first of profile (which is about her).* ***These end-notes are my attempt at giving you a little insight into the lives and works of the artists whose imaginaries and worldings form one of the most robust substrata from which this dissertation has grown, diving into the works that have shaped my understandings of the different conceptual figurations presented in this manuscript (and actively contributed towards their re-imagination) and perhaps, even more importantly, at giving them a little room, a little space, of their own in the pages to come****. It is my way of not just dedicating this book to them, but also of letting them be 'truly'/ 'really' seen/ seen in a more real way.*

Colour Coding	*The rhizome, or Deleuze-Guattarian rhizome, as I have mentioned earlier, isn't merely a structural/morphological metaphor here for my (presumed/assumed) perception & lived experience of the socio-political; it's the very, literal, pulse of this dissertation. It's vitality draws from, is expressed through, and seeks to reproduce, through these root-like networks where knowledge-ing is processual, engages with multiplicities and translates into pluralities. Each line of thought emerges from, entangles with, and spirals out toward another, their connectivities sometimes obvious, sometimes striking, always partial, i.e., this text doesn't follow a singular path, nor does it expect you to. There might be what seems to be a beginning and an end, but with time you will see that you can slip in and out of its folds and foldings at any and every possible – and impossible, or at least improbable – juncture.* *But I don't think complexity and fluidity inevitably beget chaos. At least not here. At least not vis-a-vis the ways we understand these concepts. So,* ***to, make these branching threads more navigable, I've color-coded the text: red for "key takeaways,", the lines that assemble the theses of/for this manuscript; green for "conceptually loaded work," dense nodes of theoretical substance; blue for the voices that interject as citations, challenging or amplifying my own; and purple for those moments where I break what little academic-formality I have been able to perform to engage with you directly, breaking the 'fourth wall' as it were, inviting/ reminding you to step into the rhizome yourself.*** *Remember when I told you this was a performance (in the Abstract and the Prologue)? Well, it's an interactive live performance art piece. It's mandatory to jump in!*

Figure: 59 – Collage by Sulafa Hijazi, accompanied by a video, *both created as a part of a project titled:* ***The Cycle.***

Author Engagement: ***The Cost of Living with Death \\ The Resilience of Life within Death***

(Hijazi, Sulafa. The Cycle. Collage. Website. 2015)



Doing 'Translation'

"Nothing is stranger than this
business** of **humans observing
other humans** in order **to
***write about them**."*

- *The Vulnerable Observer (Behar, 2022)*

I am hoping by now I have given you some sense of what we are doing, why we are doing it, for whom we are doing it, how we got to knowing these what-s, whom-s & why-s and what that has to do with 'translation'. And precisely because of its centrality to this otherwise rather rhizomatic (I am hoping) experiment I am sure you are – like I still am – wondering when the *insert-profanity-of-choice* am I going to discuss with you what the *insert-profanity-of-choice* does translation even mean here and why have I not gotten to it yet.

Honestly, because it's scares the ever living/ dying *insert-profanity-of-choice* out of me. Step into my shoes for a moment -

they hurt and burn like hellfire because
they are new Dr. Martens, but you will want to
step into them anyway because they are the
breathtakingly gorgeous pair with Katsushika
Hokusai's "The Great Wave" painted onto them
from DM's collaboration with the MET and yes
this is a painful meta-analogy for the
manuscript as a whole

- asking a bone/soul-deep deconstructionist -

who is almost perversely
dedicated to the rhizomatic-cause,

- to create a roughly stable relationship between a signifier and it's signified-s

or signifiers and its signified –
*see I can't even *insert-profanity-of-*
choice do it here! –*

- is just plain cruel.

There is no other word for it. It goes against every fibre of my personal, professional and political drives and motivations. Yet, as with the 'naming' of Syriality itself, I fully acknowledge and appreciate the need for it: the need for a definition, or name-ing, for this 'translation'. So, here is my best attempt at a delimited conceptualization of what I think

translation 'means' (or rather, 'does') within – and to some degree across – the borders of this text: ***Translation, here, is designed to be ethico-onto-epistemology of mediation,***

an enactment of the politics of "not only", i.e., it is the process of acknowledging, appreciating and contextually describing the present-absences within a/any "not only", the methodological practice of actively working through these hauntings and the "restless" performance of critically re-figuring our socio-political worldings – real and conceptual – through them.

an ***"ethnographic sensibility"*** with which ***"amateurs of reality" find ways to "attune themselves to the world, to learn to be affected by it,"*** and through that encounter, from within that affect-ed state, ***by become-ing "vulnerable observers",*** learn to ***write about the realities of their subjects, "stand(ing) on the same plane" as them, knowing – and appreciating – that they "will only tolerate us if we are willing to confront them face to face."***

a methodological act of "critical re-imagination" that **enacts worlds and worldings out of the "new stories that are rushing to be told in languages we've never used before,** stories that tell truths we once hid, truths we didn't dare acknowledge, truths that shamed us," **and with the help of (methodological) devices like "collaboration" and "concept work", it disrupts our sensibilities and sense-abilities towards lived-socio-political-realities, blasting open spaces for a "haunted" register of sense-ing and introducing us to their "ghosts", i.e., to "the traces of those who were not allowed to leave a trace."**

such that it becomes/ is performed, here,

as an Empirical Philosophy built with/ from within (a) Care-full-ness that stands in Solidarity with (certain/ Syrial) self-declarations of (certain/ Syrially identifying) injured bodies.

Give it a moment. I promise to make it sensible, and hopefully make sense, soon-ish (more specifically, in Part: 3- Syrian Interludes). Just, for now, hang onto to for dear life, please. Yours and Mine.

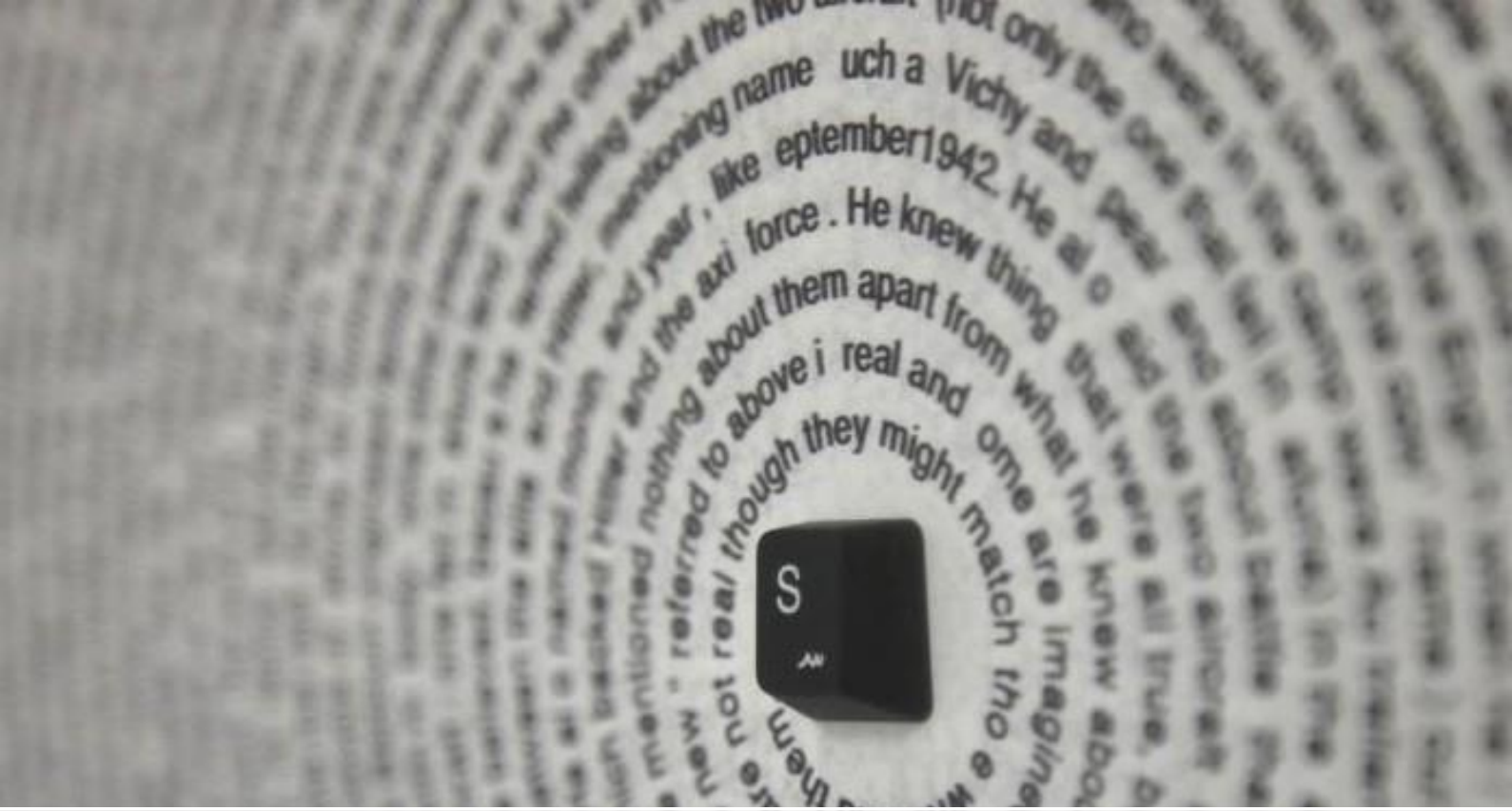


Figure: 60 - Syngamy by Khaled Barakeh
(Barakeh, Khaled. Sygamy. Digital Artwork. Website. 2010)
Caption of the Artwork by Khaled: ***"(syn·ga·my) | [sing gah-me]: the fusion of two cells to initiate the development of a new individual organism.***

Language in translation distances us from understanding as often as it brings us closer to it. *Syngamy reflects on the serendipitous loss, addition and accidents that may occur during a shift between languages. The point of departure for this work is the recognition that, despite Arabic and English sharing approximately twenty phonemes, the 'S' or 'ص' is the only one which resides in the same position on a standard English-Arabic keyboard. The short story, Aluminum, by Hasan Dawood recalls the events surrounding a British plane crash-landed in between two small villages Lebanon. Among all the characters, the only one that has no name and mentioned with its profession was the translator.* ***This text was translated from Arabic to English, and the other way around, five times by different certified translators. Each iteration resulted in a change in the story. The resulting text was then stripped of all of its S's. The absence of this mutual phoneme further abstracted the narrative, leaving the artist completely lost in translation."***

Author Engagement: ***Scheherazade's*** (Mahdi, 1995) ***Storytelling- Translation as the art/ act of telling Nested-Stories || as a methodological tool, act, and device for the Trans-lation of Trans-versal Socio-Political Realities, Trans-disciplinarily.***

*Or What the *insert-profanity-of-choice* does translation even mean here?*



Theoretical Note: 4, Affect-ive Communities: Object-ive-lu Engaging with the Study

Or, Which *insert-profanity-of-choice* characteristics and phenomena should we look for to gauge the position, texture and size of our needle?

Sardonic humour, or "Awkward jokes that are borderline disastrously disturbing, funny only because of their blatant absurdity, skirting the line of being politically correct/ humanly care-full, diminutive of the trauma that is rather explicitly present in them and yet one of the best defence mechanisms – or at least a very common one – at the disposal of injured bodies, at least those present here" as I defined it in the Design-Table, to me is a marker of/for this Syrial affective community. That, and you know that moment – the one that typically corners you almost exclusively in informal-but-with-people-you-only-know-typically-very-formally settings like coffee appointments, or 'work' dinners, or weddings, or just after-an-event-drinks – when someone who you don't know quite well asks you a question that makes you want to *insert-physical-injury-of-choice* them and be swallowed whole by the ground beneath your feet simultaneously, because you cannot not answer or be too honest and/or call them out on their *insert-profanity-of-choice* audacity, and so all you can do is (usually for me) stare at your feet for a minute, take a sharp breath in, tighten your jaw, gulp, fake-smile and half-truth your way out of that conversation usually by deflecting with a joke that seems insightful but not threateningly passive aggressive, all the while hoping to high hell(fire- always remember the spell from the dedication) that the nails you are digging into your palm won't sprout blood?

(P.S. - as you will see when you are introduced to Omar's work, and the game Khaled and his friend played about 'calamities-in-Syria' and find out more about Karnafel are coping strategies – and strategies of resistance – operationalized by almost all the artists-activists I engaged with in/through Syrialism.)

Sorry, I know that was too rambling a sentence even for me… I just find those situations so *insert-profanity-of-choice-again* triggering. Anyway, back to the manuscript and the shape *these*^ moments take, both those rich in sardonic humour and social/ societal anxiety, differently and differentially but always with repetitions, vis-à-vis my relationship with/to Syrialism: The questions of (i) but 'whose' war-stories are these and (ii) why I am interested in talking about these stories from the Syrian revolution.

Wait, let me re-write that for you, so it mimics the emphasis of the speakers: Why are *you* interested in *this* topic?

And that emphasis makes all the difference. Without that intonation it is a question about how Syrialism and I found each other, how we see each other, who are to each other, a question about how we are doing together, what we are building together and where we are hoping to go with it all. Without that intonation, there is a care-full, if not caring, interest animating that question.

The intonation on the other hand makes this question a solve-for-x equation. Here:

'A'- stands as a measure for just-a-(random)-'Indian'-'girl'-in-'college', i.e., me

'B'- denotes 'interest' in the 'situation' (or 'conflict' or 'crisis'- never 'revolution' or 'war' or even 'humanitarian' crisis) in 'Syria'

and "puzzle" we must figure out an answer to us what could possibly have been added to A to make B possible:

A + x = B. Solve for X.

And the questions come in all permutations and combinations for both sides of the equation and are always asked from within a three-tier implicit-assumption-system. First there are the "what"-implications: what makes an Indian human so deeply interested in what is happening in Syria?, or the what makes a 'young' 'woman' interested in Syria? Or 'war' or 'such violent things', or What makes a 'college' 'kid' capable of writing about violence and Syria? and these are typically ensconced in the "Why"s: why would someone from India care about what is happening all-the-way-over-there-in-Syria, why would a young-girl (read: upper-class-ish, 'polished', 'damsel'-y, shits-rainbows-out-of-her-ass-or-something) choose to write about this kind of 'stuff', and why would this literal kid think she is capable of writing something/ anything about things that are so 'serious'. And then, usually, finally, pièce de resistance, there is the "But why not" dimension: why isn't this Indian writing about India-Pakistan, or Kashmir, or the Naxalite Movement, why isn't this woman writing about gender issues in the global south, if its media she wants to do why not just write about Indian movies and violence, and why isn't this kid writing about *insert-other-topic-of-"appropriate"-choice-at-your-own-risk-here-because-I-will-haunt-you-for-it* because what could she possibly know about any of this violence.

(Don't get me wrong, I am a big fan of making sure that I acknowledge and appreciate the confines and confidences of my own positionality, and I promise I will get into it soon, particularly in the Syrial Interludes, but these aren't questions about reflexivity or research ethics. These are questions of garbled interest, like the person being interrogated was 'just' an 'oddity' at a 'curiosity shop.' They are

patently different from, for instance, when Adil – whom you will meet in our encounter with the first of the Three Little Syria's and I go over our where-are-you-froms, or when my interlocutors ask me how I ended up resonating with Syrialism. In just that simple re-phrasing itself the difference is starkly evident: they all asked me, each in their own way, about which aspect of their lived experience of the revolution did I find resonance with enough to want to track them down, hound them, and study them for it, and in that moment were able to see, appreciate and acknowledge, my positionality as a person- and not only an 'Indian', or 'woman', or 'young', or 'college-student', but as an entity that lives in/ through multiple modes of being and has a conceptual, aesthetic, cultural, affective, etc, *lived*, positionalities as well.)

I am not going to dive into – but I am going to flag it here – the "White-Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy" that governs these questions, assumptions, and implications or how deeply it broke my heart to discover and internalize the extent to which WSCP rules over (because there is no other figuration of power possible within a WSCP wording, except one that relies on absolute subjugation) contemporary academia, at least in IR in the Global North, or how desperately we – at least in my opinion – as social scientists need to invest in fleshing out feminist methodological devices like 'positionality' to make them even more robust than they already are (because I am quite lost as to when the acknowledgement of the limits of one's ideation being inter-linked to their socio-political position vis-a-vis their subjectivity became a mechanism for us to filter/ stigmatize researchers based off said acknowledgement, but apparently that's the turn it took!).

Because, "waywardness" (Hartman, 2019)***, especially in the face of WSCP-academia becomes existentially exhausting real fast, sometimes.***

But I will say this, I no longer answer these questions by talking about how I write about Syria because it reminds me of Kashmir just as it does of Occupied Palestine now because there is a rhythm to occupation that echoes through/ across its different iterations; about how writing about Srinagar would mean I would not be able to compartmentalize anymore and would have to see it not as the place where my grandparent's home used to be, or where my only concerns in life were being stuffed with already-peeled-just-for-me-litchees, cherries and yakhni-that-makes-you-snot-nosed-teary-eyed-and-whiskey-warmed, but as the accelerating hellscape of occupation that it is; about how I wanted to learn from the revolution- from how Syrian people could translate the absolute power of their resilience and rebellion into a

feverish Uprising how to somehow hang onto the idea, the potential, the desperation for political hope despite living in a space where even the air seems tyrannical; how I thought if I could figure out how the violence and the survival and living worked here in Syria, I could take that time to become ready, to develop and evolve, and finally see if I could 'apply' that to other spaces, to somehow find the courage to maybe even apply it to 'my' spaces; about how – and this is what, most importantly, drove me to Syrialism above/beyond/alongside it all – I had never seen so many people, not at this scale and not in this genuinely intimate way, be so fiercely vulnerable in their approach to documenting, articulating and communicating their pain, their trauma, their fear, their death… so fiercely vulnerable in creating a 'history of their own living' through a reality where/when violence becomes a "dimension" (Nordstrom & Robben, 1995) ***of their lived experience; and how desperately I wanted to learn from them, for my own self, for the sake of my sanity and for my world that had been completely "unmade"*** (Scarry, 1987)***, and remade, through the two IPVs that are evil-incarnate: International-Political-Violence and Intimate-Partner-Violence; and about how selfish and weird and 'dirty' all of these reasons felt, but also in a twisted way 'not' because the truth is, this – this 'studying' or 'subject'ivising – was the only way in which I really knew how to confer and perform any care and solidarity.***

How the *insert-profanity-of-choice* do you get yourself to be brave/vulnerable/care-free and -less enough to tell people who have already categorized and classified you ***that you write about Syrialism, with these artists, about these social-media posts, because these Syrians-whom-I-have-never-met-before-and-will-in-most-cases-never-meet, their Syrialism, their lived experience, is the only 'home' you have ever known? How the do you tell them that you are, actually, writing about "what you know" and/or about "where you are from" and/or "your people"- that we have matching scars, physical, psychological and socio-political to prove it?; That it just isn't a physical space or an identity marker easily defined and described within the modernist contemporary notions of Western-Colonial identitarian categorizations? It is an affective community, ours, the one I am trying to map here- both in terms of how it is formed and how it operates.*** I am not a part of their people because I am not Syrian, but I am "their person" (canonized in Grey's Anatomy as your 'emergency contact', person you trust to help no-questions-asked, and your emotional peer (Rhimes, 2012)) because we ***all live with/through Syrialism.***

Instead… now, in those moment, when I am asked these questions, with those intonations, like a perfectly disciplined subject, I try my best to only respond with "awkward" jokes, like "Well, you know, in a way, Syria has been my generation's 9/11" etc. and proceed to

feel disgusted at myself and the most of the worlds we inhabit for the rest of the day. Placating half-truths for the win, even if, and when, they make you feel dreadfully nauseous?

Anyway, back to the primary question here: What is *insert-profanity-of-choice* is an affective community then?

To answer that question, first, let's remember that there's at the very least two registers within which "affective" is used here, in the manuscript and I use them multiply, plural-ly and entangled-ly: there is the 'affective' from 'affective communities' and then the 'affect' from DeleuzeGuattari.

Termed by Emma Hutchison (Hutchison, 2018)***, affective communities can be thought of 'communities' that hang-together because of their "widely-held and collectively understood forms of (a) feeling", i.e., because there is a/more shared emotions/emotional understanding that circulate*** (Fierke, 2012) ***and shape political outcomes collectively and spatio-temporally*** (Ahmed, 2013)***. Effectively this means that these are communities where the 'affect' of 'affect' – the agency of their shared emotional valence – can be felt/ sensed to be more intensely/ overtly participatory in the becomings of their worlds.***

And I think there's quite a bit of work that has been done on the socio-political agency of these affective communities, for example, in the context of the emotional weight of the trauma that inspired the post-9/11 War on Terror (Edkins, 2002), the formation of a transnational "coalition of the willing" (Hutchison, 2016), or in the narrativization of national history (Wang, 2014). For me at least, across this literature, there is a refrain that, 'emotions', 'representations' and 'social discourse' are seen as the cornerstones of 'becomings' of, at the very least, the socio-political semiotics (Koschut et al., 2017) of any given event/ process/ practice and they exert their interacting agencies by producing – almost pharmacologically – an emotional bundling around transnational policy issues (e.g. the Syrian refugee crisis, see inter alia (Adler-Nissen et al., 2020)). But, the most important part for us, within the scopic regime of this dissertation and its myopia, is the very "figuration" (Haraway, 2004, 2016) of an "affective community" itself: building on, and away from Rosenwein's (almost genealogical) summarization (Rosenwein, 2006) ***that emotions – and emotional understandings, when collectively shared – have an agentic potential so 'transformative' that they can actively exert their 'affect' on different materialities, corporealities, social relations, understandings and experience of space and so on, each taking on a new aesthetic dimension (meaning + form) based on how the emotion is perceived, translated and communicated.***

This is what I meant when in trying to **delineate who the 'population' being 'studied' here is** (i.e., in determining who these 'Syrians' are that I am talking about) I said that "it is an affective community, ours, the one I am trying to map here- both in terms of how

it is formed and how it operates." The way I understand it, ***Syrialism is the affective mode of being, and/or the emotional understanding, i.e., the 'affect', whose 'affect'/ 'agency'*, creates a transversal community of sorts of people who (self)identify with the 'translation'/ the idea that their lived experience of violence felt like – or, continues to feel like – a radical unmaking and remaking of their universe, like their 'world turned upside down', and became all 'twisted' when they encounter said violence***.

But it is ***strictly non-representational*** on both accounts: not everyone who has experienced violence would feel it as Surreal/Syrial and therefore does not 'automatically' become a part of this 'affective community' (the self-identification, that sense of shared-ness and belonging is an entry requirement) and not everyone that does make sense of their embodied experience of violence as Syrial encounter the same violent assemblage// assemblages of violence. And as such, the agency of these communities, take the Syrial community for instance, vis-à-vis impacting socio-political outcomes, for me, comes from their ability to operationalize the intensity of their collective affective resonance to critically reimagine the 'figuration' of any process/ event/ practice and real-ize said reimagination.

There is a Medusa tattoo that I will keep talking about in the coming pages. Give me a moment to make it an arm-floaty for affective communities, for you, with it. It will help clear this up more, I promise.

I was sweltering in a cabin-sized studio covered wall to wall with sketches and photographs and posters – each with its own postit – of every symbol imaginable I think (just a virtual flood of information on the semiotics, origins, morphologies of every conceivable sigil) when I designed my first tattoo. Delhi heat is no joke in June, and open windows meant Delhi-noise: I could barely hear myself think, which is usually a sensation I quite crave, but when deciding how to permanently scar-and-fill-with-ink parts of my body for a third time, some thinking is not the worst. Either way, between the heat, noise, adrenaline, and the hypnotizing whirring of the needles punching into bare skin, I was kind of just absently 'floating' ("out of it") along the length of the studio, waiting for my turn, when I first saw her. Snake haired, hollow-eyed, terrifying and stunning- Medusa, her stone face stretched across some stranger's forearm-flesh. The post-it read: "Assault Victims, Female Empowerment, Kali".

As the tattoo artist and I sat down for our session I asked him the story behind it and he told me that overtime, he didn't quite no how – as was the case with most "tattoo language" – Medusa's face had become the tattoo of choice for survivors of sexual assault to the point that it was now, then (already in 2016), a 'silent nod', most of the time, but not always, from one survivor to another if they met someone who had a similar, but different, Medusa tattoo. And this was still in the pre-MeToo, and "Stone Blind" days, when Medusa hadn't quite yet

made her full-blown critically re-imagined comeback. Since then, it had spiraled into taking on "not only" the inscription of 'survival' and the 'reclaiming of one's trauma', but it had/has also begun to resonate in registers of 'empowerment', 'female rage', 'rape culture', 'retributive justice', 'transformation', the 'reclaiming of the femme fetale' "figuration" and so on. And until a few months ago, I had forgotten all about it when half way through Stone Blind actually, Natalie Haynes (Haynes, 2023) reminded me of this 'practice' and I knew: this is what I was trying to say was the 'sample population'// the whose and for whom// the 'represented' – whichever way you cut it – the 'community' that Syrialism spoke to and of took the shape of, ***this community was like the one where everyone has a Medusa tattoo. There is nothing else connecting the millions of people that have her inked on their very bodies, in terms of identity markers there is no consistency, members have no idea who the other members are, there is no shared verbal language, no collective agenda, no 'collective' to even speak of for that matter (not in a way that can be meaningfully mapped and delineated)… all there is a loosely hanging refrain, grounded in the intensity of their lived experience, an 'affect' that somehow finds repetition (and is not necessarily something 'shared') through/despite the sheer heterogeneity of bodies that it passes through, forming a relationality between all these people, but not necessarily a connection. All they have 'collectively' is 'just' Medusa and the 'situated knowledge' of what the lived experience of abject 'violation' feels like. // Or in our case, All they/we have, is 'just' Syrialism and the 'situated knowledge' of what the embodied experience of martial violence feels like.***

P.S.- I have to come clean with you. Technically, this is blasphemy- this taking of the 'affect' from DeleuzeGuattari and the 'community' from the emotional-affect worldings because the giants in, of and from the former (I am thinking here for instance of Massumi and Connolly) have spent an insane amount of academic labor making sure that we are able to construct, comprehend and operationalize a version of 'affective' theory that actually depends on making a strong distinction between emotions and affect. According to Massumi (Massumi, 2021)***:*** *AFFECT/AFFECTION. Neither word denotes a personal feeling (sentiment in Deleuze and Guattari). L'affect (Spinoza's affectus) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act. L'affection (Spinoza's affectio) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include "mental" or ideal bodies).*

And I stay true to this definition of 'affect'. I agree with DeleuzeGuattari and their translator Massumi that 'affections' are entities independent of/ from their 'subject', abilities in and of themsevels, "blocks of space-time" as DeleuzeGuattari said they were when "artists" created them. But as is my arm-float-y with most of the concepts in this worlding, I get stuck at, "of what/ for whom/ whose/" questions- the same ones I hate being asked of course.

And so, I see affect here, in this manuscript, as both the ability to 'affect' and to be 'affected', i.e. as a form of agency almost, but by a specific thing under the assumption that my ability to be affected by or affect thing X will be very different from my ability to be affected by or affect thing Y and my ability to affect and be affected by X will be very different from yours, and it will be very different from who I was, and who I can/will be (relational contingencies ad infinitum).

And as such, to make the 'by what' relatively more sensible, I also treat them as not emotions per say, but emotion adjacent- think here of 'trauma' for instance. I would argue that 'trauma' is an affect, i.e. it's not an emotion, or condition, but rather a fuzzy collage of different emotions/ conditions (anxiety, depression, disassociation) that is also, simultaneously, an entity that exercises its own ability to 'affect' and be 'affected' through its entanglements. And in/ through this dual conceptualization it becomes a mechanism through which different affective politics can affect our worldings.

And for me, that/this is where/when, within this Syrial affective community, the artist-activists whose lives, lived experiences and self-translations form the very (literal) life-blood (life and blood) of this dissertation, stand as almost-singularities. The 'community' here 'shares' experiential refrains, echoes of sense-ings and sense-makings stemming from/ reproducing this 'situated knowledge', but we don't have a shared lexicon for any of it. We don't have a shared vocabulary that we can rely on to translate these experiences, this situated knowing, to be able to communicate with/ through/ about it all even within the community, let alone beyond its rather fluid boundaries. And not all of us have the skillset/ aptitude/ ability to affect-ively contribute towards creating one. I, certainly, don't (and when we walk through the 'Three Little Syrias' over the next few pages and we stumble into the 'screaming silence' introduced there, you will find that quite a few of us share a frustration/ resignation/ reluctant(?) and somehow simultaneously relieving acceptance of this).

But Omar does. Khaled does. Sulafa does. Ayham does. Malu and Zaher do. All the artist-activists whose works have been worked with/ worked through within these pages do.

They have the ability to affective-ly translate this lived situated knowing into situated knowledge, this war- experience into war-knowing (remember from the Translator's Note?). They have the skillset, the grit, the resilience, and the fortitude to actively contribute towards the building of this lexicon, to co-produce/ collectively produce, a vocabulary that can anchor different parts/ aspects/ facets of this mode of being- one where violence (martial or martially partially connected) is a "dimension of living" (Nordstrom & Robben, 1995).

And in that regard, I think, they are the co-authors of/ for this dissertation. It is not only their war-experience, but their war-knowing (the first instance of translation) that I am simply 'vulnerably observing' (Behar, 2022), and often poorly but again to the best of my ability, translating further into war-knowledge. I suppose that is what I mean when I say that **everything within these pages, including the very idea of Syrialism – not just the name but the characteristics/ understandings of it – is birthed from 'collaborative concept work'** (from the Translator's Note remember?) between us. That is why there are pages dedicated here to create 'Artist-Activist Profiles' for you at the end of every chapter (remember from the Design Compendium?) so you might get to know them and their positionalities as well as you know mine because those are the spaces/ experiences/ living-s that Syrialism is stemming from. That is why this book is dedicated to them (and to everyone else within the Medusa community). That is why I am insisting that the ethico-onto-epistemology of/for this dissertation is 'Translation' (from page: lxxviii, remember?). That is why in a couple of pages, when we are 'Living through Syrialism', and find ourselves interacting with Footnotes 45 and 46, I will return to all of this: to how Syrialism is (i) 'simply' ***one/our (theirs and mine because truly, I can no longer tell the difference between where my situated knowings overlapped with each of their individual ones and how, where or when this 'shared'/ overlapping but not congruent, co-produced/ collectively produced lexicon/ vocabulary/ concept emerged as a) way of thinking/feeling through/about, of 'describing' political violence, its injuries, and its lived experience and*** (ii) ***'simply' a way of performing this theoretical framework that we have collaboratively (or, in spirit at least, co-productively) chosen (and built- its co-constitutive) with only these specific artists, the specific theorists I list here, and the specific ideas and examples I build on and I.*** It is, at its core, a critical re-imagination of how ***We*** sense and make sense of martial injury and which story/ -ies we choose to tell about it.



Figures: 61, 62, 63 and 64- Photographs from Khaled Barakeh's Exhibit: "Mute" (Barakeh, Khaled. Mute. Mixed Media Installation. Website. 2020)





Figures: 61-64: Photographs of an Art Installation by Khaled Barakeh
*Title for the Artwork by Khaled: **"MUTE"***

*MUTE is an **adaptable, site-specific public art installation in the form of a demonstration** that moves across political and geographical intersectional contexts. Capturing the **momentum and magnetism and political power of demonstrations in Syria in 2011,** the **49 figures are dressed in the ordinary clothes of Syrian activists living in diaspora that were collected through an open call.** Recalling the tactics protestors used to avoid capture by state security forces in Syria, the figures' clothes are dark colors that allow individuals to blend anonymously into crowds. **The heads were decapitated and reconstructed to look inside the bodies bringing back all the memories, traumas, and anguish, turning the faces into horn-like openings that screamed everything that had passed and maximizing the voices one day muted. The hands are also missing, leaving holes at the wrists of arms upheld in protest against the torture, killing, and absenteeism of people.** Swinging between stillness and motion co-exist, these protestors are frozen in postures that evoke **demonstrations' physical tension and emotional intensity.***

*The motivation for MUTE was born after 2015. **The newly arrived Syrians shifted their protests to German streets using the same words and gestures they had developed in the peaceful protest movement that began in Syria. This was a way to find one's bearings and belonging in European space and to build a community in exile. However, since the context was different, these protests of "others" were an ordinary sight for the passersby drawing little curiosity or attention, which kept to their paths without glancing at the protestors who were shouting in a strange language.** The idea behind MUTE began from that moment.*

The collective movement of Syrians on German streets asserted a connection between here (Europe) and there (Syria), as well as between the past and the present.** Faithful to this spirit of connection, MUTE opens, in each of its installations, a relation between the memory of protest in Syria and its present surroundings. Like the repertoire of protest it instantiates, **MUTE is mobile:** the figures can be transported by van and installed in new contexts. **And in each new setting, the protestors wordlessly enact a relationship to the place and its politics, as well as active connections with local activists and communities."

*Author Engagement: **Affect(ing) (Through) Communities // Communities' (for) Affect(ing)***

Khaled and I were in our second-straight-day-of-'interviewing' when we finally got to Mute.

Our previous session had (finally) been cut-off by our dinner-starved stomachs and though we picked up, right where we had left off the day before, in those 18-ish hours, everything had changed for Khaled. ***The mother of a really close friend, his aunt, and a fellow inhabitant of his No-Man's Land, had passed away that night.*** *For the first 20 minutes or so, Khaled hadn't said anything about it. We had simply slithered into the motions of working through the artworks – the motivations, the processes of creating them, the encounters and lived experiences that led to them – only, it all felt 'off'. Khaled, to whom laughter (I have dis/un-covered in the past few years) has always come quite readily, felt somehow heavier then – the way humid air feels heavy – and when I had asked him if he was okay, he – in all his generosity and fierce vulnerability – informed me of her death, but we didn't quite linger on it. It was the most we could do to pay our respects to her in that moment, to let silence and grief do what they do with the grieving.* ***Only, the more we unraveled 'Mute', the closer we kept getting to loosening her كفن (kafan, or burial shroud) and others'.***

*"****So it was basically two events coming together- the first trial against Assad and the first or I think the second lockdown. For Covid.*** *But lockdown, like the real lockdown, and* ***no one is allowed to leave and gather which also take away from the opportunity for us to be there or to, or also from everyone to demonstrate, or to do anything. So I thought, like, how can I bring us there, right? How can we be there since that trail, even its happening in Germany, but it's still 'Syrian' Syrian. It's connected to Syria.*** *And even, I mean, by that international justice law, they have to in Germany and even other places, even if there is no German involved. Ya, but so,* ***they weren't translating, umm, the trial through, in Arabic, and so even the victims, they were there, they won't understand anything****. So I thought how, so in a way I thought it would create kind of, um... (looking away from the screen)* ***I once went to Rwanda, and I saw that because of the genocide there and because of they don't have enough capacity to process all the… um crimes that has happened, which was a lot, a lot, so they took something traditional and re-activate it again,*** *so which is that the community they meet and on a grass, like under a tree or in a field of the grass, and the person who accused should stand up and tell the story from their perspective, and then, so basically everyone kind of tells their stories and then the community decides… so I thought back to… sorry I am still a little slow (AgP: No worries, please take your time, really)… (laughing) a little bit in the morning,* ***so what I thought to do was to make a parallel court, sort to say.***

So, you know, you have the official court happening outside who are people asking, or the victims been asked questions and they have to answer the questions based on facts, dry facts, right. No place for emotions, or emotional stories, no appreciation even for the… any kind of personal loss, right? So even if you killed all my family, but I have don't have anything to "prove" it, it doesn't matter right? So what I thought to do was to create an alternative court, well not an alternative court, but creating a platform for the victims to speak up, *because I, invited them to the demonstration… and they came with the photos of their loved ones, so kind of like bringing them back to the moment of, of like our demonstration.*

And um (staring into the distance for a long-ish pause), in a way ***if you think of the theatre, speaking of Surrealism, so the court place, it functions like a theatre, in my opinion, right?*** *Everyone has their roles, it starts on specific time, end of specific time, even they have their costumes, and then you enter and everything goes by script. Of course sometimes it can go off script. There are questions prepared and then you ask the questions and the question is answered right? So it's really a theatre play. And um, so that is what I was trying to do outside right? Kind of mimicking this is a different way.* ***I wanted to bring the people who were, um, demonstrating when they were in the street, and to bring them there and to be witness as well.***

And then I cut their heads in the way you saw it. *Because um… (long frustrated tsck and the head-tilt that usually accompanies it when you are trying to re-formulate the beginning of an already begun sentence/story)... okay, so, two things. There is* ***a one guy, so a reference, there is one guy who was creating songs at the beginning of the revolution with anonymous identity and then they figure out who he is, um and they caught him and they cut his throat*** *(Figures X & X, in chapter: 1, of Part: 4). So they found his body with his throat cut (doing the action). And* ***it is symbolic right because he was singing the songs, so they wanted physically even to, you know, silence him****. And in this action, or this like… like…* ***like in putting the head looking down (face buried facing into the thoracic cavity, as shown in the photograph***

below), is kind of like looking inside, or looking in the past or in the memory, and (by the slit throat blasting outwards) maximizing the voice, because the throat it becomes a horn right, and like maximizing the voice, *like its reverse in this sense.*

And um….. also I mean, like the idea is of, and which is repetitive action as I see in my work, ***is kind of having this faceless, like bodies which are faceless, because then it is so, it becomes symbolic right, more than specific you know****.*

Um… ***ya, so the process of making it, also was really interesting.*** *Because I was talking to many different people, and knowing their stories, and I am not to which extent, but I like know like each character, is like which activist, or which person, because you know they gave their clothes (to dress the statues)… Ya it was, um… ya.*

(Khaled just stopped here. It was our first real silence. He was just… somewhere else. It was that same silence, again, the one you will meet in Encountering Little Syrias. The one that screams despite the absence of words, or perhaps because of it. We just sat there, like that, with his eyes drilling into the floor, the air turning to lead, curving our spines, boring down into our shoulders, until we were as curled up as it was curdled. Finally, he continued,)

Ya it was quiet not an easy one. Because you have to like work with people very closely, to getting to know their stories, *and then also after making like… and then the families joining the demonstration… because one um…* ***I am sorry, I just slipped away, because um, one of the women present there was um, the person that just passed away,*** *and um like (AgP: "I am really sorry") and like… ya, ya, um, and ya, ya, so I don't know what to add…"*



Theoretical Note: 5, Iconic Figurations: Working with Concepts/ Concepts that work in this Study/ Concepts that Make this Study Work

Or, What roles do *insert-profanity-of-choice* concepts/ theories/ thoughts play in this 'experiment' and how the *insert-profanity-of-choice* do they find themselves quite so agentic?

"Iconic Conceptual Figurations"- to figure out what the *insert-profanity-of-choice* this means and the role they play in this experiment I would like to introduce you to 'the Syrian Last Supper.'

The Last Supper – besides, of course, being an "iconic" (Mitchell, 2013, 2020a; Mitchell & Mitchell, 1995) work of art – has, surreally, been a recurring surreal(?) motif in the Syrial worlding. In this dissertation alone you will meet three Syrial Last Suppers: Omar's (Syria's Last Supper- presented on the next page), Rhea & mine (*That* Dinner Party- presented a few pages right after it), and Khaled's (After the Last Supper that you will meet when we finally reach Syrvival). ***Each of these 'suppers' were created, in a manner of speaking, in their own silos – one in Beirut, one in Geneva-Chandigarh, and the other in Copenhagen – and yet because of their "partial connection"*** (Strathern, 2005) ***to Syria, to the martial violence of the Revolution, to the drive/ desire to explore the lived-ness of this violence, to the 'flat'-ness of the dinner table as a (aesthetic and otherwise) space, and the mythos of the Last Supper itself, they became entangled within/through this manuscript***. I was already working on the script for "*That* Dinner Party" when Omar led me to his "Last Supper" and it was only (almost) two whole years later that we ran into Khaled's dinner. Let's return to Omar's supper for now though (especially since 'Syrialism' – in its coinage – is his and his alone).

His torturedly haunting 'spin-off' of the Last Supper that he affectionately calls "the Syrian Last Supper", the one you see here, was in fact one of his first pieces that we discussed at length (in my interviews with him). ***He explained to me how his supper table is occupied by thirteen rather vivid characters, each with their own costumes, props and movement-sets: each invoking their own semiotic universes. "I tried to present most of the affiliation" he said, "some of them are clear for non-Syrians, while some of them are not. So, I had the Kurdish, the Sunni, the Shiites, the prisoner, the refugee, the traitor who didn't represent anyone because I wanted to keep it open... so he is the only guy who does not have any leading or connecting dots to his personality. I was Jesus because I have long hair and beard and I had this discussion with an artist friend of mine that I have been thinking about what man should be Jesus and he said, why not you, you***

Figures: 65-Title of the Conceptual Photograph created by Omar Imam as a part of the Syrialism series: The Syrian Last Supper.

"It (referring to the cake at the center of the table and the photograph) was the map of Syria at that time. You see the grey area for ISIS, the green for the rebels – you need to enlarge the picture to see it – the red for the official army and the yellow for the Kurdish and for sure it was changing. It was changing during the preparation for the picture! I had the picture but two months later we had a different map and I printed on this cake and we ate it after the session, we ate Syria!"

(Imam, Omar. The Syrian Last Supper. Conceptual Photograph. Website. 2018)

look like him!"[1]. And that explanation really stayed with me ***because if you look at the details of the photographs, you begin to see that Omar's thirteen are not characters at all, but rather thirteen Syrial "figurations"*** (Haraway, 2004; Weber, 2016a)**.** A laptop, a Baglama, canned food, sunflower oil, a neon lifejacket and a camera share the supper table with chains, toy soldiers and miniature support vehicles, as do the relief workers, the dictator, the rebel, the torturer, the tortured and the photographer. It is as if this photograph screams of a ***sheer multiplicity*** to the actors, objects, logics, systems that participate in the making of the on-going conflict in Syria and the plurality of their relationalities. In Omar's own words, and I agree, this photograph then, poses a challenge of sorts to every account of the Syrian conflict that produces an imaginary of this war that can be reduced to violent-agression-between-recognized-organized-aggregates: every proxy war, every cold-war, every Assad-vs-FSA, every violent extremism/ terrorism account because it might as well be a proxy war, but not only (De la Cadena, 2015), or a 'cold war in the Middle East' but not only and it is about terrorism, but again, not only**.** ***By bringing these characters, their objects, and their semiotic universes all to a single, 'flat'*** (DeLanda, 2013)***, supper table, I think, this photograph actually effectively – and affectively – also exposes the partial connectivity of the relationalities of and between these seemingly discreate imaginaries/ "figurations"*** (Haraway, 2004, 2016)***, embodied by these characters, begging us, as the audience, to see war not as an accidental by-product or tool of the conflictual interactions of different political actors, but rather as a deeply surreal phenomenon, steeped in complexity.***

And I have a deep appreciation for how subtly Omar has ***emphasized that detail*** – of course by making sure that each subjectivity embodied and represented was 'in-mid-action' (and in media res, spatio-temporally as well) as if it were an ***active constantly (re)produced and (re)performed verb and not only a noun,*** but more so even, – ***with the cake that anchors the framing of the photograph and the narrative: a cake that is shaped like the conflict-map of Syria, for that day, insisting, as it were, on making sensible how any given moment/ instantiation/ event/ frame of violence (any given moment of stasis at which we see capture and approach the rather intensely kinetic and dynamic 'conflict map' of Syria) is produced/ generated/ its becoming becomes through their very entanglement, their very "eating Syria' together, (and not a linear, reduced, simplified etc. Cause-effect dynamic between or across each of these actors and said violent-event). In that smallest of details, Omar had, for me, managed to capture the vitality, the***

[1] Omar Imam, interview by author, Geneva, Online, April 29, 2021

'living'-ness of war's unmaking and remaking of our worlds and the embodied processuality of how its violences are sensed and made sense of.

Now, I have been thinking quite a bit about why all three of us were gravitating towards the idea of the 'supper' "not only" (De la Cadena, 2015) as a visual echo, but more semiotically as well, I suppose: ***what is it about the dinner table?*** Is it the eating, dining, consumption thing, or is it the architecture of the dinner-table itself? ***What is it about the desire to anthropomorphize (in one form or another) concepts, processes, affects and their affects?*** Is it 'just' about being able to effectively capture and communicate the extent of their agencies? Is it about being able to give shape to the "unimaginable" (Miranda, 2016), to make it all more comprehensible? ***Or is it about acknowledging and appreciating the concepts', processes' and/or affects' desires, themselves, to become more sense-able and to be better made sense of?*** And I am still not quite sure, but I think ***it has to do with the desire/ impulse to make sense-able and make sense-of, not 'just' verbally, the affective dimension of 'iconic conceptual figurations' (like these characters of Omar's) and their relationalities (like their individual actions and their collective eating), in a textured but flat, and deeply surreal, worlding (like the dinner table).***

For me, at least, I wanted to create "*That Dinner Party*" as a crossover episode between Caryl Churchill 's "Top Girls" (Churchill, 2008) and Neil Gaiman's "Sandman" (Gaiman, 2006), and maybe that impulse/desire to create this 'crossover' is an echo of exactly this^ desire[2].

[2]"*That* Dinner Party" is the setting for the 'comic strip' I worked on, and through, with the help of Rhea Saupin, introduced in the Design Compendium.
I borrowed the setting for this 'comic strip' from Churchill. Churchill's play, 'Top Girls'. The play follows the protagonist, Marlene, a junior executive at the Top Girls Employment Agency, across three acts, observing her engagement with her personal, social and professional lives. In doing that it explores what it means to be a 'feminist', what that has to do with how women (categorized as strictly vagina-wielding female actants- which is, well, not ideal to say the least, especially if it does not come with a disclaimer) perform professionalism, and how do they try to find stable footing in the antagonism between work-and-home living- all by spotlighting the Pasodoble between 'ambition' and the response-abilities of woman-hood in a patriarchal society.
For us though, the most interesting aspect of the play (vis-à-vis) the dissertation, is the structure of the first scene of the first act. In this opening scene, Marlene is hosting a 'surreal' dinner party to celebrate her recent promotion and in attendance are 'iconic' women from different historical places and periods (fictional and non-fictional) i.e., we see Isabella Bird, Lady Nijo, Pope Joan, Dull Gret and 'Patient' Griselda all sit together on a dinner table, alongside Marlene, and discuss their lived experiences, their sacrifices, their ambitions, and the sad serendipity of being able to trace (different but repeating) echoes of (repeating but differently) violences through their individual 'histories of living' with and within WSCP -

So, what the *insert-profanity-of-choice* are Iconic-Conceptual-Figurations?

Let's tackle that in two parts beginning firs with the Icon-Concept relationality: See the thing with "icons" (to ruthlessly simplify, paraphrase and operationalize Mitchell's beautifully complex theories, (Mitchell, 2013, 2020b; Mitchell & Mitchell, 1995)) that at some point, perhaps at the very point where and when they become iconic, they transcend the boundaries of their own image/picture and become, what Mitchell would call "metapictures" (ibid), and I

White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy remember (from the Prologue? – despite how anachronistic these echoes felt/seemed/should have been. They also talk over each other, misunderstand and I think, sometimes, wilfully, misrepresent each other's positions and positionalities- constantly judging, prodding and preaching, their relationships with each other seem to be in a consistent flux, shifting with each changing topic.

And that is the first thing that has stuck with me the most- how beautifully this opening act captures the frighteningly precarious snug "durability" (Lisle, 2021) ***of the marriage between difference and solidarity (and I suppose of all marriages)***.

I think that this *spirit/ affect of flux (because it speaks to the processuality, multiplicity and plurality of relationships), of deeply embodied entanglement (between ideas, positions, all grounded in lived experiences and how this collage affects their relationship to one another) and of a state of being that is simultaneously combative and congenial (and the "twistings"* (Hirsch, 2014) *that that brings), makes the 'dinner table', in particular, a consummate visual metaphor for the particular brand of textured, coloured, political-yl 'flatness' that this dissertation, and I would argue Syrialism, is embedded in/ dyed with. It makes clear that entanglement as a relationality does not in any way, shape or form, imply un-knotted connectivity, rather it is rife with lines and connections that are only 'partial', there is deep 'friction' and 'bumpiness' in the 'melees' they participate in co-producing, there are 'glitches' in the circuitries they inhabit and 'turbulence' in the 'ecologies' they are generative of - and generated from - and it is precisely this 'restlessness' of/within any given socio-political-process-of-being-and-experiencing-being-in/through-livedness that holds the agentic potentialities for change, be it towards rupturing or 'intensifying' the 'durabilities' of existing power structures* (for a quick referential guide to/for the 'terms' here, read: (Lisle, 2021)).

P.S. - I know that technically, or at least ideally/ idealistically, all spaces designed to facilitate dialogue have refrains of these characteristics, but I particularly appreciate both the informal-formality of the 'dinner'-ing. I have spoken in other places about food G drinking and other acts of consumption and their entanglement with research guided with/through "ethnographic sensibilities" (Schatz, 2003)) and the double/ repeated/ refrained, albeit refracted/ superimposed 'flat'ness of the morphology of the table itself' G we can pick this up there, for instance in Translating To/ For Syrialism.

And the second thing that stayed with me was, again, the desire towards assembling a cast of 'iconic' characters (fictional or non-fictional, just like Omar did, I wanted to, and as you will see later in this chapter, and then the dissertation, Gaiman and Khaled did); ***because once you know that you are having a dinner-party, I guess the obvious next question, is who do you invite***. For me, and as it turns out, the answer was: 'Iconic' Conceptual 'Figurations'.

understand as concepts unto themselves. Think here of Hypatia of Alexandria, or Wonder Woman, or Alice in Wonderland, or Banksy, or Frankenstein's Creature - really just any'one', any figure, that has become mythical/ legendary/ greater-than-themselves. Alice, for instance, is of course, Caroll's Alice- the little curious and imaginative little girl (read- innocent and naïve) that tumbles into a whimsically surreal world and undertakes a journey – of the soul and the landscape – that is truly (trans)formative. But, she is also a figurative impression (like when we call someone an "Alice in Wonderland" if the person in question is currently experiencing circumstances are truly bizarre) and a metaphor for the resilience of childhood-y curiosity and the need for adaptability in the face of growing-up without losing your'self' (i.e., the need for learning how to navigate, live with and within – how to subjectivise the self – the collective-'adult' world with its 'surreal' rules without losing, at least, some aspects of the individual-'self' that are deemed desirable.) And the same is differently true for Hypatia, Wonder Woman, Banksy and the Creature.

Keeping in my mind, then, that these characters, these people, these figures, they are all "iconic" because they have become deeply tethered to, and almost inseparable from, the ideas that they seem to be embodying- in a way they have become concepts in themselves (because isn't that what all concepts are at the end of the day? "Iconic" – in this regard – are words, then, that signify an entire rhizome of ideas, positions, arguments, and beliefs). So effectively, here: ***all icons have a conceptual aspect/ element or dimension to them, but are not necessarily concepts, but all concepts are iconic.***

Let's look (secondly) for the 'figuration' of it all now? When I walked you through our house – Syrialism and mine – in the previous chapter, I spoke to you at length about "concept-work" (Stoler, 2008) and hopefully, was able to make clear, where I stand on what I think concepts are, how they are treated in this text, and the reasons for their anthropomorphisation (however misguided they might be). Taking that into account, it is really no surprise I think, that I gravitated towards taking inspiration, now, from Judy Chicago's Dinner Party and Neil Gaiman's Sandman (particularly, in the case of choosing the 'guests' for our dinner party, the latter): the former, here, was the first step towards/in an initial bout of inspiration because while 'Top Girls's' approach to "real" characters (fictional or non-fictional) was a good diving board for me, it wasn't necessarily making visible the 'conceptual-iconic' extension/ relationality to the extent that I was hoping. And in a way, Chicago's Dinner Party took it a step further and gave me just that, but it also left me deeply unsettled[3] and with the feeling

[3] It was an art installation, produced first at the Brooklyn Museum, in 1979, that took the shape of a dinner-party attended by 39 women ("Who Were Eaten Alive"- the alternative title// the subtitle// the thematic title), in groups of 13 along each axis of the triangular table (a purposefully created echo , by the artist, of/for the 13 people present at the Last Supper). Each of the 39 women were represented by a custom-

that there was something else I was looking for, somewhere in a similar vicinity but not this very thing. It was as if between Chicago's Dinner Party and Top Girls' there was a choice to be made when thinking through this icon-concept-person relationality: the relationality was either that the flesh and blood and bones and a truly-lived-life person (fictional or nonfictional) would be 'reduced' to 'just' an 'iconic' idea or that in trying to preserve the flesh and blood and lived-ness we wouldn't be able to capture the conceptual affect of said 'iconic' person/ character's lives. I wanted to add texture to concepts, and another – a sense-able dimension to their affect – not take away embodiment from bodies in tracing/ making/ (re)producing their 'iconic'-ness.

But honestly, I was deeply 'confounded' (not discombobulated and/or fazed) about how to perform/ design this adding of texture/ dimension/ affect to the 'Iconic Conceptual Figurations' that build this text. For once, it wasn't about not knowing how to bleed[4]-correctly, or for long, or how much blood was too much blood, or how to stop the bleeding, i.e., this wasn't the confusion of incapacity (which had, by then, fast become, the Joe Goldberg – Television's favorite stalker-serial killer from "You" (Berlanti & Gamble, 2018) – of my existence). This felt different: it was much more amusing and, far more, puzzle-ing- It was not

made plate that tied elements of each of their unique 'histories of living' to Chicago's "butterfly-vagina" motif – an "icon" in its own right. And here, already, I think we could begin to see, that there is a real sort of acknowledgement, that the 'Primal Goddess', Kali, Hatshepsut, Judith, Hypatia, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Mary Wollstonecraft (a personal favorite in terms of attendees), Virginia Woolf (to name a few) were 'ideas', or embodiment of 'ideals', and "not only" (De la Cadena, 2015) characters/ persons/ personalities. And/But there is a lot to be said here – and has been said – about the race and politics of the visual vocabularies used, the socio-politics of the gender-reductionism, the 'feminism' of it all, and so on- all. And perhaps that is the 'reductionism' that made me largely uneasy.

[4] I am 'twisting' around and through Hemingway's quote about writing here because, for me, it beautifully captured the 'real'ness – the entanglement of the abstract and the bodied – of trying to write about the 'real'ness of 'Iconic Conceptual Figurations': ***"There's nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and open a vein."***

And, while looking for other-writing-humans who, like me, had already drank this^ cool-aid and were prepared to bleed-write (if not already bleeding-writing or writing-only-because-bleeding) but just had a-million-concerns-about-the-actual-machanations-of-this-bleeding-and-how-to-do-it-well, I ran into Sean Norris's 'twisting' of this quote, and 'twisted' that around too: ***"To cut is what makes writing hard. Sitting down to write and hitting that first key… that's the hard part. Once you start - once you spill that first bit of ink and let it bleed into the page, the rest takes care of itself. There's nothing to it. You just sit there and bleed until it stops. It is not for this reason, but it's still interesting and worth mentioning that the word 'write' comes from the Proto-Germanic word 'writan,' which literally meant to scratch, tear, or cut."*** (Norris, 2022)]

knowing how and where to make the cut in the first place[5], and that was bizarre because cutting – I was convinced – was one of my more productive/creative skills.

Turns out, that's^ just observation bias btw:
if you only bleed from skins where you have been never-not-cut you can trick yourself into thinking that cutting 'comes naturally' to you.
****Insert-profanity-of-choice* Positionality***
(especially the way we meet her in FieldNote: 6.)

And, then, in the middle of this desperation-to-(begin)-cutting-but-not-knowing-how-or-where-to-cut, I was reminded of Gaiman and what he had taught me, when I first met Sandman in 2013. There is so much I would like to say about the Sandman graphic novels – especially now that it is a Netflix series as well, which I feel really double about: on the one hand I appreciate that I have more people to talk to/ connect with over the creativity and intricacies of this worlding, on the other hand, I feel kind of 'basic' now especially given that it

[5] The *insert-profanity-of-choice* deconstructionist training that I received - way too early in life, in my humble opinion, because those theories/ philosophies are pernicious and sorely life-contaminating - is forcing me to subject us both to the following caveats here, vis-a-vis "correct":

(1) we can always make an argument that if this is the relationality between icon-person-concept that we are all 'iconic', because we are all to some degree, ideas-of-ourselves-especially-in-the-eyes-of-others and perception really is the hidden political leverage twirling "diagram" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2009) here, but that really must be a conversation for another day,

(2) and that all methods of 'representation'/ 'communication'/ 'visualization'/ 'translation'/ any other kind of making-sense-able will always, necessarily, have leftovers - and that is precisely where the politics of theorizing, conceptualizing and living lies, and this impetus to somehow make either the 'whole' sensible is a ridiculous modernist hangover because (remember the parable of the blind men and the elephant (Shah, 1974)?) there isn't even a whole elephant to sense, describe and make sense of, in the first place, and of course, because there are no words/ images/ sounds/ touches/ tastes/ thoughts/ feelings, and any other signifiers that we can think of that would explain exactly what we wish to explain about whichever part of the elephant we can access, i.e. which can ever be a perfect congruence with the signified- the "difference" of living with/ in/ through text, and I will take the liberty to extend on Saussure, Husserl and Derrida and argue any and all other forms of signification as well, would render it impossible.

(3) And so, let me just say, I am truly trying my best to unlearn these instincts- modernism seems to be as ingrained in my lifeworld as the "white-supremacist-capitalist-patriarchy" (hooks, 2009) that I speak of a tad more often. But, I still went searching for something else, not because I wanted the 'perfect' or 'correct' way to describe the 'whole' elephant, but because I wanted to find the best possible way to make-sense-able, and make sense-of, the part of the elephant I was interested in and have access to: to find the 'best' possible way, that I could encounter, to make-sense-able the "figuration"al aspect of iconic concepts, because I believe, and think, that the being able to sense the 'figuration' of the concept, or parts of it in some form or another, is integral to being able to make sense of it.

was always one of those unspoken-but-commonly-acknowledged filtering questions, a test of 'true' nerd-y-ness whether one had heard of/ read the series– but, I will keep my fan-girl-ing all to myself.

Quickly summarizing the aspects of the series that are interesting for us, let me say though, that Gaiman created these graphic novels to revolve around ***the life and dying*** (because there is no 'absolute' death for our protagonist) ***of Dream or Morpheus, "The Lord of Dreams"*** (Gaiman, 2006). ***He is one of the "Seven Endless" ones- siblings who are anthropomorphized "beings", each distinct in form and function, differently/ and often more powerful than Gods.*** Destiny is the oldest; Death is a young woman who spends one day each year living and dying as a mortal; Dream (our protagonist) is the personification of all things imagined- thoughts, dreams, nightmares, fantasies; Destruction is the 'prodigal' brother who has long since abandoned his response-abilities (Barad, 2010) as an Endless, and to them; Desire is androgenous and they are often, quite cruel and Despair is their cold and quiet twin; and Delirium is the youngest and fluctuates between forms, functions and genders depending on how they feel. ***The thing is, we have no clarity, as to the 'nature' of these beings, not really anyway. We can map it through their relationalities with themselves, with the human world, with objects and non-humans*** – like say, ravens (our deuteragonist being Mathhew, Dream's raven) – ***with other mythical and/or mythological characters*** (we meet the Fates, Hecate, Ishtar, Loki, Thor, Cain and Able, Calliope, Orpheus, Lucifer, the Fey folk, Shakespeare, Abu Ja'far Harun ibn Muhammad al-Mahdi, Marco Polo, Geoffrey Chaucer, Susana and Judith Shakespeare: off the top of my head), ***with spaces, and only in one place in the entire series – in Gaiman, through Destruction's, own words: "The Endless are merely patterns. The Endless are ideas. The Endless are wave functions. The Endless are repeating motifs. The Endless are echoes of darkness, and nothing more… And even our existences are brief and bounded[6]. None of us will last longer than this version of the Universe"*** (Gaiman, 2006).

The Endless, then, to me, are these patterns/ ideas/ motifs that affect our world and are affected by us and in that, they are conceptual 'figures'/ concepts that are "figurations"/ figures that are conceptual i.e. concepts that actively, continuously and dynamically (constantly but not consistently) ***participate in the becoming of a world(ing) and are actively, continuously and dynamically generated by said world(ing), their "figurations"*** (Haraway, 2004, 2016) ***being the plane at/ through which this co-constitution finds agency.***

[6] The idea being that their bounded-ness, as we find out in the later books, works a lot like "TinkerBell's" magic which only exists if children continue to believe in it (Barrie, 2004)// or the Tinkerbell Effect, if you would prefer a psychological reference instead.

Or, going back to 'concept work', they are concepts that 'work' to (re)create, (re)craft and (re)produce our worldings and us, and concepts that we work on, and that are actively affected by us and our worldings, when we (re)create, (re)craft and (re)produce them. And more importantly, they are concepts, who through Gaiman and Sam Kieth, Mike Dringenberg, Jill Thompson, Shawn McManus, Marc Hempel, Bryan Talbot, and Michael Zulli (the artists), found sense-able "figurations" beyond 'just' the verbal. ***In being anthropomorphized in this way, where their processuality, multiplicity, embodiedness, plurality and their partial-connnectivities were all rendered sense-able, i.e., where their surreality was made-sense-able, they became*** (or were able to express themselves as) ***"performative images that can be inhabited"*** (Haraway, 2004)***, i.e., they become "distillations of shared meanings in forms or images… that emerge out of discursive and material semiotic assemblages"*** (Weber, 2016a) ***and as such, as "power signifiers that approximate but never properly represent seemingly signified worlds" that have held onto, that appreciate, and that draw their power from their surreality- from them being an "employment of semiotic tropes that combine knowledge, practices, and power to (in)form how we map our worlds and understand the actual things in those worlds. (ibid)"***

Now, this is quite a mouthful, but for me at least, Weber's words here have been the codebook I have been using to understand and operationalize Haraway's figurations since I first came across them. ***Weber argues that if we are to see 'figurations' the way she and Haraway do, we will realize (1) that there are four key elements through which figurations take specific forms: tropes, temporalities, performativities and worldings, (2) there is an instinctive urge for us to think through and operationalize figurations as if they "represent preexisting worlds", that (3) it is precisely that urge to reify "figurations and the worlds they create" that makes them both "potentially 'flat, unproductive, stifling and destructive"*** (Grau, 2004; McNeil, 2008) ***in*** (Weber, 2016b)***", and as such, (4) we should think about figurations as a "critical conceptual devise"*** (Kuntsman, 2009) ***instead since that would allow us to care-fully acknowledge their agentic potential and appreciate their response-ability, their disruptive-ability and their operationalize-ability, especially, I think, when it comes to crafting critical reimaginations*** (Thiele, 2021).

I would argue here that what Gaiman has done with the Endless is precisely step (4) of the Haraway-Weber plan of action when it comes to 'figurations.' In treating these 'iconic' 'concepts' as 'figurations' – as semiotic tropes that are defined through different temporal imprints and through the different performativities they

are delicately but durably tethered to, and which actively participate in creating our different worldings – that are constitutionally surreal (performative world-generating tropes whose production is a process, that are multiple and plural in their semiotic ranges, that are partially connected to other tropes and worldings and that are deeply embodied to the point that they are literally, here, anthropomorphized), Gaiman has given us, I think, a roadmap of sorts on how to:

(1) make-sense-able the surreality of these/any 'iconic conceptual figurations' themselves,

(2) map the surreality of their affect-ive-ness vis-à-vis the generation of our current worlding, making-sense of their entanglements, and

(3) operationalize the surreality of these entanglements – their densities, their durabilities, their bumpinesses, their frictions, their partial-connections – to (further) 'twist'// critically re-imagine this worlding;

And that is what Omar has done with his Syrial Last Supper, and as you will see before the concluding pages of this manuscript so has Khaled; and I am hoping to do the same with *That* Dinner Party.

Syrial Surfaces

طفل يتلعثم، وجه يافا طفل"

كيف للأشجار الذابلة أن تزهر؟

وقت بين الرماد والورد قادم

عندما ينطفئ كل شيء

عندما يبدأ كل شيء".

- Adonis, يأتي وقت بين الرماد والورود

“A child stammers, the face of Jaffa is a child
How can withered trees blossom?
A time between ashes and roses is coming
When everything shall be extinguished
When everything shall begin”.

- *Adnois, A Time Between Ashes and Roses*

Encountering Syrialism:

Travelling to Three Little Syrias

تضامنًا مع الصحفيات وكاتبات المقالات اللاتي يخاطرن
بحياتهن لكتابة هذه القصص.

Encountering Syrialism:
Travelling to Three Little Syrias
*Or, How the *insert-profanity-of-choice* did I get 'Syrialism'?*

Encounter Episodes/// /// Episodic Encounters, Part: X- Istanbul

The first[1] 'Little[2] Syria' was very hard to find.

I had to rummage through Google, scour newspaper articles, meticulously (and manically- do they always go together?) index names of streets, stores and restaurants and frantically triangulate their map-locations, unsuccessfully sign up for AirBnB's 'Hummus Tour(s)' across these restaurants, and gently grovel for information at every lokanta I ate[3] at before I was able to even venture an educated guess as to

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[1]'First'- there is no first here. Not really. This sequencing – as most sequencing, I am cautiously conjecturing – is arbitrary and for the sake of simplicity because for some reason linearity begets 'ease' (at least of reading). For the most part, with most other things such as the title of this "episode" itself, I have gone with the 'part-X' design format – from the DC – as a visual reminder that all things within the ontological pluriverse of this dissertation are "flat". There is no pretence here of a fixed-point-of-beginning (again, echoing much of what was said in footnote: 1 on page (i) of the Prologue and in Field Note: 4, about 'storytelling' and haunted/ haunting 'histories'). ***The research, the worlding, the writing, the format, the design, the analysis, all stand/start "in medias res."***
But with some tropes distinction by numbers was unavoidable… like with our Three Little Syrias.
They are triplets, I promise. I just can't describe all three at once. Trust me, I tried. Hard.
But linearity won. Hence, 'first', or rather, the 'first of' the Little Syrias is how I begin this story.
Plus, ***I am wondering if that isn't true for most ethnographic-y writing.***
(I am in no way implying that this an ethnographic work- at the most it is a work with very very limited "ethnographic sensibilities" (Schatz, 2009, 2013)***– but perhaps I just mean works that rely on "thick descriptions"*** (Geertz, 1973)***. To tell a real story, to show a lifeworld in the fullness of its complexities, don't we always end up imposing a linear structure on our descriptions even if the experience, more often than not I think, is far more… rhizomatic?***
(Ankersmit, 1993; Harvey, 2021; Mio, 1997; Mio & Katz, 2018)(Ankersmit, 1993; Harvey, 2021; Mio, 1997; Mio & Katz, 2018)

[2] 'Little' here used both, in the way that Jeff Huysmans operationalizes 'little' for "little security nothings" (where seemingly banal practices/ devices are securitiezed for/ towards different security politics) (Huysmans, 2011, 2014) and in the "metaphor"ical – in a deeply socio-political manner (Ankersmit, 1993; Harvey, 2021; Mio, 1997; Mio & Katz, 2018) – trend of referring to neighbourhoods with significant migrant populations as 'Little Place X' or 'X Town' and so on.

[3] Has someone written significantly about the relationship between food/eating and qualitative research-ing? So much of my access to people's lifeworlds has been mediated through food/ eating/ drinking that I am convinced that the intimacy of meal-ing (whether you are sharing a meal with someone, or around someone, or with the help of someone), and just 'food' as a 'device' really, somehow creates an atmosphere that facilitates sharing (frictions and power-dynamics but also a loose form of companionship and all that goes with it.) Plus, so much about the preference-consumption-digestion-

where I might stumble upon "Little Syria". For a moment there I was convinced that finding the exact coordinates that were inhabited by "Little Syria", that trying to trace the exact neighbourhood that it occupied somewhere in Fatih (a municipality in Istanbul), was my attempt at mapping Narnia, or Neverland, or Wonderland, or even StoryBrooke or Fillory[4]. In fact, when Berat's death-defying driving[5] deposited us in 'dental'-land – because literally every second storefront surrounding us was either a dental clinic or a dental supply shop – I began to wonder (more than earlier) if "Little Syria" had just been a(n exoticised) figment of journalistic imaginations that I had fervently (perhaps even desperately[6]) wanted to believe in.

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excretion is mimicked in the information-research dynamic, I think, that it heightens, at least for me, this hankering to find the recipe for/ cook-up a detailed description of this dynamic.

[4] Each of these fictional lands correspond to the following book/tv-or-movie-adaptations worlds:- (Kitsis & Horowitz, 2011)(Kitsis & Horowitz, 2011)Narnia --> The Chronicles of Narnia (Lewis, 2001)|| Neverland --> Peter Pan (Barrie, 2004)|| Wonderland --> Alice in Wonderland (Carroll, 2009)|| StoryBrooke --> Once Upon a Time (Kitsis & Horowitz, 2011) || Fillory --> The Magicians (Grossman, 2015).

[5] Taxis, Rickshaws, Ubers- modes of transportation that allow for close-quarter isolation between service providers and researchers are also up there in the list for me with meal-ing; if there was a list where the relationalities between the acts/spaces of intimacy and qualitative research-ing could be prospected. (Wernick & Reese, 2019)(Wernick & Reese, 2019)Berat, and his Uber, for example, gave me everything I needed as a way of an "introduction" to Fatih. In the 1 hour and 37 minutes I spent in his car – Istanbul traffic is no joke at rush-hour – the three of us (him, GoogleTranslate and I) covered a lot of ground. He gave me a rundown of the city space – pointing at important landmarks and historizing them for me while also basically reenacting the car-chase scene from 6 Underground (Wernick & Reese, 2019)– and introduced me to the socio-economic dynamics of the different neighbourhoods. We talked about our partners, about food, about darwishes and their whirling, about migration and how complicatedly he felt about Istanbul these days. He told me all about Fatih's Byzantian and Ottoman pasts, asked which sites I had visited and what I thought of them, and walked me, or drove me, through how task asap (the particular neighbourhood where first Little Syria resides) became a nexus for the Syrian migrant community and how much of that was because of the efforts made by the other diasporas from West Asia in that district. He was clearly quite proud of his city, and I was proud that I hadn't thrown up in the car.

[6] **I wonder sometimes if it's a shared researcher's-dream to one day be able to access this mythical, mystical space (physical and social as Lefebvre** (2012) **would insist) where the phenomena, the relationalities, the powers, the structures, the systems that we are hoping to comprehend would just… appear- a space of unbiased, undeniable, revelation.** Like there was some unchanging quintessential universally-experienced solidified truth 'out there' in the world, in the field, that we could just stumble upon, or extract, or observe or sense. It's ridiculous of course- the whole notion, but I do wonder, if despite our best attempts at internalizing our post-modernisms, and interpretivism and care-practices, if this… fantasy ever leaves our bodies unscarred. Here, for example, I wasn't really looking for a shared-'S'yrian-truth-about-embodied-war-experience, but I would be lying if I wasn't secretly hoping – against hope and my better judgement – for strolling into some kind of shared sense-ing/-ability floating across this 'little syria' that I could just make immediate sense of as soon as I would see it. **I knew (and at the same time was completely unprepared for and was praying that I was desperately wrong) that**

When we finally spotted "Salloura oglu" I knew I had struck gold, or at least something golden[7].

I was, at the very least, in 'Little West Asia'[8].

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these phenomena, the answers to 'how does violence feel at its most local, intimate, embodied 'level' when it comes to living with/through/within war', would not be tactile. They wouldn't be *object(-ive)-y. I couldn't just pluck/receive them from/in the field and carry them back to Geneva to exhibit at a defence.*

But low-key that was the bias I took with me to this little Syria.

I suppose in a way, that is *precisely* what motivated me to find an anchor for the affective-community-within-a-relational-'field' (that I think through in Field Note: 2, a little in footnote: 8 that begins on the very next page, and more than a little in Theoretical Note: 4) that this manuscript is dedicated to/for in the resistance/defiant-artworks of the Revolution.

[7] I mean that quite literally.

Salloura Oglu is something of a local-legend in Istanbul when it comes to restaurants. And in Syria for that matter.

From what I have heard/ read/ learnt/ understood, the Salloura's halawet al-jeben (sweet-cheese rolls-ish) took over streets of Hama in the late 1870s. In those days it was 'just' the great-great-grandfather of the family, his one steel-tray, this one desert and his hollering making their way through Syrian streets. And somehow in the next 150 years or so the family mushroomed its business across the Ottoman and French colonial administrations, rooted themselves firmly in Aleppo (one of the then – perhaps now too – culinary hearts of/for Syrian cuisine) during the Assad-ian terrors (be the Hafez's or Bashar's), expanded their repertoire of recipes religiously until it seemed like the "Salloura name became synonymous with 'desert' (Bohn, 2016)", and left for Istanbul only in the thick of 2012-13 (becoming one of the last big businesses to uproot themselves) when it became unbearable to live with/within/through the smouldering ruins of their city. Aleppo by then was beginning to reek of absolute ruin, a foreshadowing of things to come (cluster munitions, barrel bombings, chemical attacks, "double tap" airstrikes, indiscriminate shelling and what can easily be seen as one of the longest sieges in contemporary warfare: 19th of July, 2012 to 22nd of December, 2016).

These were the circumstances against which ***As'ad Salloura*** (the then and now patriarch of the family and its businesses who was clad in a deep purple head-chef-coat when I first saw him) ***laid the foundation of Salloura oglu and by adding that suffix, Oglu (Turkish for "Son of"), alongside the "1870" he created a space that was at once a home-away-from-home and a new beginning, a new-Aleppo so to say that would be one of the primary anchors for Istanbul's 'Little Syria'***. Especially since over the next two years (well into 2014 after which land routes became much more impermeable) he paid to smuggle over 50 of his employees and their families out of the country. Some of them, like Rashed who cares for the freezing deserts at the end of the display cabinet that marks the entrance to the restaurant, continue to work for him 'till todate. ***In my head, at least, the restaurant was an unofficial embassy of sorts: grounds that were hallowed, country-specific and safe-haven-ish despite also being profoundly 'alien' all at once.***

And in keeping with its stature in/for the community it was gilded- white and gold from floor to ceiling.

[8] It was the signs, I think, that tipped me off- suddenly every sign, billboard, poster, advertisement, banner, store-name was – also, because the Turkish was still there, quite predominantly – in Arabic.



Figure: 66 – Photograph taken by Author in Istanbul, or rather, in the "Little Syria" neighbourhood of Istanbul in October, 2022.



Figure: 67 – Photograph taken by Author in Istanbul, or rather, in the "Little Syria" neighbourhood of Istanbul in October, 2022.

I am not sure how long I sat there scarfing muhammara and Fattoush, and not so subtly gawking at the slices-of-life[9] *that were unfolding around us – It was one of those places where "Time is a Mother"*[10] (Vuong, 2023) *– but at some point, "gradually, then suddenly"* (Hemingway, 2014)*, it came to me. I just knew. Even if I could (go) find a window to climb through, this "Little Syria" was not a home I could or should or wanted to break-into*[11]*.*

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[9] ***The first floor of the restaurant was suspended in its own 'sama'.***
From where I was sitting against the open window in the far corner of the room (the preferred vantage-point for all those voyeuristically inclined I think even if one fundamentally disagrees with 'fly-on-the-wall' practices/notions of ethnographic-y practices- remember from Field Note: 4***?) I could pretty much feel the whole floor.*** I could hear the group of students sitting behind me performing student-ness at its peak. There were hoodies under denim jackets, fist pumpings and falling-off-chair laughter and just-a-little-too-loud-when-one-is-just-a-little-too-uneasy-in-one's-own-body discussions at that table. The succulent smell of the safarjaliyya (a kind of lamb stew) that the two women sitting across from them were sharing – while being buried into one of their daughter's Instagram newsfeeds – hung deep in the dampness of the fall air that was blanketing us. And their hushed worry seemed to be making the equally quietened delight of the three older men who sat at the opposite end of the floor from me, hunched over a two-layered cake with white frosting, even more pronounced. ***I could barely understand a word of what was being said, I was failing miserably at meaningfully interacting with those who made the restaurant work, I was overwhelmed and completely distracted by hunger and feasting, I kind of just wanted to enjoy turn-brain-off-people-watching, and still, it felt like I could read/feel/touch… sense… something in the air. Like the atmosphere itself was speaking- it had the same charge, the same valence, the same cadence even, as the air sinks into – and makes mobile – a space with/of heightened rituality.*** The 'vibe' was concert-y, or church-y but I couldn't tell you why. ***I could sense it but had no idea of how to make sense of it.***
The truth is I still don't.
I am not even sure if there was something there or if I was just "interpreting" too much into it.
Either way, after much thinking/feeling, I found a name for my imaginary talkative air-y friend: Sama (whom I would love to introduce you to in Theoretical Note: 4 and Field Note: 2).

[10] Vuong's writing is always devastating in its tenderness- like Didion's intensity found flesh in Adichie's words. It splinters through your heart so ruthlessly that there is almost a gentleness to it. And that stands true for his second collection of poems "Time is a Mother" as well. The book wrings its namesake from a/the poem – "Not Even" – that (at least to me) bleeds about living, surviving, existing, dying and everything in between in absolute liminality. By weaving an embodied narrative that ropes together the frictions and consonances of individual expression-societal conditioning/demands, of transformation-stability, of marginalization-tokenisation, of war's devastation and the bloodied root-network it provides for artistic expression, of debris-intactness of the morphologies of the self, of grief's despair and its fertility, through the poem Ocean 'proves' to us that "Time is a Mother | Lest we forget, a morgue is also a community centre". ***His 'time', here, is a spatial, material, embodied and acutely generative affect that bears within it a particularly arresting (again, in both its connotations- spectacular and confining), as is my/ Salloura Oglu's 'air'.***

[11] ***What *insert profanity of choice* is a "Field" here?***

It could be because I was at a sama ceremony the very next day, or because I couldn't get the scene of the long-pony-tailed-man and the omi with all her grandkids sitting at opposing tables at Salloura oglu out of my head. (Your guess is as good as mine, but those were my positionalities stepping into this theorising.)

Let's go back to the restaurant for a second.

A half hour or so before I left the restaurant, I saw an omi (Dutch for grandmother but more specifically any-person-performing-a-grandmother-figuration) walk in with her daughter, son-in-law and (my best guess is her other) son. She seemed a little tense as she shuffled into the table-for-ten adjacent to mine. From how little they spoke to one another and how desperately they were staring out into the street, cutting through the open air like taught electrical wirings jutting out across an azure sky, I assumed they were waiting for someone. I think she must have taken off, and put back on, her coal-ish shawl seven times in the ten minutes they were on stand-by (there is something more active about that than 'waiting' I think). And then the flood came. There was crying and kissing and hugging and shouting. A mother nearly howled in relief and the other – her niece whom she hadn't seen in 4 years – re-assured two little girls with soft "That is your grandmother. No, Really. Go hug her."

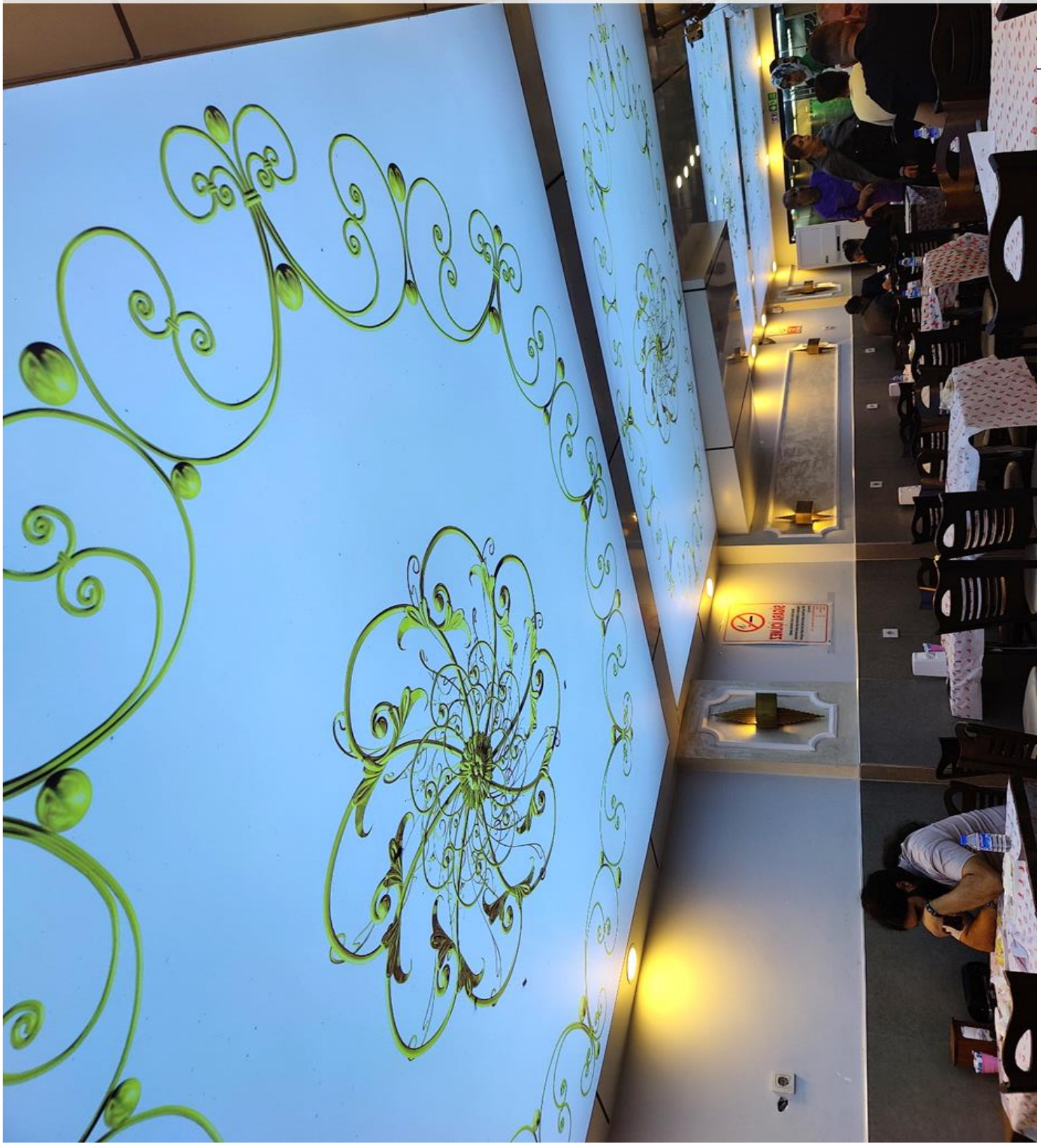
It was… surreal- the moment itself, that I was able to witness it, that I was able to witness something like this at all while randomly-out-in-the-field… that even before Adil, whom you will meet briefly in the next paragraph informed me, I knew that somehow, somewhere, in some capacity the war had found them, that they had somehow survived it, and that this was the moment their sheer resilience found its reward and relief. We, me and Adil and I think the whole restaurant, couldn't help but look, and also look-away immediately and smile-y-sigh-y. ***There was something so intimate about that very (spatially structured to be) public moment that it felt like an intrusion to stare, to question, to want-to-know, to dig. More of an intrusion than it usually felt- much more.*** (I know what I have said earlier about 'intimacy', in the Syrial Preludes, and a deep-seated desire for it, but this… this was my encounter with the first 'limitation' of that craving, of working with/ within/ through this intimacy: there was such a thing as too much of it- something I will explore in depth in Field Note: 5. 'Critical Distance', as I would discover belatedly, would have been a saving grace earlier on this 'experiment'.)

And in my panicked desperation to look anywhere else, to give them the privacy they deserved, I began looking in the direction of the man that was sitting right behind them, a (chess) Bishop's step away from my table. He had been sitting there for quite a while. I knew that, my peripheral vision had caught something grey while I was still wading through my first plate of kibbeh, but I was only now getting around to really looking at him. And just like that, "gradually and then suddenly" (Hemingway, 2014)– or rather "slowly, and then all at once" (Green, 2014) – it made sense. ***What I was seeing at his table was just as intimate – but differently so – as the omi and her family re-union.*** Something echoed, repeated itself. ***There was something shared there, not common, or representational, just a refrain.***

Something shifted as soon as that realisation began rhizome-ing in my bones. I left immediately after I think. There was a hurried exchange of cash, a thank you for Adil, and a polite wave to As'aad, and before Rashed had finished saying something about enjoying the rest of my trip in Istanbul I was out of there. I knew I couldn't/ didn't want to do this- to break in here.

I was nauseous (then again, it could have been Berat's driving or the over-eating but I think it was also the guilt). It was home- these moments, these spaces, these atmospheres… it was an us-space and though there were other us-spaces I didn't mind violating (not even when it came to other Syrian us-spaces) in the name of academic curiosity, this one was… I just couldn't.

Figure: 68 – Photograph taken by Author in Istanbul, or rather, in the "Little Syria" neighbourhood of Istanbul in October, 2022.



This was a home that had been hard rebuilt. I couldn't (even if I had tried) break into it, and more importantly, I didn't want to. I had to find another 'field', a different 'sama', where 'immersion', felt... permissible- practically, ethically, and normatively.

I needed to find 'wajd'... it just needed to 'feel right', and I didn't know, then anyway, why it didn't.

In footnote. X, in Chapter: 2 of Syrial Surfaces, "Living Through Syrialism" I will tell you why. Or, at least, my best estimate for it.

Figure: 69 – Painting by Sara Shamma,
from the collection, titled: "Sema",
presented at the Turkish Embassy, Art House in Damascus in March, 2009

(Shamma, Sara. Sema. Painting. Website. 2009)



Maybe it was because Adil (who had spent the evening brining me mutabal every time my spoon hit ceramic) and I could not strike up much of a conversation beyond the usual where-are-you-froms[12]. Between his broken English and my (even more horrendously) broken Arabic (and both of ours non-existent Turkish), a conversation about home, loss, exile, nostalgia, trauma, and the complexities of living with and through the violence of it all was out of the question[13]. Honestly, a part of me wanted to just make

[12] which I quickly learnt was my way of asking can-I-study-you and his way of asking what-I-was-doing-in-a-place-like-this.

Adil was from Damascus. He had been studying to become an accountant when he was "forced to run" and through "a friend who knew another friend" he had made it to Amman, then Beirut and after three failed attempts at making it to Germany had decided to make this west-Asian-immigrants-corner of Istanbul, home. He was a relatively new addition to the organisational fabric of the restaurant (having worked there for "only" about 17 months) but, for me, he was an integral 'broker'-node because (after repeated reassurances that I wasn't a journalist- also something that became a repeating trope in my visit to this Little Syria) he was able to introduce me to the head-chef.

[13] ***This is of course a question of language- but "not only"*** (De la Cadena, 2015). I tried doing the sitting-with-a-translator thing when I first started conducting interviews. I even made sure that the translator was a close friend so that the movement-space for languages could be as informally structured as possible to give as much room as possible for the affective. But… how do you translate silence? And gulping? And piercing-eyes and reluctance and hesitation that is tinged with a wretched need to speak. In what language do gestures speak? And what of the lifeworlds that I was accessing? Which even were these lifeworlds if I would stick only to the periphery of Syrian worlds that can be translated into English in the first place? ***And what would be the nature of this "access" if it doesn't come with any… 'real'… assimilation, or rather "immersion"*** (Schatz, 2013). ***If I could not walk away from the conversation feeling like the person I was speaking to was truly able to show me their world(ing) - how much ever they were willing to show of course - then… there was a frustrating futility to the exercise that I couldn't quite get past. I know that all (such) interaction is always mediated, distanced, and incomplete- I know that there is no 'true'/ 'whole' assimilation***. I cannot tear open people's skins and wear them as my own or read thoughts and feelings with perfect accuracy (I am still hoping that one day at least some X-Men powers – especially Prof. X's powers (Isenberg et al., 2000) – will just suddenly appear in my genetic makeup, but I can't count on that, unfortunately,) no matter how hard I, or my interlocutors, try. ***But there is still an intimacy to interactions of this intensity- an intimacy born from knowing that your world(ing), despite the imperfect, incomplete, bumpy circuitries of significations that all communication is tied to (verbal, visual or sensory), was somehow, in at least some of its most important parts if not as a whole, briefly glimpsed by someone else. I couldn't replicate/ find that with a translator.*** For me, even these moments in Istanbul which were by any metric of 'fieldwork' a failure because there wasn't anything 'concrete' I could quote or write about or prove because there just wasn't enough said… even these moments were more intimate than say the entire 4 hour long interview with Sana Yazigi (I will introduce you to her in the next episode) where Lubna (my translator) tried her best to bridge our world(ing)s.

I think coming to terms with that - and it took a while - was how I returned to one of the most dreaded questions in all qualitative work I think- that of representation. I *hated* that question. It was the worst. In my mind, it was clear- there was nothing representative about my work because I wasn't

a drinking game out of hearing "tamam" and call it a night content with being entranced by the rhythms of everyday-living but the other-parts of me (the 'miners'[14] especially) were indignant. So, I did what any self-respecting Zillennial would do- I ordered myself some more dinner, took pictures of my food, left the restaurant, and foraged through the streets for a Tech store[15].

Or maybe it was because there was an intimacy to the ecology of "little Syria"'s streets that all but demanded to be left uninterrupted. It felt 'wrong' (uncaring or indecent or something similarly shifty that I still can't seem to settle on) to intrude, to investigate, to extract. I think I was stuttering, hesitating, because the place in its entirety – in its spatial dimensions, in its temporal affects, its material anchors, its sensory slants and its linguistic and semiotic universes – felt like a 'home-hard-rebuilt'[16].

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*trying to say anything generalisable let alone remotely universal. I wasn't trying to talk to a set of people and then declare that what they thought was what all 'S'yrians thought. There wasn't even a singular Syria in my mind, in the work, let alone a singular notion of a 'Syrian' collective. Only once the *insert-profanity-of-choice* righteous-indignation-of-the-'critical'-scholar in me was chipped away by repeatedly, aggressively and aggravatingly bumping into the world, did it sink in: this was a question about "Whose".* "Whose" worldings were these that I was trying to understand/ grasp/ translate? "Whose" history of living, "whose" lived experience of war, was talking about? If it wasn't 'S'yrians, and it wasn't 's'yrians, and it wasn't Syrians whose experiences needed to be translated to me, and it wasn't the Syrians in this Little Syria - or was it - then who was a part of this thought-feel-war-is-surreal community? Whoever-felt-this-way was not a very good answer, because that meant that I had to figure out what the "name" for this way was and I was nowhere near qualified or comfortable enough for that, and if I didn't know where to look, how would I find someone from within this thought-feel-community that could give me the name for whatever it was that I was observing/ feeling? I couldn't find any existing socio-cultural taxonomical categories, practices, or methods to sort this out. And that didn't help with me hating this question. *It was only much later, when I accidentally found Medusa's-tattoo-practice again while reading Stone Blind, that it struck me- it was an 'affective' community, of sorts (something I will return to and introduce with care in Field Note: 2.*

Duh- it had been right there, all along, and I still couldn't put it together.

[14] This research as extraction bit is a subdermal splinter that we will keep brushing against over and over again I am afraid. And so, I will keep returning to talk/ think/ work through - and with - it with a bit more caution/ conscientiousness over the next few pages, and in particular in "Living through Syrialism."

[15] Remember the panicked haste with which I had run out of the restaurant (in footnote- 10)? In my brain-fog I figured before heading back to the air-bnb I could take one last shot at wandering through the streets and seeing if there was a store that sold electronics. I couldn't imagine a world where smartphones and laptops and ipads were n ot a necessity and tech like that meant international procurement routes which most likely also meant 'English' and that would mean a better shot at putting a name to all these... sense-ings/ations and observations. Or at least that was the best I could come up with in that moment.

[16]

It was a safe(-ish) haven[17]. It insisted upon not being broken into.

Or, at least that's what I took away from my conversation with Ali and Huzaifa[18].

Huzaifa owned the second-hand technological odds-and-ends store that I staggered into barely a block away from the restaurant. It was housed in a dark(ish) alley that snaked along an utterly still residential neighborhood. If it weren't for the coffeeshop and the Arabic PC-bang[19] that stood guard at

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[17] I have a strong distaste for the oppression-Olympics so I am not going to try and compare, collate or contrast precarities across different situations, positionalities and lifeworlds. ***But I would like to point out that when I talk about 'safe' here, or 'home', or 'secure', or 'strength' it is to celebrate the resilience of my interlocutors and not to imply in any shape, way or form, that these spaces and circumstances are no longer, in their own way, precarious***. Economic, linguistic, political, mobility, and gender precarities all mark this new home/ safe-'ish' haven, just differently and differentially (a turn of phrase you can use as a buoy throughout this text- I will mull over it, too, in the coming pages), than in Syria at the moment.

P.S.- At the same time, as I have emphasised in the previous footnotes, and as will become much clearer when you meet Huzaifa and Ali in a bit, there is also a sense of community, of safety, of boundary. There is a border, at least one that can be sensed even if it cannot be seen, around 'Little Syria'- and I suppose in the name(ing) itself, something I had to contend with not just in the feelings of 'breaking and entering' i.e., the embodied-ness of my research activities, but also in the embodied-ness of my own person. For instance, roaming in the streets (that could in some of the cases be described as 'dark'ish alleys), I was suddenly hyper-aware of my woman-ness. There were just… not so many performatively female persons around and those that were stuck to the main street and/or were in groups, usually with performatively male persons in the mix. The red-tip-dyed hair that I was then sporting didn't help.

[18] Their names have been changed per their request.

[19] ***'An Arabic PC-Bang'- who even knew such a thing existed? I had only heard - far too many stories - of PC Bangs, and more importantly, internet/gaming cafes that explicitly and especially self-marketed as PC Bangs and not the former, from friends who have spent significant time in Seoul. To see a business like that randomly tucked away in a predominantly West-Asian-community-resettlement space in a corner of Istanbul was, well, curious. OR, rather, it wasn't curious at all, and as a colleague rightly pointed out when they read the first draft of this chapter- my exoticisation is showing in this observation. The only thing 'curious' about it is how, despite my best efforts to unlearn this over and over and over and over (you get the point), and practice all the criticality I preach, it is still something I haven't yet fully internalised.***

(I will talk about this more in a bit here, but also later in the field-notes where I re-visit more of these characteristics of the "master's house" (Lorde, 2003) that seep into the way I engage with the world, despite my every intentionality and effort to break (from) the "master's tools," linking it to the 'extraction' of/in 'research' that I harp about every now and then until then though, let me clarify a bit more.)

This wasn't the exoticization of Orientalism (thank whatever-you-feel-like-invoking!), but it is a very specific conflict-sites-imagined-as-cut-off-from-world-trends-classist exoticisation that emulates the rest of the field-is-an-exotic-imagined-place-of-'real'-meaning (remember footnote: C?) theme.

each side of the alley, I would have missed the store entirely. After an awkward introduction and (some frankly painful) pauses, Huzaifa and Ali (who was a "dear friend" of Hazifa's and had also randomly dropped by to check-in with him just a few minutes after I waltzed in) finally felt comfortable enough to share a little of their bone-stories with me. Their newfound confidence, I think, was rooted in my (urgent and slightly panicked) repeated reassurances that I was not a journalist, "only" a PhD researcher[20].

Ali went first. He was from Erbil and had moved to Istanbul a little over a decade ago. He too worked in Fathiand owned a department store just a few blocks away. "Too much of Arab community[21]

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*I thought about removing the footnote entirely, and… hiding that I ever thought this way, but we committed to *insert-profanity-of-choice* 'fierce vulnerability' didn't we?*
**Insert-profanity-of-choice-again* social contracts.*
So, that means warts and all, I suppose, and occasionally, falling off my very high criticality-horse.

[20] I think I had mentioned earlier that this was a recurring theme that kept coming up in quite a few of the interviews- there was a distrust of the journalistic process and a sense of relief, and maybe even a relaxed opening-up, once I was able to assure the interlocutors that I was 'just' a 'PhD student'. On good days, I tend to think of this as a sign that the 'student' moniker comes with a non-threatening figuration and/or that there is a sense of safety that the knowledge, experiences and opinions that are shared with the researcher will be treated with utmost care because at the end of the day, the idea is quite simple- to understand something that, at least to those viewing, is difficult to understand and that parts of it can only be explained by those who have experienced it. On other days, I wonder if this is because there is an acknowledgement, a common-sensical understanding of sorts, that research, once it becomes research, is only very rarely, and only to a small extent, about the people themselves and much more about the information that is provided/mined/shared, about the dynamics that are explored, about phenomena and processes and not those who embody it and/or give us access to them. There is a shift in the subject(-ivity). ***Either way, the gase of the researcher itself, and how it operationalises its 'subjects' of study, is/ was somehow considered (almost) benign here, and elsewhere. I, of course, thoroughly disagree with this sentiment/thinking/schema (as you will see in Field Note: C and 7).***
So, "Curiouser and Curiouser" (Carroll, 2009).

[21]Given the context within which we were talking this was meant to be a dual signifier. It was, of course, about the community that he identified with quite strongly, and that he mentioned - just as Adil - had significantly helped him in making his home here. But it was also vibrated - at least to me - in the 'conflict-exoticisation' register?
*This^ was a wider trend thought that I noticed in my conversations with my interlocutors. **While telling me about their lived experience of the conflict, and helping me get in touch with other Syrians, at some point in the conversation, I think almost all of them, zoomed-out just one-lens-dimensions further and told me about the larger/ other communities of conflict-survivors that they interacted with on a regular basis.*** For Ali it was the "Arab community", for Omar (whom you will meet later) it was the Rohingyas, for Malu and Zahir (whom you will meet later as well), it was people from the Philippines and Indonesia and the Ukrainian communities respectively.

Figure: 70 – Photograph taken by Author in Istanbul, or rather, in the "Little Syria" neighbourhood of Istanbul in October, 2022.



It reminded me, repeatedly, that this just wasn't something I was able to unlearn- giving off the vibe that I, through/because of, my research did – at least to some degree – exoticise the *insert-profanity-of-choice* out of conflict lifeworlds, but that there was a delicate balance here that needed to be struck between creating a "figuration" (Haraway, 2004, 2016; Weber, 2016) of war – telling a war-story – where its different lifeworlds were somehow "partially connected" (Choi et al., 2019; Strathern, 2005), at least within the dimension of the 'lived experience of the martial' and ensuring that this figuration, once crafted, was not a 'stereotype' or 'dominating imaginary', or 'conventionalized/ normalized truism' – academic or otherwise – in and of itself.

you will find here", he declared, and as we huddled around the glassy cash counter (the shorter leg of the 'L' shaped arrangement of the display cases that anchored the store) he diligently explained to me the layout of the diaspora across Istanbul- Fatih is where his 'everyone' worked though they lived across three different pockets mostly on the other side of the Bosphorus (the 'Anatolian Side'). When he found out that I grew up in Chandigarh, he glowed. He began (quite fondly) remembering his 2006-family-trip to Delhi, Agra and Ranthambore. He had loved travelling, especially to India and he dearly missed those tigers- the ones he had had a chance to see up close "back when everything was different…" when his passport, his residence permits, his financial and social status were assets not "liabilities". I couldn't help grinning like there was a triangular protractor ripping my jaw open- that small instance of mutual exoticization here made the stabbing-guilt I typically felt in these situations just a tad bit softer.

And just as quickly as Ali had slipped into his core-memories-lifeworld[22], he slid right out of it and focused his attention on Huzaifa instead. Huzaifa had been standing rather guardedly behind the counter for most of this conversation. I could see the seething suspicious indecision behind his eyes. He was (or so I think[23]) measuring the situation we found ourselves in and his internal monologue that was busy with the social-calculus to-trust-enough-to-reveal-even-the-minutest-details-of-one's-live-or-not-to-trust was not so internal- his face a al-Sayed-ian[24] sculpture, each expression painfully carved and sturdily

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[22] I'm not sure if you have had a chance to see the "core memory" unlocked memes that were circulating a while back. It's a common trope in Role-Playing (Video)Games, especially those that are protagonist-driven. Essentially, at some point in the narrative arch of any such game, there is a moment where a repressed/forgotten memory central to resolving the character arch of the protagonist is "unlocked" or triggered by an encounter with another character, or an object or a place. This is of course a mangled simplification of the game mechanic and the meme culture around it, but for me, every time I see someone suddenly remember something they have long since forgotten, the meme pops into my mind.

[23] Again, I am not sure if you have been to any job application portals lately, specifically with jobs within the Dutch Government apparatus. It's a wild, wild, universe of/for job-seeking out there and one of the strangest things I encountered, or rather I watched my partner encounter (since he was the one applying for said job), was an online test where one of the exercises was that he had to match the emotion depicted in a photographic flashcard to its 'correct' name. I like to think I didn't marry a sociopath, and that I am not one myself (although it's a house with two IR doctorates so…), but we both failed that exercise, by a mile. Turns out when it comes to quantifiable emotional intelligence yours truly can be found severely lacking, so ***I would take all these observations with a giant heap of salt, please***.

[24] There is a bronze statue in Damascus – in front of the Citadel (that dates back to the 11th century) – of Sultan Saladin (of the Ayyubid dynasty) designed by the Syrian sculptor Abdallah al-Sayed. The statue is a snapshot of the Sultan, mid-galop, trotting across the city in victory while Renaud de Chatillon and Guy de Lusignan (his prisoners of war in the Battle of Hattin) stand beneath him, being dragged alongside the

solidified (in bronze). Ali stepped in, and as a form of encouragement and a show of faith, egged Huzaifa on. "Huzaifa is from Aleppo. He left in a very dramatic way."[25]

"Dramatic way"- there it was again. A perfectly opaque phrase that stood as a signifier for limpid vulnerability. I stashed it away in the margins of my notebook. It was a brick of thought I would examine later even if my fingers were twitching to turn it-over-and-over in my palms, memorising the texture of each surface and the shape of each edge.

Huzaifa – warily (or so I thought at least) – took up the space that we had created for him, nodded and carried on. He told me he had been an engineer in Aleppo until 8 years ago (2013) when his life-/-world turned "upside down" and he had to "flee in a dramatic way". The partial porous-ness of Gaziantep's borders had barely allowed him entry[26], and from there he had slowly made his way to Istanbul. Once he

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crown of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. What makes the statue quite popular, at least in the Syrian-art-world, (besides this history and that it is a convenient meet-you-there-point) is the skill that went into the carving of the bronze. The fall of the cloth, the bristle of the hair and the beard, the scabrous-ness of the chainmail and perhaps, most importantly, the details of the expressions of on each of the protagonists, makes it *quite an elegant work of art. Or so I have heard- I have only seen it in pictures. It's that detail-ing though, here etched so care-fully in muscle and tissue instead of bronze, that reminded me of the statue when I was looking at Huzaifa and scuffling with his social-calculus.*

[25] *Interview with Author, 12th of October, 2022.*

[26] *Over the past few years, I have sat with quite a few of the 'smuggled somehow over a land route' stories and each one of them has been Surreal/ Syrial. But the one that stuck with me the most was the one that Khaled (Barakeh) told me in our first session together. (I will introduce you to him and his work when I talk to you about the other Khaled - al-Assad - and the latter's beheading). **We had been discussing how sometimes the violence that you witness, experience and hear of, is so intense that you cannot do anything but laugh. And, laughing, he said, "There is another story, but that's more a funny one.** (The previous story had left us both… shaken. I will come to it when I acquaint you to Ruination in chapter: 2 of Part: 4) **That's really like 'surreal' surreal. There's three refugees… three Syrian refugees and they were going from France to England and… you know… I don't know how they smuggle themselves, but sometimes they just go through the… um… gate… and there are a lot of big cars so they just smuggle themselves in, top, (gesturing wildly with his hands), wherever they fit, where they find a spot, where they can hide, they hide. So they found this big tank like big… like… how do you call it? I think tank. So basically its um… like… so they found a hole in top of it and they climb and they got inside and what was inside was warm Nutella. So they were transporting Nutella. And they opened this big like… cover or whatever and for three days they were holding it open to keep breathing and they were drowned into chocolate (we were both laughing at this point- whether it was the horrified laughing, who knows?) No, really. Imagine like the moment they went out of this like (gesturing wildly with hands again- plucking something out of a bowl would be my best charades guess)… three refugees covered in Nutella, which***

had found his bearings here, mostly with the substantial support of the Arab-migrant/immigrant/refugee-community in 'Little Syria', he sent for his family. Now they were all here in their home-away-from-home-that-was-never-quite-home because, as he gulped and mused, even eight years since whenever someone asked him where he lived, or more specifically where/how 'home' was/ is, his instinct was to chant Aleppo. His eyes were fiercely glistening over his ever so small smile by then and the sharp inhale he took (the one that made his nose twitch) that allowed him to exhibit restraint was enough to make me well up as well and had my throat constricting. Huzaifa's pain was deeply palpable. All I could muster in response was sincere, "I am so terribly sorry. 8 years is a very, very long time to not be home."

I *hated* this encounter. I knew it wasn't nearly as simple as, "I was forcing him to talk about, and therefore re-live his trauma", but feelings do not care about clarity. And I felt ashamed and angry that I had even asked this of him in the first place, deeply grateful that he and Ali were kind enough to hitch words to their lived experiences for this encounter, and acutely embarrassed that there was a calm that had washed over me. A 'This would fit perfectly in the manuscript', swiftly followed by a, 'this is exactly why I wanted to do this, to create space for these stories' possessed me. I "shake(/shook) it (all) off"[c] (Swift, 2014), aggressively jabbed my nails into my palms, using the pain to anchor myself and run as far away from that^ line of thought as fast as I could, and lingered, talking to them for a while longer- this time about art and artists and especially calligraphy since there were quite a few calligraphers in their networks that they could get me in touch with.

I think between Huzaifa's home-bound nostalgia and our meditations on Arabic calligraphy, there was a moment of yowling quiet; between his "… left dramatically" and my "… long time", there was a 'little' (remember from footnote: 2?) moment defined by a substantial surge of affect, of meaning cloaked in intense silence. You could hear Huzaifa's pain, Ali's empathy, and my hesitation crackling. The air was tingling. I think it was charged by our inability and unwillingness to bind to mere words the realities that

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is really like if I was watching it, it will be like too much. And really like if I tell you stories it is literally like countless. *(Interview with Author, 14th of March, 2022)".*

So, the next time you look at a Nutella jar, think of them. It's sickening-ly sweet.

P.S.- I will remind you of them too, in a few pages, when we talk through partial-ly-connected-war-stories.

had been incised on Huzaifa's bones entangled with a deep desire to give due reverence to the fierce vulnerability of those few minutes.

I had encountered this roaring silence before- in other conversations, especially with other interlocutors, in other settings- support groups, conferences, interviews with artists, and therapy. It wasn't anything he had explicitly said… to be honest he hadn't really said anything, but by the time I had found my way to this 'Little Syria' I had already been in conversations where we went over the truly, devastatingly, gruesome details of (for example) either the physical machinations of the tortures some of my interlocutors had faced, or of the corporeal rhythms of their detention, escape and migration, or of other abject horrors they had witnessed and/or lived through while seeing death – real gory, bloody, putrid and petrifying, decaying-flesh-stench-ed death – and yet, somehow this silence felt like it belonged to the same register. The effect of Huzaifa's silence on both him and me was reverberating the silences I had encountered while travelling to those other 'Little Syria's. This silence, this moment of screeching silence that escapes (or rather insistently and assertively defies) any/all forms of (at the very least verbal) articulation[27], seemed/ seems, to me at least, to be the "diagram" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, 2009) that governs each of the "small worlds" (Austin, 2017a) I have encountered and explored here, in this text.

From the beginning – although if you asked me where that beginning was, I would tell you, again, it was multiple and the coordinates of each of those beginnings are as lost to me as it is to you – it felt like there was something there, in/ behind/ through/ past/ under this silence, that could be sensed even if it couldn't entirely be made sense of… at least not by me. I knew that this silence was affective. It held meaning, and shaped individuals, and governed worlds by being a floating signifier for the trauma, the injury, the hurt, the resilience, the bravery, the desperation, the frustration, the sheer audacity of

[27] I say in this extremely broad and generalised-to-the-point-of-simplification terms. Of course, there is writing out there that does in fact delve deep into the embodied-ness of these and other silences. The works of Ocean Vuong, Han Kung, Fernando Pessoa, Sylvia Plath, Elif Shafak, Natalie Haynes, Toshikazu Kawaguchi, Isabel Allende and so many others whom I actively borrow from in these pages, for instance, give quite poignant articulations for all that escapes easy capture. And then there is always poetry-birthed, an argument can be made, for just this reason.
I think, maybe, I am speaking strictly of 'our' writing: our being somewhere between non-fictional, academic, research-y, and sometimes even journalistic writing.

unassailable human will that lives through the harrowing violence of any conflict// the conflict of any violence. I knew this silence was multiple (it meant so many different things, but also somehow the same thing at once- pain, loss, grief, resilience, trauma, memory, home, body, self, fragmentation… and, also, always, 'injury'), and plural (its morphologies and textures mutated between – and within – individual lifeworlds, sometimes it was silence, sometimes a looking-away, sometimes a gulp-and-topic-change, sometimes a nail-in-palm), and deeply embodied (our bodies were communicating, they "spoke", "heard" and "knew" parts of these 'injury'-stories even when we didn't/ couldn't/ wouldn't find words/ thoughts, for these interactions). But I was woefully unqualified, unprepared, unequipped, and unready for capturing, examining, and translating this silence in any form that would do it even the slightest of justice. It was testimony – this silence – albeit of a 'different' form of a history of living through/in/with the actual, daily, machinations of 'W'ar and/or the 'M'artial and their violences- these silences were testimonies of what violence is like as a "dimension of living" (Nordstrom & Robben, 1995) and I had no way[28] of giving them the respect and care that they deserved. But I also couldn't leave them alone/ or 'give up on them' (because that's what it felt like to 'simply' move away from this to another 'subject' of 'study', one that I could, ideally, *manage* to do - abandonment). They screamed at me unrelentingly, to draw my attention, I think, to the fragmented, bumpy, wayward, durable, individually-socially-contextually grounded histories (remember from Field Notes: 2 and 4) of the lived experiences of war.

(Nordstrom & Robben, 1995)(Nordstrom & Robben, 1995)[28] ***Or rather, as I have mentioned before, but would like to re-stress, all I mean to say is that 'I' didn't have any other way, not that there weren't ways to treat these 'testimonies' with the care they deserved and needed. There is brilliant ethnographic work that is, indeed, able to pull this off with brilliance and grace, this being the "Getting People to Say the Unsayable."*** (Austin, 2019b). Take Nordstrom's work itself, for instance, from whom I borrow the very idea of violence as a "dimension of living" (Nordstrom & Robben, 1995) and/or the work of Scary whose "unmaking" (Scarry, 1987) is central to my understanding of both violence and Syrialism. Or that of Mol and Strathern whose 'multiplicity' (Mol, 2003) and 'partial connections' (Strathern, 2005), respectively, make up two of the six or seven concepts that pretty much hold most of this text together. Or of the feminist scholarship from which this dissertation draws its lifeblood. Haraway (2004), Sylvester (2012, 2013b, 2013a), Zalewski (2013), Ahmed (1999, 2004, 2014, 2021), Stoler (2008)- theirs are works that this dissertation, tries anyway, to stand in strong solidarity with. But though I borrow from, build upon, and work through/from/ within these works, and hope to someday be able to write with the same integrity, respect, and compassion, I do not yet feel qualified (having no training in ethnographic methods) or capable (having yet to internalise, better, feminist methodologies) to do the same.

I *had to* listen to them. But I couldn't quite tap into their frequency, definitely not (care-)fully.

I knew, though, that in other[29] 'Little Syrias' where other, different, syrians resided there were other, different, modes/ mediums/ methods of expression- syrians like Omar, Ayham, Khaled, Sulafa, Malu and Zaheer. There were others out there somewhere who were differently engaging with these silences. They were diving/slamming/crashing right into them, creating encounters vastly(?) different from ours, by undeviatingly investigating the contours of their own silences, experimenting with different ways of expressing, of de-/re-/coding their own violent/violence-lived-experiences and (re/)creating avenues to translate these silences, the histories that inhabit them, and the experiences they represent into different forms of experience-based knowledge-ish. These syrians, in these 'Little Syrias', were actively curating their own histories of living with and through martial violences and in that process, staking their own claims towards (re)assembling, or rather, (re)figuring the living archives of the on-going Syrian revolution. Until I learnt – hopefully from these syrians[30] – how to overcome at least some of that

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(Segato, 2010, 2016; Segato & McGlazer, 2018)(Segato, 2010, 2016; Segato & McGlazer, 2018)[29] I have a deep hatred for that word. It's not dislike, or distaste. I don't detest it, I don' disapprove of it, I just despise it. ***The language trees that are currently rooted in this word make it, I think, one of the most dangerous words in the English language because it can no longer be confined to a measure of alterity***. I doubt that it ever was, but this is definitively the case in our contemporary worldings. ****This* alterity, *this* 'other'-ing, our 'other', is "cruel"*** (Segato, 2010, 2016; Segato & McGlazer, 2018). Within the registers of us-them, 'normal'-deviant-abnormal, desirable-despicable, 'native'-ity-alieness, 'other' has rapidly reproduced – and continues to do – socio-political universes where practices (that enact the violences) of othering (with an almost zealous determination) have become an integral part of the "pedagogy of cruelty" (ibid) – a cruelty that is so widely, repetitively and habitually practiced that it has become wholly/holily normalised and produced an affective politics of lowered 'levels of empathy' (ibid).

[30] Again, vocabularies of collectivity and of distinction are (almost) offensive within the multiverse of this dissertation, but in some ways, every now and then that runs against the grain of its non-representational (Vannini, 2015) *texture. I suppose its only fair that when talking of things, ideas, practices, and worlds, that are coherent but not cohesive, that are multiple* (Mol, 2003), *that the theoretics of this text echo that as well. **How do I put into strict-ish classifications that the 'syrians' here are supposed to be (1) not all 'S'yrians, (2) not the syrians from the first Little Syria, (3) not all syrians from even the other two Little Syrias, (4) not even all syrians that did give names to these silences, and dove head first, as I have said here, into the exploration of their own embodied experience of the violences of the revolution, (5) but rather, just the few syrians, and their worldings, within this larger field of self-declaration that I could somehow manage to get access to- online, in person or somewhere in between**. Their words, ideas, theories and experiences in no way, shape or form represent the experiences of all 'S'yrians, nor those of groups 2,3 and 4. **They do not even "represent" the experiences of each other, in both the affective renditions of that word: these 'syrians' do not speak on behalf of (even) each other (let alone all 'Syrians) and their experiences do not amount to a reflection/ portrayal of the experiences of all***

hesitation, that blockage, that frustration, that me, Ali, Huzaifa, and so many of my other interlocutors were feeling, so I could tackle the translation of these silences myself, I could depend – and perhaps rightly so – on those that could do the work of naming these silences, and the experiences they hold, themselves, i.e., on those that could aesthetically self-declare war-know-ings from within their war-experiences[31].

This silence then – that I saw as a 'measure' of the complexity of the lived experience of violence – has been the anchor that I have lowered, held and followed. And a deep 'desire' to sense it and make it sensible, to give it a name, has been my Polaris.

It is what took me to the three 'Little Syrias'. It is how I reached Syrialism.

'S'yrians.
These 'syrians' - Omar, Ayham, Khaled, Sulafa, Malu and Zaheer and others whose words are the stimulus and sustenance of this text - 'simply' are the group/ community/ social-section that gave me access to their violence/ violent lifeworlds and across whose lifeworlds that is an 'echo', a 'repetition, a 'refrain' in the description - not explanation - of what the lived experience of violence is sensed and made sensible, to them and through them to me. *The social demographics of this group, the distribution of the privileges and disadvantages across it, and therefore their positionalities make it so that there is no easy way to create boundaries around this 'group' at least within the constructs of socio-political identity (i.e., because of the socio-political makeup of the group itself I cannot say the group constitutes Syrians, from X city, within Y age group, of Z gender, and explores their embodied experience of violence across A, B and C dimension. That is exactly the kind of research I found myself unqualified to perform for all the reasons I have mentioned previously and will detail again in the pages to come).*

So, I stick to 's'yrians with that small 's' and find unsatisfactory solace in knowing that this group can best be described as an ***'affective' community*** *(remember footnote: 1c and Field Note: 2?) and that, at least to me, almost necessarily means that its margins will bleed transversally across the classifications of our socio-political mappings. Or rather, that it (this group) can best be described, first and foremost, as a "small world"* (Austin, 2017a) ***onto itself that, then, has certain affective registers to it (and these registers form "line of flights"*** (Deleuze & Guattari, 2009) ***connecting it - sometimes durably, sometimes bumpily, always partially - to other small worlds).***

[31] The "subject of study" here, therefore, (as we saw in Theoretical Note: 2 and I will quickly reiterate here) is the ***artwork itself, the artist, the experience of making that art, and the experience of the violence that is depicted in that art- all of it. It's the lived experience of 'violence', of how it sensed by injured bodies and how they make sense of it themselves.*** And it is the sensing and the sensemaking, simultaneously, because the 'affect' of these aesthetic works is a 'constant becoming', it is the interaction effect between the art-artist-viewer-expereince-audience-material-medium-mediation, i.e. to put it in brutal/ unflattering simplicity, the affect is the product of all and the sensing and sensemaking of the artists, viewers, writer (me), and readers (you) at once.
Everything, Everywhere All at Once (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022), again.

It brought me to Syrvival.

And it is still tugging at me, keeping me bobbing, today.

Figures: 71 and 72: the Syria Mobile Film Festival (2014 – 2017)
(Omareen, Zaher. The Syria Mobile Film Festival. Photographs. Print: Syria Speaks. 2014)



Syria مهرجان سوريا
Mobile Film لـأفـلام
Festival الـمـوبـايـل



The second 'Little Syria' was very hard to find. As well[32].

I can't narrow them down to an 'E'ncounter like I could, in some ways, with both the first 'Little Syira' (with Istanbul) and the third 'Little Syria' with Omar. There was no singular moment of absolute non-recognition that fundamentally re-changed/ shelled me into critically re-imagining the way I was thinking and/or, feeling about the lived experience of violence in the context of the Revolution. But there were many 'e'ncounters in that there were many moments of partial non-recognition that kept coaxing me to incrementally re-change/ marginally re-imagine the way I was thinking and/or feeling about it all, not individually necessarily, but in unison. I suppose I am saying that I 'encountered' the first and third 'Little Syria's with/in moments that, to me, could be made-sense-of as an aria (even if they were sensed as plural), while I made-sense-of the second 'Little Syria' as/through an orchestra of moments instead (even though it was sensed as multiple-ly (Mol, 2003) singular). And so, there is really no way for me to make a neat little linearly-flowing-fable-y narrative to think through – and make sensible to you, as well – its spatial morphologies.

This little Syria is like a/the map of/from the "Invisible Cities" of Italo Calvino (Calvino, 1978) and I will come back to that in Field Note: 1. First, let's meet Archer.

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[32] *Have you ever tried trawling peppercorns out of a bathtub? Try. I will wait.*
*It doesn't *have to* be a bathtub- it can also be a saucepan, or a kettle, or a fishbowl-y flowerpot- just anything that allows for depth, water-density, proportionality (water: pepper :: 80: 20) and current. Spring a few peppercorns into the mix (a few brawny wobbling heads, like 15 or so- this isn't an exact science), and leave the lukewarm-ish water undisturbed for a bit (a few good minutes, say 3 or so, again, it's not an exact science),*
and watch as the peppercorns perch at the bottom and nest.
Now, try. Go fish.
If your experience is anything like mine, no matter how madly you claw at the water, the peppercorns will more maddeningly keep evading your preying/prying hands. They will slip through your fingers, bob away from the 'cup' of your palms and slither away on any ripples you create if you break the surface (into the water or out of it) too fast. And if somehow you manage to keep your hands perfectly steady, and find a movement-pace where the currents of/from water displacement don't immediately add to the buoyancy of the kernels, you will still have to do these in small random(ised) batches, because trying to catch them all at once will only make them protest.
My encounters with the second 'Little Syria' are like these peppercorns.

You will remember from my encounter with the 'first little syria' that I was left feeling… a little lost, incomplete, 'small' (in ability and being), humbled [33], but determined that what I was looking for – a 'name' for this silence that seemed to shadow conversations about living in and through 'war' like Death[34] itself, a 'name' for this affective diagram that was participating in the becoming of both, the embodied experience of this revolution itself and the "history of living through it" [35], a 'name' I could not find, give or create – was as Mary Poppins would say was "… (not) lost forever only out of place" (Marshall et al., 2018). I knew or hoped (it was the marrow-of-our-bones-know-it-before-our-minds-do kind of knowing, so both?), that I would encounter it with 'those' syrians (the 'those' from pages and footnote: 28) that could/would do – and were already doing – 'the (concept?)work of naming these silences, and the experiences they hold, themselves.'

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[33] and rightly so- I think it takes a certain kind of hubris to 'begin' work like this I always think because you go into it assuming not just that your interlocutors would want to talk about whatever it is that you wish to ask them of/about/for, but also that you can just waltz into someone's life and world and actually be able to get them to talk to you, understand what they have to say, and translate it into some kind of 'knowledge'. Imagine if you did that to a random person at a bar, or someone you were just getting to know in your 'daily' life- there would be no second conversation because mostly, that is not how humans function (I have been told). Like I have said, elsewhere, and will repeat across different 'habits', sometimes being a researcher made me forget I was also a person.

[34] I am not a superstitious person per se, or rather, I am superstitious in the same way as most qualitatively inclined scholars are- at some point or the other, you begin to feel like the process you are stalking is just 'not meant to be' stalked. I was beginning to think the silence - like this Death - would 'inevitably' find me no matter how fast or far I went to outrun it.

This is the Death emerging from the parable of the 'Appointment in Samarra'-

an ancient Mesopotamian folktale about a merchant's servant, who upon encountering Death in the bazaar of Baghdad, panicked thinking that Death was 'looking' at him menacingly and borrowed the merchant's horse to flee about 120 kms north to Samarra, hoping to outrun her (Death). When the merchant arrives at the bazaar hoping to interrogate Death about these 'threatening gestures', Death clarifies that she wasn't being menacing/ threatening- she was simply startled and surprised.

"I was astonished to see him in Baghdad, for I have an appointment with him tonight, in Samarra."

(Maugham & Kennedy, 1989; O'hara, 2013)

And that's how the parable inevitably ends, with the inevitability of Death.

[35]Because at that time, I didn't quite have the words - not that I do now, but others, (thank you, Bleiker, Donatella, Calvino et. al.) did - to explain that there really was ***no 'actual' boundary between the two***: the making of this 'history'/ war-story, ***the aesthetics of it, were as much a dimension of this embodied experience as the materiality, the processuality, the multiplicity, the plurality, the corporality and the affective at least for the Syrians we are encountering in this manuscript. These 'aesthetics' are both a part of the collage of this embodied experience, and the 'language' into which the collage was being translated, so it could be sensed and made sensible by the inhabitants of the second and third little Syrias, just as its affect (hopefully) will become how we sense and make sensible of its 'story' once Syrialism is through with us.***

Portals remember (from theoretical note: 3 and field note: 4)?

So, I went back to Archer. I had met Archer only a few months after I started my Masters at IHEID, in late 2017 when an old classmate of mine, who let's just say lives pretty much exclusively on the 'dark-side-of-the-'social media'-moon', sent me a link to one of his videos. And watching it was, I would say a revelation, but that's too clerical and visual) an *encounter*.

Archer opened for me a world where a Polish (foreign) fighter, volunteering with the Quwwāt Sūriyā al-Dīmuqrāṭīya[36] as a sniper, fighting (primarily) against ad-*Dawlah al-Islāmiyah fī 'l-ʿIrāq wa-sh-Shām*[37] and the TFSA[38] declares himself a film-maker. He shares with us – you, me, anyone who is watching, really – the experience of producing (with both its connotations: enacting it and filming it) violence in very minute detail, going over his daily routine, his choice of 'equipment', the strategic principles of tracking down locations, the psychological terrain of boredom, anxiety, adrenaline, of "going crazy", the fatigue and the fog of such enactments, the censorship he dances within an attempt to tell this story and most importantly, he allows us to see, quite literally, the act of shooting (with both its connotations) – all while listening to Avril Lavigne[39].

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[36] Translation- Syrian Democratic Forces (SFD): an 'alliance' of Kurdish, Assyrian/ Syriac, Armenian, Turkmen and Chechen militias.

[37] Translation- DAESH: Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (DAESH from here on).

[38] Translation- Turkey- backed Free Syrian Army/(officially) Syrian National Army.

[39] ***A story narrated by a perpetrator is by no means a novel genre.*** Arendt (Arendt & Kroh, 1964), Hatzfeld (Hatzfeld, 2005), Oppenheimer (Oppenheimer, 2015), Moreh (Moreh, 2015), Berlinger (Nabokov, 1970), Nabokov, Ellis (Harron et al., 1998), Morrison (Morrison, 2004), Austin (Austin, 2016, 2017b, 2017a, 2019b, 2020) and many others create a space where we, the/any audience, are brought to the actual scene of 'perpetration' of a sort of violent instantiation, ***to the actual "doing" of the violence.***
I think these stories - from on-Syria or not - all demand that we see the "figuration" of the/a 'perpetration' as 'surreal' (and not just because I think everything is surreal, which I do, but because I have been advised not to say because it 'dilutes' the argument rhetorically?) ***This is to say, that working with/ through their work we can see - or at least I do - that an act of perpetration 'emerges' through the productive juxtaposition(s) of various actors (human, technological and otherwise), materialities, spatialities, temporalities (therefore is an assemblage), is a profoundly embodied experience that has multiple resonances and a plurality of registers it resonates within,*** *and, here I am 'just' riffing based on what I have experienced of Syriality,* ***finds itself partially-connected, through different repetitive refrains to other acts of perpetration within its own "small world"*** (Austin, 2017a) ***and to the violent "small world".***
I am flagging this with you here on two accounts- both being 'foundational assumptions' for/of this text: First off, I think these stories are among the most important ones when it comes to studying violence. No ifs, no buts, no caveats, no hesitations. **They share a desire to bring us to the 'scene of the crime' as it were and there is merit to being able to stand feet-planted in the gore and guts (if one desires to) to sense and make sense of said 'crime'/ 'violence'.**

*(P.S. - I am not saying it's desirable to do so and spend quite a bit of time talking through the gut-punching maiming of these moments of inquiry/ encounter and through strongly encouraging anyone else *not* to follow suit, especially in Field Note: c and 7, but the merit… the *insert-profanity-of-choice* merit still stands. As a friend of mine - who is by far one of the most inspirational humans I have ever had the privilege of knowing - said recently, on finding out about my desire to head off to Kabul, "…you should still do it, and I get it I did it, but I want you going in knowing very clearly what the cost is, and really thinking it through if you are willing to pay it.")*

And this desire to bringing-us-to-the-act-of-violence-itself extends well beyond this genre as well. For example, tthrough his analysis of Tomas Munita's photograph 'A U.S. Soldier Mounts Guard', Shapiro shows us how "photographic and cinematic technology bring remote battle venues into view. As a result, danger that 'eludes everyday sensory perception becomes socially available as a cinematic structure'. (Feldman, 2005: 205)" (Shapiro 2007). ***There is a connotation of experiential intimacy there/here- like if we can fracture the proximity between ourselves and the act itself - even if it is mediated 'through the eyes of' the perpetrator, or even witness/ 'victim' and the medium of this mediation itself movie, book, oral testimony, socialmedia - then we will be able to some 'sense' more 'something': more 'truth', more 'reality', more 'mechanics' and 'mechanisms', more 'processes' (depending on your ethico-onto-epistemology)… but just, 'more'. There is an assumption of an 'inner world' that this experience can give us access to (regardless of its true-biased, representational-nonrepresentational, intimate-alienating, grounded-generalizable statuses all being up for debate).***

And I buy into this 'assumption' quite strongly. I do think that this 'over-the-shoulder'-esque approach to encountering the realities of violence/ violent realities, gives us an almost unique opportunity to "map" the landscape of the lived experiences through which it is sensed and made sensible, of the daily machinations of the performances that are generative of these violence/violent becomings, of the heterogeneity of the lifeworlds that these violent/violence iterations inhabit and reproduce and of the sheer dynamism of interconnected moving and wandering 'parts' that find themselves entangled to bring about any of these violent/violence processes.

Second, ***any given 'act'/ 'event'/ 'iteration'/ 'instantiation'/ 'practice' of any violence, here, in this manuscript is *always* without any exception compositionally an "assemblage" and metaphysically a "process".***

**Insert-profanity-of-choice* the hell(fire) do I mean by that? Glad you asked.*

*(JK. I know you are sick of it, but it will all make sense once you meet Ruination later in the text, I promise). Just, look out for Theoretical Note: 5 and I will walk us through what I mean by this^ *coughs loudly* 'insanity' *cough* I mean concept-work, of course.*

"Don't judge people by their playlists :)

For days we couldn't establish a proper sniper position in Raqqa due to the fact that most of the buildings we were taking were 1/2 floors high and not giving proper city coverage. There were roofs but the position there was too exposed to those goddamned ISIS drones carrying grenades under them. This is the first building to make establishing a sniper's nest possible. My choice for the day was a M93 "Black Arrow" high calibre rifle with APC and explosive round with it. As some people will notice the scope mounted on it doesn't have the shock-resistant characteristics required for that rifle, but ***you gotta work with what you have****. I arrived at the destination around 5:30 AM and took a quick look around, then brought the gear to the firing position I used the day before. Set the scope to the place the targets (VBIEDS) will most likely be coming from (beginning of the main road) distance shown on the rangefinder was 1255 meters and 1315 on the high apartment building where possible ISIS sniper positions would be (listens to Wardruna's Helvegen). Then for hours there would be nothing except the balcony door opening to the side on the 3rd floor. I fired an APC through the building's wall.* ***No idea if I got something, but the door never opened again... Then I would fire at possible sniper positions, holes in walls made in buildings in front of me.*** *Then again,* ***I would be going crazy from staring through the wall for 9h straight****. Then, around 4 30 PM, things would get interesting (listens to Girlfriend by Avril Lavigne, reminding me(s) of Pyro's character introduction video[B.4.1] released by Valve, Team Fortress: 2) DAESH started an assault on our position, providing covering fire for car bombs they were sending towards us. As you can see in the video* ***I encountered bolt and stock problem at the worst possible moment (Yes I should'vd had a round in a chamber and yes I should've fire without the stock).*** *When I finally got it right, I couldn't get a clear shot, so I tried two different positions. But still no good. The car passed our building and I was waiting for the next one to come. Sometimes they come in pairs. Then you can see me looking from the window at the explosion caused by the car that we let pass. 9 Kurdish fighters died there... ISIS kept attacking our building and my position was compromised as shown on the video, we were most likely hit by an RPG. (Not on the video) Then they sent another car that Kurds managed to stop using RPGs and machine guns. After 5 min of the car being stuck on the tree in the middle of the main road,* ***American artillery or airstrike finished the job by hitting it directly with dead-on precision and causing the explosives to detonate.*** *After that, it was already around 7 PM when Daesh attacked our position again. At that time, I was out of bullets for the sniper rifle (very hard to get by) so there was time to switch to AK. You might notice that I'm making a mistake of not putting my plate carrier or any other gear on, but* ***after 12 hours of staring through the hole, you just don't think straight anymore or to be honest, care. I couldn't see my enemy, 99% of the time we don't.*** *So, we kept shooting at the most likely positions they would be, and again these are the shooting holes made in homes in front of us. I used the same tactics in the battle of Tabqa you might criticise this,* ***but it really only thing you can do.*** *If you stop covering the battlefield with fire, they immediately send the suicide bombers towards you. And you dont.want.that. Last footage is taken around 8 30 PM when Daesh fighters withdrew to the high apartment building shown there. Kurds called an artillery on them, which were pouding them for good 30 minutes. Those buildings are not there anymore.*

The video is a big cut due to opsec and fact that I cannot make some things public."

- *Archer, Gniew Eufratu, Sniper's day in battle of Raqqa - Syria Combat Footage*

This^ was the caption that accompanied the video Archer had uploaded to his person YouTube account- a caption that allowed us to, quite literally, watch/ hear his lived experience of being a sniper in Raqqa for the day, from over his shoulder. And stories like Archer were everywhere. In fact, stories like Archer from/of/in/through on-Syria is I had come to know 'S'yria to begin with[40]*, and I can with some confidence say that was true for most of us. Think back here, for instance, to the Lens Young project I introduced you to in the Prologue.*

"Stories like that of Archer or Lens Young"- I am thinking here of stories of the martial, i.e., stories of/about physical violence enacted in a conflict setting, that have, I think, especially recently, exploded into global public view with unprecedented velocity, with/through their entanglement with participatory networked technologies. And Syria, was, I think, the first conflict whose histories of living found their on-life in this social-meidial-ly constructed reality. And though, as I mentioned earlier, we have seen similar 'footage', and similar digital content, come in from Yemen, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Mexico, Kashmir, South Sudan, Afghanistan and so on- all content that has gone 'viral' in its capacity as user- generated digital content posted (inter alia) on Facebook, YouTube, Reddit, and Twitter, still I think within this universe of user-generated content pertaining to war-time violence, the Syrian case is particularly interesting and not 'just' because of its novelty. ***It is also due, first, I think, to the sheer***

[40] Well, this 'Syria' anyway- the one it is right now, post-March 2011.
But my first encounters with it were very different. I knew a little of and/or about Palmyra through history books that spoke of fantastic(al) ancient cities, and of Damascus and Aleppo through the accounts left behind by the merchants of Baghdad and Quaidabad – my primary interest at that time (many, many years or rather lifetimes ago) spawned by Tagore's Kabuliwala. And until the March of 2011, that was more or less the extent of it.
It was then that I, and I am assuming quite a few of us, started our first intimate encounter with Syria- or at least the Syria that existed on(off/)line. I remember the first images that went viral- I am thinking here, particularly of the photographs that came from Dara – the graffiti (that you saw in the first few pages of this manuscript), the protestors and the tanks in the streets. These were images of bravery and repression, of anguish and valour, of indifference and passion, of cruelty and selflessness- of the promise and cost of a/the revolution, the promise and cost of the 'Arab Spring'. And then in the blink of an eye – "gradually and then suddenly" (Hemingway, 2014)– or rather "slowly, and then all at once" (Green, 2014), (from footnote: 13) – **online Syria morphed into a cadavre exquis, an exquisite corpse (Zalewski 2013), of competing and/or complimenting realities, infinitely mutating and reproducing the conflict, while also being reproduced by it – an endless sprawling circuitry of violent realities// the realities of violence being churned out through social media (as we saw in the Prologue, Theoretical Note. 1 and Field Note: 4).**

'amount of content' generated and circulated every day in/from/about Syria. *The Assad-government, the Free Syrian Army, People's Defense Units (YPG), DAESH and others - all belligerent parties to the conflict have their own YouTube channels, Instagram[41] accounts and/or WhatsApp groups. Then there are individuals who are participating in combat and affiliated with different groups, civilians who are trying to record the atrocities they are facing, pro-'X'beligerant-party supporters that are not necessarily involved in active combat but record different violent/ violence moments as a show of support, all posting across both, personal and community-based handles. And we have already seen the work that projects like The*

[41] In fact, in the 'early' days of trying to perform this digital ethnography, when I still hadn't figured out that it would effectively involve 'stalking' said accounts digitally, ***I had made rookie mistake of following the Syrian Presidency Instagram account from your own personal IG handle. And within the next 12 hours, I was being followed back by three different pro-government propaganda accounts: the 'syrian_republican_guard', the no longer active 'syrian_presidency' (which is now Syrian Presidency- they shifted PR firms in the middle which is a whole different glorious portal I strongly encourage you to head down- I will just quietly leave a name here and walk away: Brown Lloyd James), and the also now non-existent 'asma.al.assad.'*** (fan-page for the President's wife that had me paranoidly snickering and building conspiracy theories when news of her 'cancer' broke in late 2018- which, as it turns out, turned out to be a good dinner-anecdote for meeting Donatella.)

I think I remember that conversation fondly because with conducting research guided by ethnographic sensibilities, that demands emersion and care, at least for me, there are very few moments that you can feel reassured in your 'tapping into-s' and 'translations'- there is always a doubt that roots further and further into your flesh the more you know of a world, because coming to terms with its own vocabularies, figurations, symbologies, practices, metaphysics-es of 'living' means you *know* that your best attempts at translation will still inevitably fall short. And of course, it's a worthwhile effort despite all the limitations and drawbacks, but that fear of inflicting violence on those you have begun to deeply care about and for, on those in whose language you are now learning to dream, think, and feel is quite overwhelming. For the most part, I am grateful for it, because as violent as it is as a disciplining mechanism it keeps us, as researchers, I think – or at least it did me, in check of never losing sight of the "not only"s, the multiplicities, that build the events/ narratives/ processes/ figurations that we are trying to translate. But nonetheless, every now and then, it is good to have a 'reality-check' of sorts to know the extent of your 'emersion'- to know how far along you have come into being able to live within/through the lifeworlds of those you are trying to 'study'.

Having the narrative interviews with the artists, seeing in their eyes that moment of gulpy-heart-turning-pained-relief when someone is able to see you, really see you, completely naked (in the being-sense), and being able to communicate to them that their work made me feel the exact same way... those were these 'ethnographic' monitor-and-evaluation-y checkpoint moments for me.

As was, surprisingly, the conversation that this dinner anecdote prompted where Donatella, one of the most brilliant scholars on Syria, was laughingly telling me that my conspiracy theories were actually a shared sentiment with quite a few of her resistance-Syrian-television-and-film-arts peers. It was my moment of, 'you know you are beginning to speak a language kind of fluently enough when you can dream/think in it', emersion = at least, momentarily, check.

Syrian Archive and the Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution have put in to making this content sense-able and sense-ible (from the Prologue remember?).

Second, there is the matter of pitch, I think. I am generalizing here, and apologise for it, this is meant as an instinctive first-sense observation, not a fully baked argument but from what I have seen/ found/ heard of most of the content coming from not-Syria, isn't as intensely Roshomon Effect-ed/-y as the content coming from within/through Syria. ***This is a distinction of volume (the texture of the 'amount' I spoke of earlier) I think- the sound, the noise, and the sheer number of voices, around/about any given event seems to be quite drastically intense in the Syrian case comparatively speaking, when it comes to the 'martial' of course, or rather, to stories like Archers***[42]*. And of course, here too, as with everything else, all digital content is equal, but some content is more equal than others!*

What I mean is that, roughly speaking, I think, based on the aesthetic lexicons of this content – its visual, verbal and affective cadences – and their desires, we can see that there are three thematic substrates along which this content sprouts: (i) content produced and uploaded by individual users whether they are affiliated and embedded within a group/ community or not and/or whether they are actively perpetrating, witnessing or becoming victim to martial violence, (ii) content produced and uploaded by groups/ communities whether violently or non-violently participating in the martial landscape of Syria and/or regardless of where they fall on the belligerent- civil society- civilian spectrum in the revolution, and (iii) content that is regenerated, remixed, recirculated, and shared across every conceivable platform. ***But despite this rich diversity in theme, form, framing, medium, application, circulation patterns and practices, semiotics, extent of audience engagement (because content and the medium on which the content are circulated as not distinct but co-dependent actants), there is a refrain that cuts across these aesthetic***

[42] ***I would like to flag that, I think, this is no longer the case.*** Between writing and editing, our worlds have somehow managed to burn evermore. (Remember what I said about Hellfire in the dedication?) As much as it pains me to write about these events in terms of 'cases', it is a caveat that I must declare- we have seen this pattern of intense volume from the abjectly cruel Russian invasion of Ukraine and the absolutely horrifying events that are unfolding in the Occupied Palestinian Territories at the moment, where Israel's brutal occupation of Palestine's land, history, people, culture and being, has taken the shape of an all-out attempt at genocide. I know those are 'big' statements for 'academic' products. I stand by them. And having been volunteering with the Child Helpline International for their outpost in the Gaza, and having to run through the transcripts of the calls we receive for the better half of almost 8 months now, I do not know how we can conceive of any other position. Multiplicity, here, be damned.

lexicons: the desire of this content – despite/beyond/regardless/ "with deliberate disregard for" its shape, form, meanings and medium – is to capture and broadcast the intimate lived experience of war at its most local, corporeal, and experiential level… is to bring us 'to the scene of the crime'. It, then, stands as digitally codified testimony of the millions of people who are currently surviving this revolution – a 'history of living' through/within it – produced by these people themselves (again, non-representationally), as we have seen discussed in the first few pages of this text.

This was especially true, as far as I am concerned, when it came to the 'citizen-journalists' and artist-activists that we spoke of in Prologue, and in particular to the sahafiyat this section of the dissertation is dedicated to. Take Ruqia Hasan's Facebook page for example, and Zahra Hankir's encounter with it.



"When I first visited Ruqia Hasan's Facebook page, in 2014, I was struck by her profile photo. ***The Syrian woman had paired a black hijab with a figure-hugging top that was embroidered with gold sequins. Her eyebrows were impeccably groomed, and bronzer contoured her cheekbones.*** *It was a daring look, considering she lived in Raqqa—the northern Syrian city that was, at that time, controlled by the most brutal Islamist group in the world. Most striking, though, was* ***the defiant expression on Ruqia's face, a defiance reflected in each one of her Facebook posts.*** *Everything about the petite woman screamed: "I am here and I will not be silenced."*

Ruqia was a sahafiya—a woman journalist—who secretly reported on the crimes of ISIS from inside Raqqa. *But she was no ordinary reporter, at least by mainstream media standards.* ***The thirty-year-old of Kurdish descent* wasn't employed by a major news outlet. She never had a byline or a dateline and was never trained to cover warfare. She hadn't conducted any interviews, and she certainly wasn't impartial:*** *she'd participated in antigovernment protests and openly criticized Syrian president Bashar al-Assad.*

Online, Ruqia was fearless, even though vocal opponents of ISIS were often swiftly executed. ***The citizen sahafiya wrote in chilling detail under a pen name, Nissan Ibrahim, about the atrocities the group was waging on the people of Raqqa****. She shared her reports on Facebook, sometimes posting several times a day. As Ruqia amassed a large social media following, her friends advised her to take down the photos of herself that were viewable to the public to protect her identity, but she refused.*

A philosophy graduate of the University of Aleppo, Ruqia was known for the personal, poetic, and somber tone of her social media posts, which were always written in Arabic. ***She wavered between reporting what she'd witnessed and writing about how she felt.*** *In December 2014, less than a year after ISIS declared Raqqa the capital of its caliphate, she posted the following:* ***"In Syria, life and dignity have become two parallel lines that never meet."***

Ruqia mostly referred to ISIS as Daesh, an acronym for al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham (the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria), which has reportedly drawn the ire of some ISIS commanders as it strips the terror group's label of its reference to Islam."Daesh has closed all internet cafés in the countryside, and most likely in the city, too," the citizen sahafiya wrote in June 2015. "Without the internet, we will lose our only way of communicating. Dear God: Emigration is a loss of dignity and a form of humiliation, while staying here is hell. Dear God: Where should we go?"

What Ruqia presented in her harrowing posts was an authentic account of the events unraveling on the ground in Raqqa. *Those accounts came at a time when few Westerners could report from within Syria, but they nonetheless commanded the international journalistic narrative on the country from afar.*

One of Ruqia's final posts on Facebook was also her most unsettling. ***"I'm in Raqqa, and I've received death threats," she wrote on July 20, 2015. "When ISIS soldiers arrest me and kill me, it will be okay, because while they will cut off my head, I'll still have dignity, which is better than living in humiliation."***

Shortly after that post, Ruqia was abducted by ISIS and never heard from again. In January 2016, her brother received confirmation from the terror group that she had been murdered along with five other women. At the time of this writing, Ruqia's body had not been returned to her family."

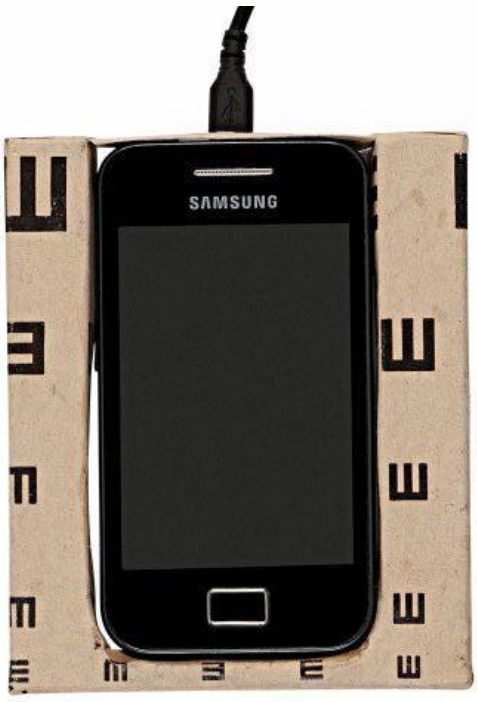


*And third, then – and for us, I think, most importantly – there was the matter of intent/ desire: of what this content "wanted" (from Theoretical Note: 1), what Ruqia, Archer, the photographer behind Lens Young, the artists whose works we have seen so far and will see over the next few pages, what do these injured bodies – who at the very real cost and risk of further injury, and literal death, were filming, recording, archiving, publishing, circulating, detailed records of their everyday lived experiences of the martial – and the works/ posts themselves want? What did they want, what do they want to tell us, what could we do about/ with what they tell us? How do we do justice to the intimacy these posts create, to the war-stories that are embedded in this content? True, this is not the first we are seeing of victim/ perpetrator/ reporter/ academic/ artists testimony of 'war' and its injuries- but this is our first encounter with sensing this testimony in *this way*, and more importantly, as with Ruqia (who in Hankir's words "was no ordinary reporter"), with the potentiality, possibility, and actuality that anyone – any of us, you, me, anyone – could be a suhafiya, a historian, a chronicler, could make a self-portrait through such digital content of a 'living' through any socio-political realities really, and what would it mean, in practical terms for those of us so inclined (as social scientists and empirical philosophers) to take this 'testimony' of 'living through' seriously, to see it, for instance in this case,* ***as a translation of war-experience into war-knowing, deeply rooted in the ability and performativity of self-declaration of injured bodies vis-à-vis their own injuries, and to translate from there – from within this translation – so we could generate war-knowledge.***



Figure: 73 – Art Installation, titled, "Syria Pixels" by Zaher Omareen, whom you will meet on in the coming chapters. *(Omareen, Zaher. Syria Pixels. Art Installation. Print: Syria Speaks. 2014)*

"'Syria Pixels' is an installation of 35 "mobile video" canvases created and designed by Zaher Omareen. ***Each canvas contains an embedded mobile device that hides a gem: a one-minute video filmed with a mobile camera by a Syrian film-maker.*** *Each video features a short visual story, a different mood which Zaher has interpreted and reflected through his artwork on the canvas. The videos function both as standalone works and as a collective video voice of Syria.* ***Mobile video devices have been the quintessential form of artistic expression coming out of Syria in the past years; they stand for hundred thousands of eyes and hands of Syrians who have endlessly filmed and documented what is happening in the country.*** *Each frame of "Syria Pixels" is a living tribute to a generation that has found freedom in the frantic gaze of their mobile devices, if not yet in their daily lives."*- (Benetton & Imago Mundi, 2016). Under each cellphone Zaher had placed a caption such as: "Amir Fakhreddine - Syrian Sleep (2015). Or, Yasmin Fedda - Abo Hawash (2015)," and so on, so the viewer would know *whose one-minute war-story they were witnessing.*



*"I once asked Syrian image-makers who gravitated around the Aikilab hackerspace, 'Why do you risk your lives to film?' '**The world does not know what is happening in Syria', they replied. 'Once the world knows, the world will act. As soon as information flows, mobilization will start'** (Della Ratta 2017c: 117). Which resonates with the words of a Raqqa-base activist: **'I have filmed everything. My people were being killed and I needed the world to know this'** (Wessels forthcoming). **Like them, many Syrian youths have filmed to death in the deep belief that 'ethical' images would mobilise by virtue of their origin – 'their truth content' (Rancière2013: 20) – and their final end." -** (Della Ratta, 2018)

*And this^ is precisely why I thought that 'second little Syria' would be *the* place for me to 'encounter' a cracking open of the "silence" around the daily machinations of the embodied experience of war… the 'silence' we were left with when we left Ali and Huzaifa and Ali's electronics in that shop in Istanbul. **There 'visuals' were framings and frames that captured 'day in the life of' // 'moment in the life of' // 'footage' // 'testimonial' // 'call to arms for justice and dignity' styled content and were precisely designed to multiply, and diversely, sense, communicate and make-sensible to 'the world'// 'the audience' what the lived experience of the revolution felt like- the granular details of what war and its violences do to the body of a Syrian, to different bodies of different Syrians, what its violence does to their spaces, to their stories, which objects war uses to enact its violences through, what times begins to feel like in this seemingly endless loop of violence, details of what war looks like, smells, tastes, feels like to touch and to make-sense-of emotionally and conceptually, of what war should be captured as, archived as and what war wanted to be captured as and archived as, and what this capturing and living had become intrinsically inseparable in this 'second little syria' of theirs- one whose on-life and off-line were not two distinct entities tethered together but mere extensions of one other, and therefore the 'same', producing soc(ial medially mediated)-Syria together.***

And in that regard, they did, to a large extent, give exceptional depth, texture, colour, flavour, sense-ory description and shape to the "silence". It made me realise that, at least, I thought, that the 'diagram' I was looking for, the affective machine/ mechanism whose echoes I was picking up on and had

been picked up on by pretty much anyone I could think of who had 'stayed with the trouble' of continuously, painfully, ramming into the embodied experience of the martial, was a "twisting". As I looked through Archer's eyes, and swapped out the lens to look through a collage of about 137 other visual-artefacts from/of/about Syria, I knew what I wanted to say was, and I believe this is the proper academic language for it: Everything felt fucked- it was all always either physically the same, and felt completely not the same, or it was physically completely different but felt the same, or it was physically the same, and felt the same, but you yourself felt not the same, or it was physically different, and felt different, but you still somehow felt the same, or any combination of it.

Here, with Archer for instance, I could see how 'twisted' his own experience of the war felt to him, how 'twisted' it felt to me, how 'twisted'ly all the objects and materials and spaces were acting, how twisted it was that I could even see him and how 'twisted' it was that the action, the violence, the war, 'thing' as a whole seemed to somehow hang together and to some extent make sense if I zoomed out enough, but none of the details, strictly speaking, made any sense, like all 'things' – objects, spaces, people, concepts, feelings, understandings – had been ripped away from their specific individual meanings and haphasardly put back together, but not in the way that they were.

I was hearing Archer speak about "going crazy" from the simultaneous experience of adrenalise and boredom, marveling, with him, at how someone could find a firefight in the hear of the "battle of Raqqa" "boring". I could almost literally sit next to him and through his over-the-shoulder filming, peek as it were, over his shoulder, to see how in Archer's world, walls, the very performance of violence, Avril's music, his rifle, none were not quite acting as 'they were supposed to'. Walls are supposed to keep out harm not become tools that enable its enactment, enacting violence is not supposed to include hours of music, especially not Avril Lavigne's music, snipers with M93 "Black Arrow" high calibre rifles are not supposed to be swaying from side to side, dancing with their metallic partners seconds before spraying lethal shots- everything in this world of Archer's, everything that shapes and mediates his (and my) experience of this world, seemed twisted.

***And all I could think of, with my *insert-profanity-of-choice* literary theory and political philosophy academic subjectification was, "surrealism". That's the only word I knew for this particular worlding**. I knew Arendt had called it "absurdity" and that captured and communicated certain aspects of*

it, as did Taussig's "slipperiness", but that was about it- I had no idea how to translate it into the language-world of the subject I was actually getting a degree in. ***What the *insert-profanity-of-choice* was "surrealism" in IR? Moreover, I had no idea (i) if it even was 'surreal', (ii) and if it was surreal what the *insert-profanity-of-choice* did 'surreal' even mean, (iii) and if I could somehow figure that out,*** *as my normative-Orion belt reminded me (the wonderful women from the text's acknowledgements- Ashmeen, Ximena, and Eliza, here's looking at you),* ***I still didn't know whether it was surreal because I saw it as surreal for those living with/in/through the 'second little Syria', or because they thought of it as surreal themselves (and if you hear it off the cuff- it is a pretty violent assertion to categorise someone's lived, embodied reality, as a caricature-esque fever dream), (iv) and if somehow I could figure out the answers to all of this, what did it even mean to say, that the lived experience of the martial felt surreal- what were the political, conceptual, normative commitments of this argument? How did it relate to how we translate, understand and imagine 'war'/ how we generate a "figuration" of war, and what that "figuration" even is? What was the story I was trying to tell, with/through this surreality – about the 'injury' of war itself, and the 'history/testimonies of living through it' – that were populating the 'second little Syria'?***

I had found a way to see where, whose and how the 'silence' was being 'opened up' and how we could sense its complexities, its multiplicities, its textures, its resonances and becomings – I had found a 'place' where we, you and I and any audiences so inclined, ***could learn how to sense the lived experience – of the martial, but… I still didn't quite know to make sense of it. The 'second little Syria' had given us a way to get to the 'scene of the crime',*** ***each of these visuals, all of this content, a portal onto itself through which we could 'access' the daily machinations of different martial processes, events, assemblages and practices. But I didn't yet know how to 'solve' the 'case', in fact I didn't even know what the crime was. Think about it, to solve a case you need to know the 'name'[43] of the crime, that is always the first step-***

[43] I have thought a lot about why we need a name to begin with. A name is a pharmakon (Derrida, 2014) at best, I think, and a treacherously confining relationship at worst (like a sad marriage, or the idea of destiny: because it's not just the restraint on how one/the thing is seen, who one/the thing has to be, and who one/the thing performs as, but also the restraint on what one/the thing can be; not just the "is" but the "can" also seem somehow confined by it, like the actuality, the virtuality and the potentiality of things 'becoming' becomes somehow, even if ever so slightly, delimited. And there is extreme violence in that i.e., in being severed from the lives a thing could be leading if our 'naming' – because what is a name if not the translation of the entire embodiment of a whole person into a single word – didn't inevitable cut us off from at least some of our "not only"s (as we will see in Field Note: 5). On the other hand, I am with Foer

establishing its taxonomic name: is it 'murder', an 'accident', an 'assassination', a 'serial' murder, a 'botched' robbery etc.

And this is already where I was stuck - I needed to find my own network of 'irregulars' (in the Sherlock-y way, from the Elementary adaptation, because it is clearly in every way the superior one, and I will fight to the death over this claim), I needed 'expert consultations' and I desperately, needed to find a name for this 'twisted lived experience.'

And that is how and when, I accidentally but through careful deliberation, ended up in the 'third little Syria'- the art-Syria of Omar, Ayham, Sulafa, Malu, Zaheer and Khaled, all prompted by a single question a friend asked me after quite a few rounds of e-whiskey where we discussed how 'accessing' lifeworld's seemed like an impossible feat, at least to those of us still starting out as researchers, and how we would be better off if we could only get ourselves to like Microsoft Excel and R-Studio more, especially in the Age of Covid[44]*. With ridiculously hilarious but deadpan expressions that only the truly drunk can pull off, he had asked, ''Where did you look? For yourself? When you had to put all that brokenness into words but there were no words? Where did you go? I went for videogames, what's that for you?" And then, again, "gradually and then suddenly"* (Hemingway, 2014)*– or rather "slowly, and then all at once"* (Green, 2014)*, I realised what was going 'wrong', or rather what was 'missing'. He was absolutely right,* ***there was somewhere we all go/went when the "brokenness" of being is getting to us and we need either solidarity, or catharsis, or to be able to make some kind of sense of it all, or at the very least be with others who could sense it (already, whom we didn't need to 'translate' for) even if none of us could make sense of it… and it was different for everyone of course, where they went to 'access' this 'excess', to live for a bit from within it/ through it, and how for most people I knew, the answer, was not***

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on this one, "Sometimes I can hear my bones straining under the weight of all the lives I'm not living (Foer, 2005)" if that is already the case… how does one live through an 'un-named' world.

And so 'naming' and the need for a 'name' exist here, in this dissertation, is the in-between where all existentialism exists: naming is seen as strangulation in every aspect, and yet there is no 'definition' without… there is a feeling of being without-matter, materially and meaningfully, when there isn't a name, and a feeling of being imprisoned by its contours and connotations when there is one. And so we will look for one, but we will also make sure, that it is at best, a floating signifier and no way shape or form a stable prescriptive representation.

[44] Which also severely impacted any travel-to-the-field plans for me during the 'data gathering' phase for this project. Well, that and the lack of funding.

something strictly 'verbal'/ 'academic'/ 'conceptual' or anywhere there in the space where these three of occasionally hangout together (something I explore at length when we meet Syrialism soon).

For me, for example, besides therapy (that too quiet recently and reluctantly but in hindsight, serendipitously), I had turned to fiction for solidarity, to music when the flight-ing rarely left my body and I was permitting myself to 'feel'/ 'fight' through it, and to visual-arts (films, television, 'A'rt, and 'a'rt) when I had to try and make sense of it because there was always something 'more'... an 'excess' that I couldn't tie down to 'words' (prose- poetry is, to me, essentially music)… something 'vital' (living, agentic, and important- all the connotations) that escaped signification more than things usually escape it (remember the peppercorn?). We needed something beyond the bounds of what we already knew, to give expression to that which we could possibly know if we sensed and/or made sense of something differently. ***And perhaps because it was familiar and tested, or because the register of 'second little Syria' was so dominantly visual, I started looking at the 'other' kind of visual content coming out from/within/about Syria- resistance art by Syrian artists about the embodied experience of violence.***

And here, through Omar, I met Syrialism.

Living through Syrialism:

Elision-ed Places | New Normal-s |

Absurd Life-Scapes |

Objects with Underground Lives |

Slippery Excesses |

The Syrialism of Omar's Photography: (Re)Encountering Surrealism

Or, What the (insert-profanity-of-choice) is Syrialism?

There is something enthralling about loud silences.

I was sitting at my work-from-home swivel chair, twisting around in the ever-so-slightly- uncomfortable embrace of its salmon-flesh-coloured (artificial) leather, warming my hands on a cup of scalding ginger tea, intensely/ intently peeling away at space, lulled by the murmuring of abject silence into a paralysed screeching stillness, when the greyed icon of Omar's Zoom profile flickered on my screen. My heart dove into my stomach.

"Connecting Audio", Zoom declared.

This is how I met Omar.

Breathe, I coaxed myself. Inhale. It had been hard to track Omar down, harder to get him to meet and despite (or perhaps because of) my desperate attempts, I wasn't sure if he would make it. I became a little nauseous. I remember being uncomfortably aware of my own breathing, of the fact that I should have used the webcam instead of the inbuilt camera, of the dishwasher I had inadvisably left running, of the Zoom waiting room I should have enabled so I would have had a moment to collect myself, of having left the tea bag in the cup just a little too long, of the wall of posters behind me and the ways in which they might betray me, of the lucky bamboo stalk that was growing in a darned Monkey Shoulder bottle, of "Breathe" (Miranda et al., 2008) playing on loop in my head (really?!), of the blanket I should have kept handy. I had goosebumps. It was April in Geneva after all.

Maybe I was just uncomfortably aware of the violence of this encounter.

I was asking someone (Omar) to speak to a complete stranger (me) about the intimacies of their lived experience and no matter how much care, kindness, respect and vulnerability I could garner in reciprocation, no matter how hard I worked at making it a conversation instead of an 'interview', of subjectivising him as an 'interlocutor', no matter how much reflexivity I could perform, there was an unrelenting apprehension I couldn't shake: I was 'studying' Omar. Not that Omar was un-agentic in our interaction at all, but what he chose to reveal to me would shape my work. But there is a directionality to "studying" that is rather

extractive, I think, and I wonder if it is perhaps ingrained in the physical machinations of 'doing research' as such.

Exhale ("… Just Breathe", ibid).

I reminded myself of Veena Das, her engagement with Wittgenstein, conjured the image of her twisted pen and her gestures of waiting, and I pressed on[45] before the caution of *care-ful*[46] research became the crippling paralysis of over-dissection.

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[45] In Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary, Das (2006), to paraphrase Cavell (who wrote the Foreword), ***chronicles a 'reality of pain'***, detailing how moments of extreme violences during the Partition of India in 1947 and the massacre of Sikhs in 1984 ***formed part of the 'recesses of the ordinary' instead of something exceptional,*** and, in doing so, presents the readers with a rather inventive argument. Perhaps more 'importantly' though – 'important' strictly for the context of this essay's thesis – her anthropological observations are interspersed with extensive philosophical reflections about how we can understand and interpret violence better. It is towards that end that, in Chapter 1, 'The Event and the Everyday', she engages with Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations to flesh out a 'gesture of waiting'. She argues that, for Wittgenstein, if in life we are surrounded by death, "so too is in the health of our understanding we are surrounded by madness" (Das, 2006). Instead of excising these voices of madness and/or any trace of them, according to Das, Wittgenstein introduces the notion of waiting: 'If I have exhausted the justifications, I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: This is simply what I do.' ***Das takes this invitation to wait, to breathe, to take a moment of pause in the midst of reflective madness to create a space where her interlocutors, and their percipience, can find room for expression.*** She argues, 'In this picture of the turned spade as indicative of a turned pen, we have the picture of what the act of writing may be in the darkness of this time. For me, the love of anthropology has turned out to be an affair in which when I reach the bedrock I do not break through the resistance of the other, but in this gesture of waiting I allow the knowledge of the other to mark me'. This interview then, this encounter with Omar, became my 'gesture of waiting'. ***I found solacein being marked, being affected, by his knowledge, experience and work… in waiting for Omar to play anequal, if not leading, role in shaping this work. This manuscript, then, especially this chapter, is a collaborative albeit/and parasitic*** (Austin, 2019a) ***act of translation.***
More on that next.

[46] I have been boxing, a lot, with what this "care-full research" would look like, what it would even mean, what it would give voice to, what it would obscure, which violences it would address and which it would exert- you saw this already in the two "episodic encounters" earlier. I spent so much time in the ring with these questions that the first drafts of this essay didn't bear even a slight shade of a bruise or ache from these questions of positionality, of ethics, of the politics of writing about these themes in this exact way. ***I was trying the usual if-I-just-squeeze-my-eyes-shut-hard-enough trick but object permanence, especially of the deeply ethical kind, is always more sticky and obstinate than I am.***
So here is my grossly feeble attempt at mapping the politics of this text with comparatively minimum personal squirming that marked/marred this discussion earlier in the episodes and will in the 'field notes' to come.
Once upon a time, I sat in a boiling room that looked and felt like the inside of a wood-fire-oven if it were painted pale blue. Cramped against 12 or so other sweltering bodies I shakingly presented a version of

this paper and waited to be baked inside out while my brilliant co-panelists presented their works. Halfway through the panel, we were choked. Some of us (read, me) were in tears. In that blueish room, in the far corner of a whiteish building, nestled in a corner of Thessaloniki, we had made our own little corner of the (IR) world. Or at least that is how I (choose to?) remember it.

We spoke about domestic torture, about the violences faced when living with fluid identities, about how we write and live through/ about these violences, especially when trying to grasp, articulate and do justice to the violent experiences of others. In that room, I fell in love with post-modern feminist IR (part of the panel title) all over again. That 'fierce vulnerability' that I love so much (perhaps disproportionately) had taken possession of the very ether of the room, of the sweltering bodies that were broiling inside it, of even the words, questions and ideas that were spilling into the spaces in between us. We shared, supported, and appreciated each other, but also didn't give an inch. It was mutually agreed yet never discussed that scholarship like the one being chewed through here demanded and deserved feedback that was manifestly soul-piercing. ***I, for instance, was asked the question I dread the most: How do you live with knowing how extractive it is to do this work, especially as someone who was once on the other side of that equation?*** Before my mind could even register that I was speaking, let alone realise what I was speaking of, words began gushing out of me. I was pyretic-ally possessed by the affect of that moment (space-time-ether-bodies-relationalities-all-entangled) too I think.

"The truth is, I don't live with it. It eats me up inside.

I feel like a vulture... like I am sitting there picking over the bones and flesh of people's most intimate, most violent memories, and how they make sense of it. Like I am consuming their literal pain and stuffing it in a place somewhere between my stomach and intestines where its dark enough so I don't have to see it quite clearly and I can ruthlessly selectively absorb only what I need to nourish my arguments and build this theoretical world. And it's beyond selfish... not just extractive which it clearly is. I came to Omar, to these Syrian artists, to their cause, to their lives, to their works, to their pains for entirely selfish reasons. I was struggling with my own (Complex)PTSD, trying and trying and trying to find the words, images, music, films – anything – that would help me give shape to what I was feeling, what I was/ am drowning in, because it just... it felt like if I could explain it or understand it or at the very least articulate it then I could vomit it, or purge it out of myself. But I just couldn't.

And I also just, plain, didn't have the guts to look at it directly within myself.

I just couldn't "tits up" and look the stranger in the mirror in the eyes.

[I was quite contentedly happy, though, at how well received that tit's up reference was in the room].

And then I started seeing these social-media posts, these artworks, these photographs that were coming out of Syria and... it just clicked.

I had found in their work a way to express everything I didn't know how to. And so I use – and I mean this in every icky and use-full sense of that word – Omar's Syrialism to personally, professionally, and politically build a living for myself. And it's sickening.

The only thing that helps is Omar's, Khaled's, Ayham's, Sulafa's, Malu's and Zaher's insistence that they want this work to be seen, to be interpreted, to be studied. They too (because we spoke of this quite a bit) made these works to find articulation for their own experiences with violence. This is what they went through the literally pain-staking process of building Syrial worlds for."

And I know that recognising their voice, acknowledging their pain and 'injury' and their sheer bravery, and caring for their works with as much respect as my brittle bones can muster is the most I can do, and I try my very best to do it, but it... it never feels enough.

Death by a thousand cuts is still death.

Two seconds(?!) later, Omar appeared at the window himself, and for the next 03 hours and 37 minutes we spoke about family, home, love, children, trauma, pain, violence, anger, media, photography, films, vision, reimagination, activism, Damascus, Beirut, Amsterdam, One Piece, and how we were twinning in blue and white.

But it has to be, because I truly believe that this work is a necessary part of us being able to reimagine what war *feels* like, how it infiltrates our lives and bodies, how we carry in our very nerves and bones the violences that we experience
and if we can just see it, really see it,
in all of its damage in this thoroughly embodied, affective dimension, maybe, just maybe,
we can find a different way of navigating the politics of it all.
I just… I am not sure I should be the one doing it."
It took a lot to have said that that day. It took everything.
I think in a way it was the first time I was even confessing all of this to myself- and that's really what it felt like, like I was whipping out a therapeutic confession, only it was a searing (atmospherically- temperature and affect) room and not a pale green couch guarded by a glassy coffee table bestridden by the therapy-tissue-box that I have since come to associate with my psychiatrists' office and it was a group of wonderfully blindingly brilliant feminist and queer scholars and not an equally, but differently, brilliant middle-aged Greek man that gave me the medication I need to get out of bed. ***There was just something about the… simultaneous reckoning and relief that made it easy to carry the guilt.*** It didn't go away at all (there was no erasure and no expectation of one but something did lift/shift), but all of a sudden I had a "why" and the "why" was enough to make my peace with, and continue, the "how."
Something, something, "He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how" (Nietzsche, 1974)? I suppose that works for 'she's too.
Anyway, this is the aporia that I am still stuck with(in). ***There is quite a rich legacy of authors, particularly ethnographers, who have wrestled with these questions more coherently than I have*** (Arendt, 1970; Daigle, 2016; Das, 1996, 2006; Das et al., 2000, 2001; Dauphinee, 2013; Della Ratta, 2018; hooks, 2015; Hooks, 2006; Nordstrom & Robben, 1995; Scarry, 1987; Stoler, 2008; Sylvester, 2012, 2013b, 2013a) ***and I wish I could add something compelling to their care-full discussions, but I find myself, yet again, unable to express what I feel/think. All I can say is that for me, "Syrialism" is not about finding a theory of violence that is universal or representative or contextual even*** (as I have mentioned previously in the Prologue). ***It is 'simply' one way of thinking/feeling through/about, of 'describing' political violence, its injuries, and its lived experience – a theoretical framework that I have collaboratively (or, in spirit at least, co-productively) built with only these specific artists, the specific theorists I list here, and the specific ideas and examples I build on. It is, at its core, a critical re-imagination of how we sense and make sense of political violence- one that makes visible "war's incessant becoming"*** (Bousquet et al., 2020) ***and despite any and all of my hesitancies about the manner in which this research was conducted and performed, there is not a shadow of doubt in my mind about the absolute necessity of the story of Syrialism, itself. None at all.***
I stand behind 'Syrialism' "tits up". Khaled, Omar, Malu, Ayham, Sulafa, Jabr and every single 's'yrian, in/from any of the 'little syrias' deserve that to be the case.

Mostly we spoke about surrealism and Syria.

Surrealism + Syria; Syria + Surrealism.
Surrealism in Syria.
Surrealism by Syria.
Syrian Surrealism. The Surrealism of Syrians.
Surreal Syria.
Syrialism.

Omar (pseudonym, more of a sobriquet really), is an Amsterdam-based photographer and video/installation artist from Syria. He first took to the camera in 2002 "inventing his own brand of dark ironic personal work in his hometown of Damascus" (Eric Gottesman, 2016). That was the era of black and white films and manual cameras for him- a time when photography was "just a hobby"[47]. The 'Uprising'[48] changed that. For the majority of 2011 then, Omar found himself creating Facebook posts starring his photographs alongside small captions that helped him discuss the "***new normality*** we were facing in Syria, about what to expect, and what is revolution, and what is war..."[49].

I thought I heard hiccupped pride in his voice- the hiccups, as I soon realised were a vestige of the injurious realities that came fettered to these gestures of activism. About a year after Omar started sharing his work, in September 2012, he was abducted and tortured by "a small group of unofficial fighters."[50] Those twenty-four hours continue to shroud his living sporadically. Later that year, Omar left home, his camera, his irony, this shroud, and him making their way to expatriation together.

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[47] Omar Imam, interview by author, Geneva, Online, April 29, 2021

[48] Nomenclature reverberates politics. All due respect to Shakespeare, a rose by any other name is not a rose. For a detailed discussion on the politics of naming, please refer, inter alia, to (Kalaycioglu, 2020), (Bhatia, 2005; Mamdani, 2007; Mundy, 2011).
The Syrian Revolution has differentially been called an 'Uprising', a 'Revolution', a 'Revolt', a 'Conflict', a 'Civil War', a 'Proxy War', a 'front on the War on Terror' and so on. Each of these names brings with it a politics of (in)visibility (of which actors, events and sites are taken into consideration), of discourse (of what is securitised within this consideration), of practice (of which practices are justified through this securitisation). It (re)creates subjectivities and (re)produces worlds with very particular ideas and socio-material practices. Omar's politics are reflected in him calling the on-going conflict an Uprising, mine – very much in the same neighbourhood – are reflected in what I have been religiously tying to 'S'yria so far, and will continue to, 'revolution'.

[49] Omar Imam, interview by author, Geneva, Online, April 29, 2021

[50] Ibid

And somewhere through the next (/last) 11 years, 2 countries and 14 exhibitions, Omar, and this camera of his created something that traversed well beyond irony and Damascus into the bordering lands of surrealism and Syria: ***Syrialism***. That is where I encountered Omar.

"Encountered"... I have, as I am sure you have already noticed, always rather liked that word. Though I met Omar only on the 29th of April, 2021, I had encountered him already in 2018. I make this distinction between meeting and encountering because the latter – this instance, this moment, this process of encounter... a weighty stumbling upon – is, as you might have guessed, one of the 'foundational (implicit) assumptions' of this story. I think, in a similar vein to Deleuze (in this too), that we think, conceptualise, research, write and live through encounters: ***through moments that force us to think***[51].

[51] In Difference and Repetition, (Deleuze, 1994), hypothesises that, "***something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental encounter. What is encountered may be Socrates, a temple or a demon. It may be grasped in a range of affective tones: wonder, love, hatred, and suffering. In which tone, its primary characteristic is that it can only be sensed***". Here, thought and thinking are presented as antithesis to cognition and recognition- the latter being something we do as a force of habit (since it is an aspect of repetition). According to Deleuze, only when we fail to recognise something, when something falls outside the schemas of cognition we have cultivated (or been conditioned to cultivate), do we really think. This moment of confrontation, when we face difference itself, is what is termed a fundamental encounter and **thought, then, becomes a product of the sheer force of this encounter.**
Now, I remain uncertain about Deleuze's distinctions and dichotomies and their relationalities and semiotics here, but I find the idea of **thought not being (only?) one's own but rather a process, almost of co-production, between what is encountered and what it makes us feel and think rather compelling. The imagery/ figuration of thought here, for me, is neither of a muse that possesses us making us but mere vessels, nor of individual ownership as if there were title deeds for thoughts. It is the imagery of a pas de deux.** This text would not be possible without the art, the artists, the images, the newspaper articles, the social media accounts, the theorists mentioned here or without my attempted abstractions at engaging with them and that string them Syrially together: all 'thoughs' here are movements/moments of engaging, entangling agencies and worldings between their world(ings) and I.
Therefore, though I am writing this manuscript, it is not mine- it is born of my 'encounter' with Syrialisms. I have said this already, about the very act of producing/ performing research, at least one that takes this shape, but I wanted to make sure that you know that it goes further than that- that it's in the way thought itself is thought of.

A quick random-ish anecdote through which I simplify this^ being the "image of thought" (Deleuze, 1994) of/for 'encounter' argument for myself and I am hoping to can be another arm-float-y for you:
In one of the first classes I took during my Bachelors, "Mind and Behavior", (where we mainly discussed the philosophical and psychological theories of the 'mind'), we had a session where we combatted the different theories in the canons vis-à-vis the relationship between the rational and irrational mind: what was the shape of this distinction, the characteristics of each, which behaviours, practices and habits they controlled and so on, your run-of-the-mill Liberal-Arts-y class discussions that almost ended with our lecturer outlining the idea of 'reason' having a certain 'brute force' to it and arguing that belief in this capacity and capability of reasons' 'brute force' and its subsequent ability to control and subjugate the irrational parts of our minds was at the heart of all "rationalist" imaginaries of mind, which formed the majority of the canons as far as I could tell.

Syrialism, even before I met Omar, did just that.

This collection of photographs[52] is a montage (almost) of a rifle-bearing goat, a teddy bear beheading 'terrorist', a morbid gondola ride, an exploding superman, a photographer developing photographs on a barricade and so much more, ***that toys with our understanding, our conceptualisations, and/or our "figurations"*** (Haraway,

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And so, with the reckless abandon that only "The Fool" (from a tarot deck) can possess, I thought it would be a great idea to ask a question about this 'brute force' and so, again, before I knew I was speaking, [my partners might have mentioned that, especially when I am 'in-the-zone', I have a leg-in-mouth-disease, not just 'foot'] I asked, "but how is that possible? If the brute force of reason comes from its ability to reason – like almost a negotiation that it will always win – then how can it win against something that it cannot reason with like the irrational mind? It can't participate in this negotiation game. So how do you win against something that can't play with you?" And I am not quite sure if it was the nonchalance with which my then Professor's response came, or the violence of it, that punched that episode deep into the recesses of my mind, (or if it was because I was 'encouraged' to write my midterm about it), either way, all he ("who shall not be named") said, was, "Well it can't negotiate with the irrational, but it has to win. For the same reason as why we have the urge to slap children and must discipline them one way or another."

Swiftly sliding past how many "Yikes!" moments there are in that memory, that I can now recognise more clearly with some distance, for better or for worse, that's the image I have always had of a thought as an 'encounter'- to me at least, **an encounter is the moment where my whole system of sensing and making sense is 'slapped' into thinking of/sensing something that doesn't quite 'fit' within my previously constructed frameworks and the encounter needs me to perform sense-making differently if I wish to engage with it and in doing so, it coerces me to critically re-imagine the system/structure holistically.** Sometimes, most of the time, it is way less violent than how I am describing it here, because I quite enjoy it (the tactility and excitement of novelty, New Thought Toys!!!) but it is necessarily always 'radical' and so when it is violent, it is deeply so.

Now, I remain uncertain about how much of it is "absolute" difference, but I do agree with the premise. **Take Omar's Syrialism itself, in the way that I was discussing it in the previous pages. I could feel what I was feeling/ sensing/ thinking/ embodying but I had no way of making sense of it, of giving it a name, a place within a larger system of thought and affect, a way to understand how whatever it was was 'affecting' me and the pluriverse I lived in. And then, I "encountered" Syrialism- and 'just like that', there was a name for this affective experience, and it could be discussed, and arbitrarily bound, and touched, and thought through and mapped and explored.** The name changed everything.

*But, then again, one can wonder that the hunch was always there, so how much of it was "new" based off this encounter-of-the-name? However, this a Ship of Thesus (Jansen, 2011) problem, which, besides bringing me voiced-therefore-flushed-out-of-me-relief doesn't quite mean much for us, at the moment anyway. So, let's just stick to Deleuze's figuration of thought and I will keep my *insert-profanity-of-choice* poking-holes-y dagger tied squarely behind my back.*

[52] For more information on how photographs and photography are entangled with martial and other security practices and politics, see inter alia: (Andersen & Möller, 2013; Beier, 2007; Galai, 2019; Hansen, 2011; HANSEN, 2015; Heck & Schlag, 2013; Kennedy & Patrick, 2020; Kirkpatrick, 2015; Lisle, 2017; Loken, 2021; Möller, 2007; Shapiro, 2007; Simon, 2012)

2004; Weber, 2016) ***war and its violences- it toys with our sensibilities towards them by crafting a Syrial worlding***.

In this collection, ***banal objects, regular people, mundane spaces*** – the carefully designed pegs on which we hang our socially constructed realities – ***stand in bizarrely(?) harmonious juxtaposition with brutal objects, petrifying characters, and terrifying spaces***, all markers of violent conflict. At first, this juxtaposition was a little incapacitating- intuitively we might think, or at least I did, that these worlds should not be meeting. These objects, these places, these materials, these people should not be doing what they are doing; teddy bears do not belong on Charon's ferry and mannequins decked in orange prison-suits do not model among wedding dresses. ***It feels unnerving, unsettling, twisted (remember, from page. X?).*** But intuitively, as well, I think, these worlds have always met- they have always been connected no matterhow thin and/or tangled these tethers are. Rifles inhabit the rural combat space just as goats do, barricades are populated by CCTV cameras, anti-aircraft guns and photographers both point and shootand IEDs go off in urban-ish underground passageways- ***there is a different framework within which these twistings don't feel so twisted; i.e., within the "new normal" (of Omar's descriptions) of war, this surreality isn't so surreal***[53].

In (re)creating these surreal landscapes, then, Omar is showing us a ***surreal kind of war story***[54]***, one that is primarily affective, sensory, aesthetic, material and corporeal- lived. These are not stories about war, but rather about the***

[53] I suppose now is a good enough time as any to try and talk about the difference between magical realism and surrealism and the border//broader relationalities of surreality and reality itself. Actually, no. I will come to all of this later, in Element: 2, but until then, here is another red thread (like the one in the dedication- yup, I am making a second exception to the no-singularities rule): All reality is always surreal. At least, within this networked, rhizomatic, multi- and pluriverse, all reality is surreality. I mean, if we can buy Das Kapital on Amazon – just listen to those words, really listen – if that is possible, it *has to be* surreal, right? Anyway, I will return to all of this soon, but much later.

[54] A 'surreal kind of war story', much like an 'affective kind of war story' (from the Translator's Note), is a play on words toying with Carolyn Nordstrom's book title, "A Different Kind of War Story" (Nordstrom, 1997). In the book, Nordstrom takes the reader to the frontlines of the Mozambican civil war (1988 to 1997), focusing on the stories of soldiers, civilians, profiteers and children to show that by paying attention to individual narratives that might seem fragmented and occupied by silences and pauses, we begin to see that there is a 'different kind of war story' in Mozambique- ***one where the violence of war is not a given, but rather, it is seen as something learned, which can, in time, be unlearned***. In doing so, she explores how state power and civil resistance manifest differentially within a culture of terror warfare. As will be explored later in this article, I borrow from her (among others) ***the urgency and necessity to look into both, the non-verbal dimensions of storytelling vis-à-vis war and its violences and the need to trace these stories within situated, embodied, complex worlds.***

experience of war: what war feels like, how its violences are sensed, how it materialises and/or which technologies it latches on to. These stories are about what war feels like as a "dimension of living" (Nordstrom & Robben, 1995)***, giving us a lexicon of sorts, an affective grammar, with which to engage with the corporeal, the sensory, the affective, the material, the technological, the temporal and the spatial dimensions of war. They allow us to engage with the daily machinations of war, the politics these machinations (re)produce and how all this becomes intelligible, or rather, sensible through lived experience.***

Different from scopic-regimes[55] that see war through statistics, or narratives that focus on structures, groups and institutions or lexicons that (in/)advertently regurgitate justifications for this practice, the Syrial worlding treats this lived experience as a form of experience-based knowledge – Omar's situated knowledge about what war feels like as a Syrian, as an artist, as a refugee, as a person whose home continues to be assaulted every single day as it has been for the past 11 years – and in that is a site worthy of *care-full* investigation.

In many ways, I think, Omar's work, and this collection in particular, make excellent expats inthe worlds composed as corollaries to Dr. Christine Sylvester's 2012-13 clarion call: "to pull the bodies and experiences of war out of entombments created by (IR) theories operating at higher levels of analysis and into the open as crucial elements of war" (Sylvester, 2012). Most of my interactions with the literatures on 'war' that come with the tag of IR were marred by concerns of causations and/or correlations, of aggregated actors/ 'stakeholders' like states, systems or organizations, of trends that corresponded to (un/)desirable outcomes or of tracing ordering principles that operationalise war. War, here, is either an event or a tool, often both and therefore what concerns this scholarship are either its causes or its consequences.

There are particular invisibilities that these concerns beget. For instance, they obscure the plurality of actors that are affected by/ that affect the daily performance of war; or, the entanglements war's violences have with violences of everyday governance and politics (effectively deconstructing that dichotomy); or, the legacies/ durabilities of different violent/ violence ecologies on the daily minutiae of the performance of war. ***Here, the "enactment of injury"*** (Scarry, 1987)***– war's primary task – somehow loses its corporeal, experiential dimension such that this "injury" is a logistical aftermath, an unfortunate necessity that takes the shape of justifiably collateral damage, a***

[55]War, as I will explain further, in these regimes, is either an event or a tool, often both, and as such the contours of this regime are marred by concerns of causations or correlations and/or consequences: of aggregated actors/ 'stakeholders' like states, systems or organisations that participate in war or of trends that correspond to (un/)desirable outcomes or of tracing ordering principles that operationalize war. Or at least this is how I was introduced to 'war' in most of my 'International Relations' training.

socio-political residue, or an after-thought in analysis. Knowingly or otherwise, these conceptualisations have created a repertoire of surreptitiously socio-politically contingent theoretical models, universes, which have systematically evicted theorising the processual nature of war (and violence) from the domain of capitalised International Relations. Beyond Sylvester, and I, Elaine Scarry, Carolyn Nordstrom, Veena Das, Tami Jacoby, Tarak Barkawi, Shane Brighton, Swati Parashar, Antoine Bousquet, Jairus Grove, Nisha Shah (among others) also trace this "...'conceptual black hole surrounding the notion of war'..." (Bousquet et al., 2020).

Omar's work, Syrialism, on the other hand, gives center-stage to this 'injury'.

It cajoles, compels, coerces, us to see how war is sensed – both, sensed/felt and made sense of – through the body, through noise, sight, sound, smell, touch, through materials, technologies, through cruelty, duress, ruination, and fear… how war is an intensely 'lived' experience[56]/ process.

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[56]"Lived Experience" – as I bored you with/ told you in Theoretical Note: 3 – is the specter that haunts this text. Though I walked us through the workings of this concept at length is earlier in the text, I am going to do a quick-and-dirty-summary here, just in case that was a TLDR moment for you (which, is completely understandable- remember, this is a Choose Your Own Adventure) because it is one of the more 'power'-full (profoundly agentic, deeply affective and steeped in, and generative of, all the socio-political textures and refrains collaged here) conceptual maps within the/this Syrial pluriverse.

Typically, ***lived experience is not a term we use, instead opting for 'embodied experience' which is just that- how the body experiences certain socio-political phenomena and/or how socio-political phenomena unfold along the corporeal dimension***. I think there is incredible feminist (/critical) scholarship that has sketched out the contours of what this looks like in practice… what it looks like when the body/embodiment of different subjectivities are taken seriously as sites of political struggles. I am thinking here of the works of Lauren Wilcox, Elaine Scarry, Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, Franz Fanon and Iris Marion Young, among others. Building (ever so slightly away) from them**, *I think about this concept as and through a congealed entanglement with 'lived experience'. I hypothesise that 'lived experience' is profoundly an embodied experience, but "not only"*** (De la Cadena, 2015)***, because 'living' and/or this 'lived experience' is mediated not just through the corporeal, but also the sensory, the affective, the material, the technological, the aesthetic and the socio-political. We live through our bodies, through our senses, through our emotions, through our thoughts, through the materials that build us and our lives and worlds, through the technologies that do the same, through the art – in whatever way, shape, form it might be – that shapes us, just as we shape it, and the socio-political ecologies that we (re)produce and that (re)produce us, all at once*** (Austin, 2016, 2017b, 2017a, 2019c, 2019b, 2020).

Living is a collage, and therefore, at least to me, lived experience is an 'exquisite corpse' (Zalewski, 2013). If I was being generous, I would call this is a 'tricky move' (which I have learnt is academic speak for 'that's one step away from impossible to pull off with any rigour') but mostly it is a haphazardly composed (perhaps slightly frenzied) laundry list of onto-epistemological, almost metaphysical, commitments. It stretches the notion of 'embodiment' to awkwardly accommodate at least 5 dimensionsclassy colour combinations clothesclassy colour combinations clothclassy colour combinations clotheses, arguing, that it is perhaps within the hyphen between embodiment and experience (embodied – experience) that the politics of lived experience, of its surreality, are located for it is neither a phenomenological argument, nor a post-phenomenological one, but rather one that is geared towards fafreflecting the multiplicity (Mol, 2003) of the lived experience. *Insert-profanity-of-choice* co-constitution. So, it's no surprise really that I spent quite some time wondering if this (re)conceptualisation of embodied/lived experience was strictly necessary. It is – at least to me – an 'avalanche' of academic theorising that is quite overwhelming at best and terrifyingly, dizzyingly, confusing at worst. And I tried my best to dismember this composition, or at the very least, maim it somehow to make it more manageable, but the interviews, the artworks, personal experiences and Adichie's Notes on Grief (Adichie, 2021) pestering me. So, we are stuck with this figuration.



Figure: 74 – Conceptual Photograph by Omar Imam.
Caption by the Artist: ***"Under torture, you cannot see the line between real and surreal. I saw myself in a serene place holding my daughter. The image motivated me to survive."***
Author Engagement:

"Teddy's do not belong on Charon's ferry. That teddy immediately makes me think of Omar's toothbrush… and other perfume bottles. It is the twisted thing that twists (at) your guts."
(Imam, Omar. Conceptual Photograph. Website. 2018)

Author Engagement, Continued:

One of the hardest decisions in the designing of this text – if not the hardest – was which artworks to include because I couldn't include them all. Trust me, I tried. ***So, as with the stories and the excerpts from the interviews, and the theoretical concepts, and everything, I first 'chose' them, let's say 'arbitrarily but with good reason'. Some of them were artworks I 'encountered' so they *had to* make it, others were 'encounters' for the artists themselves, and others are presented here for 'strictly' academic operationalization: they were able to make affectively sensible a theoretical concept or an aspect of one, and some were there just because I was able find them (for the "Who Knew" factor).***

But no reasonings for categorizations of any form, I think, no matter how robust, sound or coherent, can ever act as a ground for bail vis-à-vis the felonies of archiving. In choosing one artwork/ one category/ one aspect/ one name over another, we sever its entanglements with the rest of its semiotic and affective rhizome, obfuscating it's "not only"s and in/through that participate in propagating deeply embodied onto-epistemological violences. We have discussed all of these mechanics in quite some detail when we talked about archiving, collecting, histories and narratives of living in the Prologue and/or in the Translator's Note when we worked through our "not only"s, and we will discuss these limitations/ violences/ positionalities again in Field Notes: 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6, but until then, I wanted to quickly flag with you the following:

In choosing this image from the Syrialism connection/ collection, I left out all the others and (1) created a hierarchy of sorts, (2) at least when it comes to the stabilizing of semiotic and affective inscriptions (this will now be the photograph through which we map and perform the figuration of Syrialism even though other photographs would have given us access to other elements/ textures/ dimensions of the process). In choosing then, (3) I rendered pellucidly/un- senseable the multiplicity of the process of Syrialism itself (i.e. in choosing just one photograph for sensing and making sense of the process deeply, and accessing and codifying *only* this reality of the process – the one that the photograph "portals" us to – I participated in ignoring/ erasing/ forgetting/ obfuscating/ burying/ ruining all other realities of the process, all other dimensions we could have had access to if this isn't the reality we were fixating on).

In/ By choosing, I shipwrecked any process's *not only*s, razing entire onto-epistemic worlds.

How do we get around this erasure then? How do we make sure that we can minimize the ruinous capacities our (unintentionally?) cruel "aesthetic elisions" (Kalaycioglu, 2020)***?***

One of the ways in which I have tried to work against/ across/ through this violence-of-choice-and-archiving (besides as mentioned above asking the artists themselves which photographs they would like to present/ work with- at least those whom I was able to interview) is by (i) providing as much circumstantial/ worlding detail for each of these artworks as I reasonably could so that the reader/ viewer/ engager/ encounter, had at least the option to look at/ through the visuals from outside of our (the artists' and mine) framings as well and/or (ii) if that was not possible, and even if it was, to make sure that the 'captions' to the visuals are (typically) divided into two segments here: the direct quote from the author's own perspective of the artwork, and a quote/ caption from my – the author's – engagement with it. In making these both explicit, differentiated and entangled, I was hoping that the process of affective and aesthetic

interpretations could be made sense-able so the reader/viewer can engage/encounter the works, and my readings of them, critically – or at least from a critical distance – choosing what they might resonate with, disagree with, and/or perhaps most excitingly, might discover/encounter/ be affected by that we missed! The potential for lines of flights is preserved like this, I think, and I thoroughly encourage that you soar with them.

For this image, Figure: 74 for instance, I presented you with two captions:
Captioning by Omar: "Under torture, you cannot see the line between real and surreal. I saw myself in a serene place holding my daughter. The image motivated me to survive."
Captioning by Me: "Teddy's do not belong on Charon's ferry. That teddy immediately makes me think of Omar's toothbrush… and other perfume bottles. It is the twisted thing that twists (at) your guts."

And to that, for instance, I would like to add the following 'contextual'/ 'worlding' details:

(from the Interview)
Omar: ***"…at those time…at that destination time… I started to hear voices that were not there… and to see images that were not there… and I have seen the image of my daughter who was one month old and that kind of kept me alive because at certain time I was thinking about pushing them to kill me because it would be much easier than the torture itself. And I am sure that everyone that underwent this torture has this idea that why life is worth it, comparing to the pain… it's not. Ya but…that is for me, it came to me, Bianca my daughter came to me, and grabbed me from that basement, and from the comics (that I will show you in the conclusion) that's what I show. How she saves me…"***
As we talked further about ***our experiences being tortured, about how we learnt to live with and through them,*** *about how use-less and use-full we found therapy, how it was never enough because* ***there was no way to talk to someone about it who didn't know what it was and you didn't want anyone you loved and cared for to ever know what it felt like but the loneliness was often as ravaging as the violence itself – it unmade you, or sometimes on really twisted "dark nights of the soul"*** (Campbell & Osbon, 1991; Inayat Khan, 1999)***, made you unmake yourself – and drove you to desperation, how that desperation is where his artwork came from and this manuscript for me,*** *and laughed about how easy it was for our lifeworld-inhabitants to mistake that desperation for courage, we eventually circled back to triggers.*



Figure: 75 – Conceptual Photograph by Omar Imam, from the Syrialism Collection. (Imam, Omar. Conceptual Photograph. Website. 2018)

Caption by the Artist: (quoting from the war-story of his interlocutor, also the protagonist of this conceptual photograph) My Mom said: "you are going to leave me anyhow. Either you will go into the army, or you will go to Amsterdam. It's better if you follow your dream."

Author Engagement: "Superman is supposed to fly, just not blast away."





Figure: 76 – Conceptual Photograph by Omar Imam, from the Syrialism Collection. (Imam, Omar. Conceptual Photograph. Website. 2018)

Caption by the Artist: (quoting from the war-story of his interlocutor, also the protagonist of this conceptual photograph) I provide wedding dresses for all ages, starting from 11 years old. Fathers from Raqqa arrange marriages just so their daughters can escape ISIS grooms.

Author Engagement: Orange is the new White: A Chromatology of Marital-Prisons/ Martial-Prisons/ Martial-Marriages

Here, Omar's Syrialism lays bare how war, through its violences – its trauma, its grief, its cruelty – is *felt* – that is, sensed and made (un)sensible, as an unrelenting onslaught on an individual's body, mind, emotions, sensibilities (aesthetic and otherwise) and materials through (other) bodies, (other) minds, (other) emotions, (other) sensibilities and (other) materials. Pliers, teeth, toothbrushes[57], hands, chairs, basements, hallucinations, confusion, pain, death, contemplating death – these are the registers through which this war/violence is perpetrated and endured. Any act of violence, then, is experienced as an avalanche of complete and utter mutilation across every dimension of living.

In Omar's worlding, and mine, violence '"unmakes" worlds, both real and conceptual' (Scarry, 1987)***, and I argue further, remakes them in/through injurious surreal twistings that reveal the mangle of sociopolitical processes that participate in its becoming.*** In Omar's worlding, and mine, 'Syrialism' is what best captures and communicates this 'unmaking' and 'remaking'... this twisting. ***It is a lens, a gaze, an aesthetic, an aesthetic technique, a methodology, a positionality, a particular way of thinking, an imaginary, a worlding and the process through which that worlding generates... it is a 'machine'*** (Deleuze & Guattari, 2009) ***that fractures our understandings, our conceptualisations, our sensibilities towards war – 'real and conceptual' – and reassembles them to ablaqueate the lived experience of martial injury.***

I think by focusing on this surrealism in the lived experience of war and its violences through his work, Omar reminds us that "...war cannot be fully apprehended unless it is studied up from people's physical, emotional, and social experiences, not only down from "high politics" places that sweep blood, tears, and laughter away, or assign those things to some other field" (Sylvester, 2013b). My bet (the one that shapes this manuscript) is that if we can take his work – and the embodied experience of war – seriously, we can access "the in-between moments (of war) after causes and before endings" (Sylvester, 2013a). After all, "for many of us, those in-between moments that Parashar refers to[58] – when war has started and has not been declared over – are the guts of war, not the wastelands of war refuse" (ibid).

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[57] Omar Imam, interview by author, Geneva, Online, April 29, 2021

[58] While engaging with the work of Dr. Swati Parashar, Dr. Sylvester points out two things that are particularly salient for this text. First, Dr. Parashar, through her work on Sri Lanka, provides us with examples of what life looks like ***'between these two moments (why a war happens and how it ends)' painting war as a social practice as much as a political one.*** This does not imply that there is a distinction between the social and the political - I think it is always the socio-political - but rather speaks to a politics of emphasis: of which stories get told, by whom and towards which ends. Second, "she (Dr. Parashar) also insists that IR (thinks it) knows war but does not consider the possibility that war knows something

And these guts are wailing, waiting to be heard.

Syrialism.
Surrealism in/by/from Syria.
Syria's Surrealism.
Omar's Surrealism/ Omar's Syrialism.
Whose/ My Syrialism?

This is not Syrialism // Ceci n'est pas un Surréalisme Syrien: (Re)Situating Surreality

Or, Fine. War is Surreal/ Syrial. But what the (insert-profanity-of-choice) is surrealism?

"The whole thing [not just the art] is goddamn surreal isn't it?"
- Malu Halasa[59]

about international relations and IR". This text is about the latter: about what war can tell us about "those bits of itself blanked out of IR..." (Sylvester, 2013b).

[59]Interview with the author, 24.02.2022 (Shall we take a moment to meet her?)
Malu and I met, in a way, on accident. I was in one of those rare (but I am convinced universal, at least for researchers working with interviewing) states where what's-the-worst-that-could-happen-research-personality was, briefly, overpowering the sheer-embodiment-of-social-anxiety-research-personality and I decided to cold call the editor's of Syria Speaks (the book from Theoretical note: 5). I had been ghosted so many times by then, including once having already landed in Berlin where I was supposed to meet an artist who cancelled last minute and dropped off the face of the earth (which, again is completely understandable- we all do it, it's just that it fed into a pattern of assumed fail-ing), that I really wasn't expecting a response.
And yet, 12 hours later, Malu was in my WhatsApp having already carved out the entire afternoon so we could "properly do this" and an hour later we were walking through her stories about the "Secret Life of Syrian Lingerie: Intimacy and Design". The woman, to say the least, is an absolute legend.
And she is a legend who has 'done it all' – she has been a journalist with the Rolling Stones magazine, written for The Guardian, the Financial Times, the Times Literary Supplement, Amnesty International Reports, been the Managing Editor for the Prince Claus Fund Library in Amsterdam, an Editor-at-Large for Portal 9 in Beirut, is the founding editor of Tank Magazine (London), and currently also working as a contributor and literary editor at the Markaz Review. She has written (fictional) short stories and novels (Mother of Pigs being a personal favourite that I highly recommend!), and edited eight anthologies and supported several other artists, writers and (photo)journalists by editing their books.
And then there is all of her work in the 'art' world. She was the curator for Transit Tehran in London: Art and Documentary from Iran, the Atrium Gallery, London School of Economics, 2009 which later became an anthology as well and was re-produced as Transit Beirut; and Culture in Defiance: Continuing Traditions of Satire, Art and the Struggle for Freedom in Syria, the Prince Claus Fund Gallery, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2012 – an exhibition toured excessively and was successfully presented at least 4

different festivals. Malu also became the gofer(!) for Syrian graffiti artists, at the Victorian & Albert Museum's exhibition Disobedient Objects, 2015 and was an active participant in Nope to Hope: Graphic and Politics 2008–18, London's Design Museum which sparked quite a controversial stir when the artists themselves stripped their paintings of the walls of the museum after the institution help a reception at the exhibit for arms trade within/of the UK (what could possibly be more Syrial than that?!). And perhaps most importantly, for us anyway, she has been working tirelessly with Ventia Porter at the British Museum to (con)figure out how to bring Syrian artists within the folds of the permanent exhibit there.

Given that our 'interview' lasted 4 hours (with a small lunch break somewhere in the middle) and included back and forths after (and in one of these backs or forths Malu sent over a signed copy of the Secret Life of Syrian Lingerie to my address as a token of our interaction and I have been holding on to that moment as a different kind of armfloat-y than the conceptual ones we have used so far – it is an arm floaty that I use to remind myself the 'why' of all this) it is safe to say that we spoke about 'a lot'. And it is my firmest of beliefs that each of these interviews deserves a book onto itself, that someone should definitely write, at some point- in very far proximity from me and Syrialism. Or, at least just me. But for the sake of what little coherence rhizomes, Syrialism and the design of this dissertation allow, I am going to argue that there are two red threads I can pull out from our conversation and 'transversally' tie to this text and some of its Iconic Conceptual Figurations (from Theoretical Note: 6).

The first is the way Malu performs and operationalises her positionality (something I have seen had the absolute privilege of also observing Dr. Bressmer, Dr. Baroni and Ximena Osorio – three of the spectacularly brilliant women that I refer to in the acknowledgements as well – perform intimately over the past few years. Their way of being-in-the-world, of just existing, with as much care, grace and honest response-ability, as they do is what even allowed me to begin sensing this echo of how our positionalities while being boundaries of what we can know, experience and express of the world do not need to be borders and can be transmuted to become our strengths as researchers and as people, and it is through them, in parallel with my encounter with Malu that I was able to make sense of it, as living with/within a "fierce vulnerability" geared towards real solidarity – something I have spoken to you about earlier while I writing about Adichie and/or Vuong. I am hoping it is clear that this "Iconic Conceptual Figuration" of a "fiercely vulnerable" positionality has driven this whole manuscript). Malu is an American-born Jordanian-Filipino woman who has 'lived' – for extended periods of time, not "just on assignment" – across at least 5 different countries. She had/has always been an "inside-outsider" and having lived at in the in-between of countries, identities, families, cultures, interests, practices, Malu deeply appreciated the important of translation, and its limits, and, at least the way I see it, operationalised her 'in-between-ness', her unique positionality, to dedicate herself to whole-heartedly, with 'fierce vulnerability, to facilitating cross-cultural translations, dismantling the sticky, stereotypical "figurations" we have of places, spaces, events, peoples, agencies, all actors whose figuration-al lives are heavily overshadowed by the reductionism of 'geopolitical-narration-heavy' imaginaries, embodied experiences being effectively obscured. Whether it is through dragging us into the wrung ly-lived streets of Tehran (which becomes sensed and made sense of as a "city of contradictions") and Beirut (which becomes the forever "friendzone") building a "map" of urban embodied experience by following artists, journalists, students, novelists and 'foodies', or through slashing squarely into the "gusts of war" to find ways to make sensible its lived experience as she did with Syria Speaks and more recently with, Woman Life Freedom Voices and Art from the Women's Protests in Iran, Malu finds a way to stand firmly in strong solidarity with the voices of those who are in the business of 'finding and giving a name to their own embodied experience' of the marital. If I could, I would pull a Freaky Friday with her in a heartbeat.

Omar is not alone in (his) Syrialism. In fact, I suppose in a manner of speaking, I encountered *Syrialism* before I encountered Omar, because he is not alone in marrying surrealism to the experience of the Syrian revolution, and its handmaidens - displacement and hunger[60].

Elision-ed Places
(Theme: 'twisted spatiality')
(and Elif Kalaycioglu's "Aesthetic Elisions" (Kalaycioglu, 2020)*.)*

I am thinking here, for instance, of Zaher Omareen's reflections on his life as a journalist, an artist, his own incarceration and how with every experience of injury, of violence, of the martial, the spatialities he frequented in these roles, the hotel-prison-overlays began to morph, converge, diverge – twist – until he became obsessed with "how similar it felt, but how ridiculously different", living through/ within/ within them[61].

And perhaps that's the second red thread I want us to wrap around our pinky fingers: the 'need' and 'desire' of/for/ to work with/through 'anthologies' or 'collections'. I know we spoke of the 'history of living' and its relationship to 'memory' and 'archive' earlier, but I just wanted to flag here with you that the manner in which Malu manages to find a balance between the Roshmon effect of the spaces/events that she explores in her anthologies/ collections, the politics of 'choice' when it comes to curating and archiving these collections, and the preservation/reproduction of 'intimacy' in them is precisely what I was advocating when I was advocating of crafting histories that methodologically act surreal worlds into being.

And I do think that to some extent, this is true for all 'ensemble cast-y' aesthetic productions: think back to Top Girls, or Sandman, or Chicago's Dinner Party, but creating this 'balance' where the performance of collage-ing is as intensely intimate and personal, as it is also multi-PointofView-ed and complex, making them the ideal space to sense and make sense of 'intersectionality', I think, is quite a feat to pull off, and what makes 'ensemble' productions quite hard to choreograph and compose. Maybe that's another paper for another time: something something Intersectionality through the lens of Ensemble Cast productions, hopefully working with Angry Indian Goddesses, Roar, Top Girls and Misbehavior as 'cases'. Meh. Anyway.

Anthologies = Very Surreal = Much happy.

[60] Omar extended this surreal vocabulary to another collection of his titled, "Live, Love Refugee" in 2015. The photographs in the collection "directly question the conventions of "humanitarian photography"" (Eric Gottesman, 2016) and tackle issues of hunger, displacement, and survival, or rather Syrvial- as we will see in the concluding pages of this manuscript (in the chapter: An Epilogue).

[61] Interview with author, 01.03.2022 (Let's also meet Zaher? We did become acquainted with some his work in the previous chapter.)

I met Zaher (and actually Khaled too – whom you will meet in a bit) through Malu. Khaled was one of her co-editors and had written an entry for the book himself, and more than that, I was grateful that having done a doctorate himself just a few years ago, he was acutely aware of the trials and tribulations, and opportunities and fortuities, of the process as a whole.

Zaher, to me, has specialised in storytelling. He is a journalist that has been doing war correspondence for about 15 years now (and was in Ukraine when we last touched base), has spent time in the political-talk-show circuits, produced his own documentaries, written creative non-fictional essays extensively and a few short stories and acquired a doctorate in Media and Communication from the University of London. He has also won the "International War Photographer" award in 2011, the "New Voices from the Arab World Award" at the Copenhagen Literature Festival in 2012 and many others, contributed as a writer himself to several other anthologies, published peer review academic papers and continues to be a trainer and visiting scholar in the Visual Media university-circuit. Basically, if it has to do with visual storytelling, chances are Zaher has tried his hand at it, or in his words, he is deeply passionate about ***"...capturing intricate details and creating narratives through those images."***

Much like with Malu, I am going to try to keep this 'short' so we continue getting better acquainted with Syrialism. ***After Zaher and I spoke of our experiences with academia, about the idea of being a 'practicing' academic, about his transition into journalism, about his 'younger' days in Damascus, about travelling extensively around 'home' (Syria), about 'exile', about our mutual love for mariam cooke, about thinking visually and the how 'alien' those humans were for us who thought in 'words' before 'images', about how words will never do justice to "true emotion" precisely because they make sense, about how if we 'wrote' what we were feeling instead of wrote 'about' what we were feeling we would type either in onomatopoeia or poetry, and we spoke about 'echoes', about 'refrains.' This was what has resonated with him the most from my broken*** (at that time even more so than it is now- because I didn't yet have a nice little laundry list of 5/6 things I could inscribe onto Syrialism, I was looking for them) ***definitions of Syrialism and its 'aims'.***

Zaher and I spoke at length about his own time in 'detention' (he was imprisoned in 2011 before he made his way out of Syria), he was quite struck by the idea of 'echoes' because if he has to sum-up his time in the "place where two generations have lost time" (referring to the title of Yara's chapter in the same book) he would say he was obsessed with "how similar it felt, but how ridiculously different." And in the discussion that followed, I realized that Zaher had (un)knowingly, in talking through some of the most painful – quite literally – moments of his life, helped me puzzle my way around the 'difference and repetition', and/or rather, the 'partial connectivity' dimension of Syrialism. What did I say earlier about feeling like a vulture (footnote: 2)?

This had been the dimension of Syrialism I had struggled the most with communicating/ convincing audiences for/of. At the time, all I had was "I promise, the political torture testimonies I have read, the stuff I am hearing from Omar, Khaled, Zaher, the stuff I am seeing online, it all resembles the stuff I used to hear in group meetings (for survivors of IPV). There has to be a way to 'prove' (I was tiny! I didn't know about the critical stuff then) that it's both torture – one is domestic the other is political or something." You can see why that's not a compelling argument. Or a constructive one. But it's the only way I knew how to conceptualize it then and it was such a massive relief to see that the Medusa tattoo-humans, at least, *just knew* (even if they hadn't seen it yet, the recognition-lamp would immediately turn on in their eyes) that these 'echoes' not just within (Austin, 2017a) but across these "small worlds" (ibid) were 'real'.

So, for a change, I am going to do here, what Zaher did for me- instead of putting into words what I thought of Zaher's essay, I will quote directly two passages that Zaher and I spoke of for quite a bit. (which is totally a cop out because I really did try summarising it but… the words itself are so affectively and aesthetically 'perfect' that I wasn't able to find another way to communicate his ideas) and leave you with the one word, that for Zaher, is what 'caused' or 'created' the refrain, the echo, ***of being "in prison all the time" – (visual) Symbols***.

Trace their echoes. 'Feel' them bore into you, please. 'Sense' the maddening desperation of the embodied experience of trying to 'make sense' of a reality so distorted, so 'twisted', that space, time, location, meaning – "the carefully designed pegs on which we hang our socially-constructed realities" – no longer hold any stabilising agency like the universe itself 'fractures' so prison can always find you. You are completely untethered, disassociated, and have no idea whether you are insane or traumatised, or insane and traumatised, because all you feel is bone-gut-soul-world-deep paranoia. I won't ask you to do this often. In fact, I have tried hard to stay true to not clinically-hide the violence and the violations (as you will see next), but still not force you to stand steadfast in them. But I am besieging you here. Just this once, think from within (your own or someone elses) violating-ly and completely 'unmade' and 'remade'ness, from within injured bodies, from within the interaction of injured bodies trying to speak to/with other injured bodies about injury and the difference and repetition, the partial connections, which if I am being honest, are the only reason I came to DeleuzeGuattari at all, will all fit into place.

"Over the last five years, I found myself moving between two quite different places in Syria. The only connection between them is that they represent the real centres of power. The contrast and interrelation between them throw light on the use of symbols to construct a mythology and to command obedience. A few months before the revolution broke out, I had the opportunity, for the first time, to spend a night in a hotel owned by the army. Such hotels and clubs are spread across Syria, offering leisure services for army officers and their families. The experience of staying in the empty, opulent hotel resembled that of Jack Nicholson's character in the film The Shining, where fear mixes with astonishment and culminates in madness.

The interior of the hotel looks like a military unit. Too many tasteless portraits fill the corridors and facilities. These pictures depict, in various combinations, the current leader, his father, his martyred brother, his brother the colonel and his smiling wife and healthy children. Hotel management prevents guests from wearing swimming costumes in the hallways on their way to the pool. Perhaps this rule is an attempt to preserve the modesty of the president and to respect the stature of his leadership. In the restaurant, waiters move between tables in military uniforms like a raiding unit or patrol guarding more than simply hotel services. What is unbearable is the presence of a photograph of the Eternal Leader above the bed in all the rooms. It is not even possible to dream without the regime's surveillance. This exceptional place is not the Ministry of Love from George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four. It is pure, unadulterated Syrian reality, which explains the nature of rule in my country.

The second place I was dragged to against my will, shortly after the beginning of the revolution, in March 2011, was the detention centre of the Air Force Security Services in Damascus. There all the authorities' touristic features, which are on ample display in the army hotels and in other government establishments, disappear. What remains is an inhumane world filled with constant humiliation and pain as its only language. In this place, power reaches its zenith. Here there are no Presidential photographs to be found, except in the office belonging to the head of branch security. All the furniture

New Normal-s
(Theme: the elision-ed places + 'twisted temporality')
(and Hannah Arendt and her Banality (Arendt, 1970; Arendt & Kroh, 1964))

Or, for instance, of the collages of Ayham Jabr, particularly from the collection he released on Instagram in 2016 – "*Damascus under Siege*". In these collages, we see spaceships sailing across the skies in Damascus, alien architecture (the soaring towers that populate futuristic sci-fi vocabularies) ***occupy*-**ing its urban landscapes and Martians inhabiting, or rather invading, its alleyways. For Ayham, who "loves science fiction books, films, and theories", "…***Damascus is still under siege (sanctions) to this day***… the Martians are governments that are paying loads of money to destroy us…. Yes, they are trying to destroy and kill the civilians in my country not the system or the officials…"[62] These collages, then,

and the room fittings focus on the chair beneath that image of the President. Everywhere else – the walls, corridors, interrogation rooms and cells – is free from such pictures, because the detainees do not deserve the 'angelic look' that emanates from the photograph and the President's blue eyes.
There is no need for pictures in prison.
Everything attests to the State's absolute dominance; this stark, undeniable reality no longer requires symbols behind which to hide. On the outside, the ubiquitous photograph of the Syrian leader has a purpose. It is there to make you think of one place, always: prison.
Keep Zaher and his detention in mind.
Think of how, here, Omareen collapses/ fractures/ transversally brings together/ 'twists and partially connects' two different spatialities, two different worldings, onto one another such that certain parts of each were aesthetically elision-ed (Kalaycioglu, 2020)***, while others heightened, all in service of giving expression to the 'living'/ 'lived experience' of the martial.***

[62] Interview* with author, 22.04.2022.

Ayham Jabr, Interview by author, 22nd of April, Geneva, online.

Ayham Jabr was one of the first people I ever encountered in both the second and third little Syrias. When Ashmeen (one of the most brilliantly creative minds I have had the honour of calling my "person") introduced me to him, it was 'just' a "check this artist out - isn't it cool what he is doing with collages kind of undergrad conversation that started over dinner and ended only 4 days later after we had 'mastered' collage-ing street-epistemologically, of course." It hadn't known then, the importance, Ayham's work would take in my dissertation/life. To re-use a turn of phrase I had used for Omar and Syrialism earlier - I had met Ayham's work then, but I hadn't encountered it.

A couple of years later when I did finally start mapping the 'Third Little Syria' then, Ayham was the first person I reached out to. As I got to know Jabr, I found that Damascus had been home for him for as long as he could meaningfully remember (especially the Jawbar area - the municipality where he was born, raised and continues to live). ***Much like Omar, Jabr too, turned to the aesthetic during the "most heated months of conflict in Damascus".*** The intricacies of living through war and its violences, of the surreality of its embodied experience are what drove Jabr to translate his situated knowledge of the Syrian revolution into surreal collages. ***He wanted to capture both the deep sorrow and the sad beauty (something he returned to often in our correspondence – that melancholy of living in/through "ruins"***

and "ruination") of his 'history of living' in/through Damascus and through that re-imagine the very figuration of war as that of "occupation".

Unlike Omar though, having grown-up in a family whose 'living' was deeply rooted in the performing arts – his grandparents (Mahmoud Jabr and Haifa Wassef) are both distinguished Syrian soap-actors, his uncle is a well credited screenwriter for plays and television, and his aunts, Laila and Marah Jabr and his younger sister have all continued the tradition of remaining married to the 'stage – Ayham came to the 'visual' arts with a deep understanding of texture, dimension, framing and performance. And I think that has shaped the way in which he engages with the notion of the 'canvas' itself. (1) The collages themselves are part photographs, part paintings, part visual illustrations, part movie posters collected from editions of the National Geographic Magazine (which he obsessively collects), from daily walks around the streets of Jawbar, from the science fiction movies he hung-onto for dear life and from ticket stubs and magazine cut-outs and advertisements from humanitarian campaigns. ***Much like us, in Syrialism's house, it was like he went rummaging around, seemingly at random, through the world of aesthetic representations of all morphologies and resonances and brought back tokens that he melded together, inconsistently but coherently, to compose these collages.***

(2) And then there was the matter of the medium itself- I was amazed by, and continue to remain, Ayham's versatility of – and a hunger, almost, for – learned techniques and methods. He has ventured into video editing, graphic design, and photography, and writing, shooting, and editing short films- all of it. [Currently working on an Arabic short film titled "The Poet and The Swan," he steps into the role of an actor, a departure from his usual creative pursuits. ***The film draws inspiration from George Orwell's writings and pays homage to Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani and the renowned actress Mouna Wassef***.] When I asked him more about where this desire for novelty was seated, besides in the salivating taste of learning, (perhaps because we had *just* been talking about ***how he would 'name' his experience of war), he said, "...but I can't express that with any language or word, all wars are bad... really really bad... and so I started doing collage art hand made and digital form in part of experimenting... besides the war was at its most heated in my city so those few months were my first quarantine. All life's details are my source of inspiration (for these collages), but also inspiration comes from the saddest, darkest areas in our lifes."***

(3) And the platforms: Ayham firmly believes that the platform itself is as much of a canvas for the artist, especially when it comes to Instagram (which is what has his preference now, since the afterlives of Tumblr no longer remain as resolute- relatively speaking) and has been curating his feed as such ever since, incorporating feedback from his viewers, actively engaging with them and in some cases, case in point also this text, collaborating.

The canvas then, for him, is this intensely "lived" 'map' of 'fierce vulnerability' where he creates an 'intimacy' between himself and his 'audience' that allows him to make sensible the "history/story of living" in/through the Syrian revolution from within its 'guts', 'ruination' and 'cruelty'.

And this stands true for each of our artists and editors. Omar, Malu, Zaher, Sulafa and Khaled, each treat 'canvases' in this regard as 'dimensions of living' whose emergence is flowing from the desire of/from/within "embodied experiences" to be sensed and made sensible in an 'aesthetic register'.

(My arm float-y here: is I am thinking of the canvas, now, as the atmosphere of a concert hall and not the paper on which the sheet music is printed).

And, much like the story/storytelling of Dastangoi, and the whirling at/in/generating a Sama, this re-figuration of the canvas is 'designed' to intensify its affective register.

and the surreal juxtapositions[63] at their core, I think, are a way f or Ayham to tell stories about ***what the war looked/looks like, or felt/feels like***, in Damascus when he couldn't ***"express that (experience) with any language or word"***. They show us a world in ***ruins***; a world whose fragmented cadavers keep being erratically sutured together to (re?)create (Frankenstein-ian-ly[i]) monstrous realities one after another: a ***twisted/twisting*** world, an ecology, where living is constantly owes its life to death.

Absurd LifeScape-s
(Theme: the elision-ed places + the new normal + 'twisted sense-abilities')
(and Eliane Scarry and her/ the Body in Pain (Scarry, 1987)*)*

Or, I am thinking of Sulafa Hijazi's[64] digital illustrations in "Syria Speaks: Art and Culture from the Frontline" (Halasa et al., 2014), and in her other projects – "*Ongoing*" and

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Ayham's journey into art began with the chaos of war, finding solace in collage art during the most heated months of conflict. Life's intricate details and the shadows of despair serve as his muses, transforming into surreal collages that echo both beauty and terror.
The war, an indescribable experience, has left an indelible mark on Ayham and his loved ones. As they navigate the complexities of conflict, their shared commitment to art serves as a source of strength and resilience.

I would like to quickly flag that 'interview' is used rather broadly here. Since Ayham was – and continues to remain – in Damascus, for a variety of security and logistical reasons, a conversation could not be arranged online. As such, we have been in extensive correspondence via email, where we essentially write long-form letters back and forth to discuss his work, life and politics.

[63] ***These collages are made using the surrealist technique of superimposition. Jabr took photographs of Damascus on his daily walks and then, superimposed stills from different science fiction films, movies and/or images onto them in order to create these digital illustrations- superimposing "two different spatialities, two different worldings, onto one another such that certain parts of each were aesthetically elision-ed*** (Kalaycioglu, 2020)***, while others heightened, all in service of giving expression to the 'living'/ 'lived experience' of the martial" (from the previous footnote) much like Zaher did/ felt in his hotel-prison, but he also does this across temporalities. Past, future, present, atemporality, all find twisted entanglement in his aesthetics and through it all he seems to be tapping into the "new normal" that Omar was speaking of – the new rhythm of the 'daily', the dull routine of/within/through the exceptional, that exists within the martial – echoing, Arendt's take on the banality of martial violence and the practice of performing 'doing' injury.***

[64]You will notice that Sulafa's 'introduction' is absent from the text (well she is present in the Artist introduction from the Translator's Note, but not in a deeply personal sense). That is *absolutely not* because of any concern of importance/ relevance/ emphasis, but rather 'simply' a question of research logistics. On the day we were supposed to meet, literally a few hours before our coffee date at her studio in Berlin, Sulafa got her Covid-19 results and was positive. Somehow that one non-meeting spiraled into a year of missed calls, long-no-sign-of-life-periods-followed-up-with-profuse-apologies-on-both-our-parts, and finally a ghosting. But I strongly encourage you to read more about her work here, and of course, all the artwork presented is with her explicit permission as with everyone else. I am sure you remember seeing some of her other artworks, when we walked through them in more detail in the earlier pages.

"*the Cycle*", through which she explores how, "**suddenly, death in Syria became a fact of life**" owing, not just to the ongoing conflict, but to a larger **circuitry** of a **hyper-masculine militarised society** that is constantly reproducing cycles of violence. Her illustrations, for instance, show a "sewing machine making use of a human being for thread" stitching together a military uniform, or a naked agonizing man in labour, giving birth to an assault rifle, or a gloomy-teal-y burqa-clad woman "striptease"-ing her way to her own disembowelment, or - circling back to the circularity - a Ferris wheel bloated with individual compartment-pots shooting (up) armed and armoured shadows. These jerking juxtapositions show us that Sulafa's Syria – and the **bodies** through which its very **becomings** are **mediated** – disgorges a caustic **cruelty** that has/is consistently corroding the very metaphysical fabric of that multiverse. And that in the (un/)clarity of this cruelty's-fallout[65] "the ***Fragile Threads of Power***"[66] (Schwab, 2023) that ***entangle*** different and differential violent practices turn radio-luminescent.

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[65] ***'Fall-out', here, was used hoping to burst forth/ allude to its other (embodied-)semiotic assemblage: the aftermath of radioactivity.*** The term traces its etymology, I think, at the intersection of nuclear politics and a politics of air since it emerged as the "figuration" (Haraway, 2004; Weber, 2016)for the process in/through which radioactive particles that seep into the atmosphere after a nuclear explosion, eventually 'falling' to the ground as dust, or through precipitation. And this liquid, seeping, permeable, metastasizing, contaminating aspects of its texture are seen resonated across it's other translations be it in terms of an adverse conclusion to an action (from bankruptcy, from a band breaking up, from foot-in-mouth-ing a situation: anything really) or a situation, say a 'political' fallout, or in terms of materialities, spaces, technologies designed to 'survive' it in the first place- a fallout shelter (concrete or in the game series: Fallout) for example (typically having thick walls, underground location, reinforced entryways, 'secured' accessibility- everything to create a barrier that would stop penetration/breach of the seeping/ permiable kind.)
Cruelty – seen within this text as a "diagram" (Deleuze, 1994) ***that operates within/on/through Sarin Gas attacks (as you will see, very briefly, when we walk out of Palmyra and towards Syrvival) – takes a similar morphology: it seeps into the very atmosphere of a space, event, act and is performed through different acts of condensation, clinging onto materialities, lands, technologies, bodies, non-human actants – onto breathing itself – and the very air within which all living is submerged.***

[66] I borrowed this turn of phrase from the title of Schwab's latest book because, well, I will let her tell you, by quoting from the 'blurb' she wrote for the book, describing it's 'setting':
Once, there were four worlds, nestled like pages in a book,
each pulsing with fantastical power, and connected by a single city: London.
Until the magic grew too fast, and forced the worlds
to seal the doors between them in a desperate gamble to protect their own (Schwab, 2023).
Are you also beginning to hear the refrains?
'Partial Connections', 'Materialities', 'Four… connected by single' or Multiplicity, 'Maps', 'Magic' or Affect, 'Force' or Violence, 'Doors' or severed Pluralities, 'Gamble' or Response-ability, and of course, the 'Fragile Threads of Power'… the tangle of fragile but durable Embodied Entanglements, and the collage of Surreal Real-ity through which it is all sensed and made sensible.

Figure: 77 & 78 – Collage by Ayham Jabr from his Damascus Under Siege Series.
(Jabr, Ayham. Digital Collage. Flickr. 2015)

Caption by the Artist: "I love science fiction, books, films, and theories. By the way Damascus is still under siege (sanctions) to this day... the martians are the governments that paying loads of money to destroy us... yes they are trying to destroy and kill the civilians in my country not the system or the officials, all politicians are full of sh&$."
Author Engagement: Occupy-ing// Occupy-ed Landscapes



Figure: 77 & 78- ***Collage by Ayham Jabr from his Damascus Under Siege Series***

As I had mentioned earlier, Jabr is still in Damascus and in one of our 'interviews' (or rather, our letters to one another,) I had asked him what his 'daily routine' was like. I was hoping that the rhythms of his daily movements, his daily living, would make sensible for me the current modes of living in and through Damascus. As he told me how it was "a really mess…", how he "feel(s) attached to every alley, street, and road in Damascus city, such a mesmerizing city", and how he works everyday on his short films, on experimenting with new media, on working out, on his guitar (which is a "personal passion") and how "By the way the power (electricity power) comes 6 hours only... Do you even know how frustrating is that we have to do what we supposed to do in 6 hours from the all mighty 24;" I could imagine him pretty clearly going about his 'everyday' but I could only see (in this imaginary) silhouettes of roads, and buildings, and landmarks- shadows really of the images I had spent months researching. So, I asked him to "Tell me a bit more about Damascus. I have never been and it seems so strange to me to write about a place I have never visited you know? So I would love it if you could describe the city for me- the way you see it? Is there a particular street corner that you love? Where do you always go for coffee? Is there one path that you walk on more than the others? Has the city changed in the past few years?" And his answer, I thought, and am pretty sure Ayham will agree, was the perfect caption here.

Caption by Jabr: What can I say about Damascus?...
The wall that still not shattered... Only glimpses on what lay behind.
I think we developed that wall. To have 4 walls and make a room out of them is the only thing the Syrians need and depending on to. And that's why it never changed.
But it is the most beautifully city in the region because all the fabrics in it many civilizations in front of your eyes all the time how cool is that!.
I used to be a social active... I kept and still keeping myself busy all the time since I started doing collages, do projects for others to earn some cash, and writing scripts consumes a lot of my energy, because besides that I am not a writer, I just write things I like to watch... I started to take new paths every time I like gyms more than coffee shops it's more useful and squeezes some ideas from my brain…

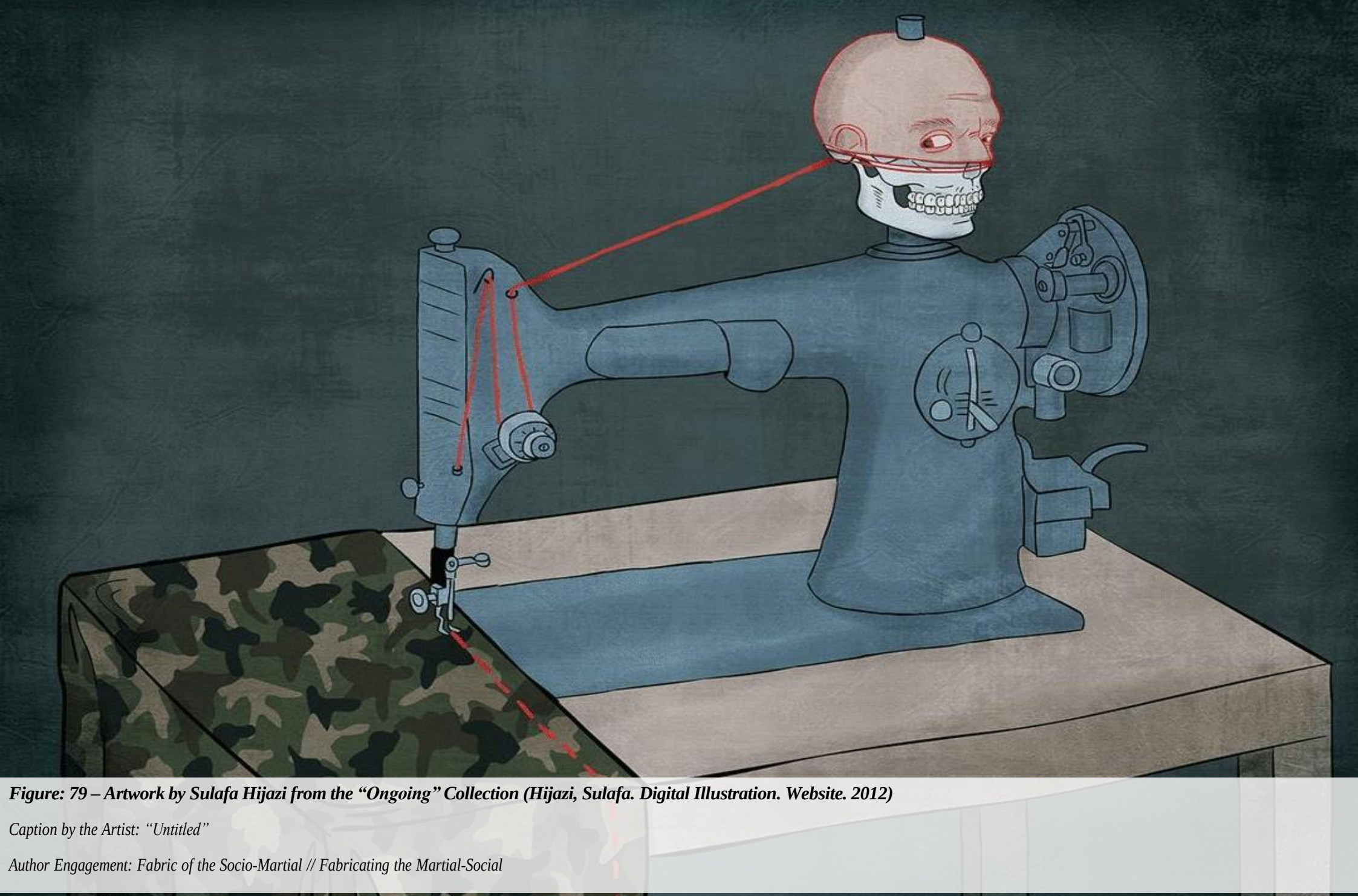


Figure: 79 – Artwork by Sulafa Hijazi from the "Ongoing" Collection (Hijazi, Sulafa. Digital Illustration. Website. 2012)

Caption by the Artist: "Untitled"

Author Engagement: Fabric of the Socio-Martial // Fabricating the Martial-Social



Figure: 80 – Artwork by Sulafa Hijazi from the "Ongoing" Collection (Hijazi, Sulafa. Birth. Digital Illustration. Website. 2012)

Caption by the Artist: Birth

Author Engagement: Birth-ing Death // Death-ly Birth

Objects with "Hidden Lives"
(Theme: the elision-ed places + the new normal +the absurd lifescapes + 'twisted socio-materialities')
(and the Small Worlds of Jonnathan Luke Austin (Austin, 2017a)*)*

Or of Khaled Barakeh who was able to spawn pieces like *Mute*, *I haven't Slept for Centuries*, *Self Portrait as a Power Structure*, *No Man's Land*, *Design of Necessity*, and *Regarding the Pain of Others* across court-house gardens, in graffitied streets, rooted in Norwegian churches, within museums of course, but also in the afterlife of a *na'ash* that migrated from Da'al to Frankfurt. Khaled (like Omar, Ayham, and Sulafa) moves through each of these canvases (stitched through with golden-threaded-maps, embossed onto exit signs, wounded by black gestural markings mimicking post-torture-wounds-and-scars), objects (satellite dishes, passport stamps, mushrooms, coffins), sounds and videos (poems, the ambient sounds of a graveyard, a monochrome collection of the architectural-etches that are imprinted onto every page of a Syrian passport), spaces and performances ***twice. First, he slices open the knotted ties that these surfaces have with the semiotics they are swamped in. Second, he seams by hand new sensorial-semiotic-social strands onto these surfaces.*** In doing so, his pieces, show us how the **machinations of injury** – how the minutia of the becoming of war practices and their violences – and death, are twistedly tethered not just to the bodies but to the **objects, spaces,** and **atmospheres** of living. Death slips into life and living into dying quite seamlessly, yet violently, in Khaled's Syria. As does vulnerability into resilience and back. There are some things lost, and some other (often overlapping but not quite congruent things) being reclaimed. His is a Syria of intense **multiplicity** and **re-figuration**.

These stories that Ayham, Sulafa and Khaled are composing – at least the ones showcased here – stand in strong solidarity with Omar's *Syrialism*. There is repetition here. Though all three of these artists differently rely on juxtaposition-ed reimagination[67] as a poetic (i.e. in its 'poesis[68]' resonances, therefore denoting its generative capacity), i.e., world-making

[67] An other forms/ mediums of surreal crafting (utilized and enacted by other artists and, sometimes, with far less dexterity, expertise or aesthetic intensity by the author as well): collaging, superimposition, exquisite corpses, dream resumes, cut-up, calligramme and the paranoid-critical method.

[68] Here, I was thinking of poetic in reference to Plato's poiesis. In the Timaeus, Plato presents us with the artisan-like figure of the demiurge and his (indeed, his) ability to design and reproduce the physical universe i.e. birth creation from ideas. This process of creation, of something that did not exist before being created, was termed poesis. But, I suppose I mean poesis more in the Heidegger-ian sense - not the literal corporeal physical creation of something that did not exist at point A in time, but does so, at **point B - but rather as a "bringing forth" i.e. an unfolding (with its connotations of processual**

Figure: 81 – Artwork by Khaled Barakeh (Barakeh, Khaled. Digital Print on Paper. Website. 2018)

Caption by the Artist: "I Haven't Slept for Centuries... In the creation of this work, stamps representing a multitude of granted visas, passed checkpoints and denials of entry were copied from the artist's own passports. These isolated stamps were then collaged onto a single, crowded page. ***These decade of movement between different countries coalesce into a single mass as a new identity begins to emerge****. As the layers of ink in the print become increasingly opaque, the original identity begins to be obscured, a tiny fraction disappearing with each stamp.*

Author Engagement: The Things we Carry // Bags and Belongings ("What Refugees Carry with Them", Time Magazine; "What's in My Bag: What Refugees Bring When they Run for Their Lives", International Rescue Committee; "The Most Important Thing: What would you bring if violence or persecution forced you to flee your country?", UNHCR, Spotlight; "The Things We Hold on to: Refugee Children carry Memories of Home", UNICEF; We asked refugees: What did you bring with you?", Mercy Corps; "Passport, lifejacket, lemons: what Syrian refugees pack for the crossing to Europe", The Guardian.)



temporality), or rather, an emergence. Poiesis then is an appreciation of the creative capacities of emergence.

Figure: 82 – Artwork by Khaled Barakeh (Barakeh, Khaled. Mixed Media Illustration. Website. 2009)

Caption by the Artist: "Transparencies is an archive of newspaper images gathered since February 2009. It is a collection of overlapping accidental, often callous juxtapositions. The simple addition of backlighting collapses separations between pages and subverts the original intentions of the international news media, creating new contexts and perspectives."

Author Engagement: Intimacies (& Distances) of Hopper-ian Frame(-ing)s



(or rather world re-assembling) technique, and create their own versions of this Syrialism, – focusing on different aspects, dimensions, processes and/or stories of the embodied experience of war – ***this technique is transversally*** (Bains, 2005; Basaran et al., 2016; Bennett et al., 2004; Bleiker, 2000; Hoffmann, 2022; Huysmans & Nogueira, 2012; Reynolds, 2009), ***fracturing-ly*** (Ansems de Vries et al., 2017; Huysmans & Nogueira, 2012, 2021; Huysmans & Pontes Nogueira, 2016)**,** ***resoundingly, vigorously reverberating-ly, geared towards differentially (re- or rather co-)producing a pluralistic dynamic figuration of a violent every day and a mundane exceptional through which war-injury is surreal-ly sensed, and made sensible.***

Slippery Excesses
(Theme: the elision-ed places + the new normal +the absurd lifescapes + objects with hidden lives + 'twisted semiosis/ worldings/ living')
(and the Syrialism of it all)

In fact, these sensibilities of plurality/ multiplicity, partial connectivity, processual-ness and the Syrialism of it all animate the stories being told by many, many other Syrians as well. I am thinking here of Ossama Mohamad's story, the "*Thieves' Market*[69], where she brings out the surreality of the different 'demonstrations' her protagonist has attended since her childhood, of the character's domestic torture at the hands of her husband, of the death of her friend andhow these different experiences of violence and their differential traumas made her feel "as if on film".Or of *Goats*, a play by Liwaa Yazji where she investigates "how we normalize surreal happenings in war" (Emma Graham-Harrison, 2017); of Hello Psychoaleppo's (Samer Saem El-Dahr's) music, the genre – *ElectroTarab*[70] – that he pioneered, the visuals that accompany his music (particularly in *Shahba*) and his discussions about how notions of return and home have themselves become surreal (Robert Cusack, 2017); of the cartoons from Kafranbel anonymously[71] created by its inhabitants as sardonic political commentary of the form international response took in Syria; of the memoirs of Dara Abdullah and Faida Lazkani where the former transports us to a communal cell in the al- Khatib prisonin Damascus, laying bare its abject, surreal, brutality and the latter takes us along her 'Kafkaesque journey' to find her brother who disappeared in prison.

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[69] Mohamad in Syria Speaks (Pages 17-26)
[70] Here El-Dahr brings together two different musical aesthetics essentially making a collage of sorts of recordingsof rare Bedouin musicians and (re)mixes it with Electronica.
[71] The collective initially called themselves 'Occupied Kafranbel' but later started signing off their artwork as 'Syrian Revolution- Kafranbel.'

I am thinking of the songs and chants that have echoed through the streets of Syria since the beginning of the revolution (2011) and how this music has its "roots in the *arada*, a traditional performance that usually takes place during weddings" (Halasa et al., 2014) or of the remixes of Karem Farok[72]; of initiatives like *SouriaLi* (the name itself a double entendre that roughly translates to both, "*Syria is mine*" and "*Surrealism*"), an online non-profit radio station "built with Syrian hands for a better Syrian future" (Kathrine Jane O'Neill, 2012) that covers everything from cooking shows and sports broadcasts to political analysis and cultural commentary and/or the "*Land of Childhood*", a subterranean theme park-esque improvised playground[73] in Arbin (Olivier Laurent, 2016) that was built by volunteers from the city to transform tunnels and basements – the underground landscapes – "from being a place associated with attacks, fear and horror to a fun place that engages children as they pass through it" (Suriyaarachchi, 2017).

I am even thinking of the 'head"lines' we have seen over the past few years when it comes to Syria. Journalists have described their experience of the space itself as surreal (Katie Van Syckle & Ivor Prickett, 2019),(Patrick Kingsley, 2016), (Sam Dagher & David Labude, 2021) or of Bashar al Assad's responses (or lack thereof) to the harrowing realities of the conflict (Anne Barnard, 2016), (Marc Tracy, 2013), (Patrice Taddonio, 2015) and Buzzfeed has even curated a catalogue of "33 *Surreal* Photosof the Civil War in Syria".

In fact, I think we can see this intimate entanglement between surrealism and Syria (or more accurately between surreal lexicons and the lived experiences of the Syrian revolution) even in the user-generated footage that has been streaming out of the country. Whether this content takes the form of videos, photographs and/or posts that platform 'open-source intelligence', identifying equipment and providing advice and insight into military tactics and weapon use, essentially creating a cottage industry of sorts (like we saw with Archer in the second 'Little Syria'), or it details stories of hope, laughter[74], joy, solidarity- stories of survival

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[72] At 18, Karem decided that "Salil as-Sawarim", or "Clanking of the Swords", – one of the most popular anasheed (an anthem/ a chant) of DAESH (/ISIL) – was perhaps getting a little too popular. He admitted that the rhythm was so catchy, that he it would get stuck in his head. ***"So I wanted to transform it into a tool for mocking the Islamic State"*** and by creating a remixed version of the song that became very popular in clubs around Egypt (and then went viral) he did just that- he "managed to turn it around completely, from death and violence to dance." (Elin Hagerlid, 2015).

[73] Built by creating a tunnel between two basements and redecorating them extensively.

[74] I am thinking of photographs like the one that was released by the Aleppo Media Centre (AMC) that shows children diving into the water that collected in a crater left behind in the bombing- it was their makeshift swimming pool.

Or of Selva's laughter. I came across Selva in February 2020 when a 21-second video from Saraqib, Syria went viral. Against the soundscape of war, Abdullah Mohammed was sitting on a olive green sofa, his 3-year-old daughter Selva, excitedly standing next to him beaming at the camera. ***With big round eyes and a tender voice, barely above an excited whisper, the father asked his daughter, "Is that (noise) a fighter***

that inhabit the martial landscape, there seems to be an element of surreality in these narrations[75]. This entanglement – this *Syrialism,* as Omar so ingeniously put it – is what I am (perhaps morbidly) fascinated by.

Encountering it was the impetus behind this dissertation and as such, echoing (and extending) Mitchell's original call[76], I am hoping to trace its intricacies by focusing on "*What Syrialism wants*"…

jet or a bomb?" Her cheeksred, her tone self-assured, Selva responded, "A bomb. When it comes, we laugh." Before she can even finish thesentence, her face turns to stone, she stands there, staring into space, as if in stunned into anticipation by a distanthissing, and a split-second later she bursts into laughter, her voice a perfect synchronous tenor to the bass of the bomb. Mohammed taught Selva to cope, to survive, through this game.

[75] Ideally, these stories would have populated this manuscript just as much as their more overtly violent counterparts. But boundaries, as I grudgingly came to terms with, no matter how arbitrary, had to be drawn for the sake of 'delimit'-ing the 'scope of the study'. Since I don't think that these lines of inquiry are any way, shape or form, any less important than the story I am hoping to tell right now – a story that (unfortunately?) begins and ends with the moments of physical violence, I am letting the photographs decide for me. These photographs, these artists, these videos- this violent encounter with the violences of and in these images are what thrust me into the Syrialism pluriverse. This whole process started with stories about war's violence and its experience and I am choosing to honor that encounter, first.

But perhaps someday? Someday road-crater-pools, laughing-at-bomb-children, underground-playgrounds, bedsheets draped from opposite balconies to construct cloth-walls (I will return to these in Khaled's 'After the Last Supper' at the beginning of the Conclusion) will populate my Little Syria as well.

[76] In 1996 – and then again, and in more detail, in 2005 – W.J.T. Mitchell presented us with a deceptively simple question: What do Pictures "Really" Want? (Mitchell, 1996, 2005). In asking this question, Mitchell, I think, wanted to shift away from thinking about what pictures mean i.e., "how they communicate as signs and symbols" to what pictures want. In the former approach intent and/or desire is typically linked to the producers or consumers of the images, i.e., "the picture is treated as an expression of the artist's desire, or as a mechanism for eliciting the desires ofthe beholder." In the latter, however, the "location of desire" is shifted to the image itself such that, "What pictures want, then, is not to be interpreted, decoded, worshiped, smashed, exposed, demystified, or to enthrall their beholders. They may not even want to be granted subjectivity or personhood by well-meaning commentators whothink that humanness is the greatest compliment they could pay to pictures. The desires of pictures may be inhuman or nonhuman, better modelled by figures of animals, machines, or cyborgs, or by even more basic images-what Erasmus Darwin called "the loves of plants." What pictures want in the last instance, then, is simplyto be asked what they want, with the understanding that the answer may well be, nothing at all."

My reading of Mitchell is that he was asking us to think about the affect of images- how images themselves, beyond meaning and the politics of situated production and producers, affect the world. In a similar vein, I am hoping to see not what Surrealism/ Syrialism means, nor look only at where it comes from, by instead looking at what it does- how it affects the things it finds itself entangled with, treating it more as a sensibility, I suppose, than a sign/symbol/entity.

Look. Listen. Feel. *This* is the refrain:

Occupation. What War Feels Like. Keeps being-ness. Erratic suturing. **Constantly. Suddenly.** Twisting/ twisted. Death becomes a fact of life. Ruins. Circuitry. Cruelty. **Juxtaposition. Hyper-masculine militarized society**. Bodies. Objects. Spaces. **Fragile Threads of Power. Entangle. Becomings.** Mediated. Silence. Screaming. Fractured. **Unmade/ Remade**. Re-assembled. **Re-imagined**. Resilience. *Surrealism*. Syrialism. *Occupation*. What War Feels Like. Keeps being-ness. Erratic suturing. **Constantly. Suddenly.** Twisting/ twisted. Death becomes a fact of life. Ruins. Circuitry. Cruelty. **Juxtaposition. Hyper-masculine militarized society**. Bodies. Objects. Spaces. **Fragile Threads of Power. Entangle. Becomings.** Mediated. Silence. Screaming. Fractured. **Unmade/ Remade**. Re-assembled. **Re-imagined**. Resilience. *Surrealism*. Syrialism. *Occupation*. What War Feels Like. Keeps being-ness. Erratic suturing. **Constantly. Suddenly.** Twisting/ twisted. Death becomes a fact of life. Ruins. Circuitry. Cruelty. **Juxtaposition. Hyper-masculine militarized society**. Bodies. Objects. Spaces. **Fragile Threads of Power. Entangle. Becomings.** Mediated. Silence. Screaming. Fractured. **Unmade/ Remade**. Re-assembled. **Re-imagined**. Resilience. *Surrealism*. Syrialism. *Occupation*. What War Feels Like. Keeps being-ness. Erratic suturing. **Constantly. Suddenly.** Twisting/ twisted. Death becomes a fact of life. Ruins. Circuitry. Cruelty. **Juxtaposition. Hyper-masculine militarized society**. Bodies. Objects. Spaces. **Fragile Threads of Power. Entangle. Becomings.** Mediated. Silence. Screaming. Fractured. **Unmade/ Remade**. Re-assembled. **Re-imagined**. Resilience. *Surrealism*. Syrialism. *Occupation*. What War Feels Like. Keeps being-ness. Erratic suturing. **Constantly. Suddenly.** Twisting/ twisted. Death becomes a fact of life. Ruins. Circuitry. Cruelty. **Juxtaposition. Hyper-masculine militarized society**. Bodies. Objects. Spaces. **Fragile Threads of Power. Entangle. Becomings.** Mediated. Silence. Screaming. Fractured. **Unmade/ Remade**. Re-assembled. **Re-imagined**. Resilience. *Surrealism*. Syrialism. *Occupation*. What War Feels Like. Keeps being-ness. Erratic suturing. **Constantly. Suddenly.** Twisting/ twisted. Death becomes a fact of life. Ruins. Circuitry. Cruelty. **Juxtaposition. Hyper-masculine militarized society**. Bodies. Objects. Spaces. **Fragile Threads of Power. Entangle. Becomings.** Mediated. Silence. Screaming. Fractured. **Unmade/ Remade**. Re-assembled. **Re-imagined**. Resilience. *Surrealism*. Syrialism.

Translating Syrialism:

Critically (Re)Imagining

the Drives of this Text

The Exquisite Corpse of Surrealism// The Surrealist Machine:
(Re)Conceptualizing Syrialism

Or, Fine. War is Surreal. And Surrealism is a register/lexicon for the 'lived'-ness of War. What the (insert-profanity-of-choice) does that have to do with IR and War-Stories?

Surrealism 'is'..., Syrialism 'is'... "Is", here – and perhaps everywhere – 'is' a treacherous word. It implicates subsequent words in the definitional process, somehow implying that the subject in question has a particular essential characteristic that can be methodically drawn out, effectively bound, and functionally communicated as the object of said sentence. In that regard, it is safe to say, that, prima facie, Surrealism/ Syrialism – which, as its histories betray has always been an asignifying signifier – 'is' nothing, not within the parameters of this essay anyway because as mentioned earlier, the argument here, then, to reiterate, isn't about what Surrealism or Syrialism is or the bramble of what it means, but rather about Surrealism wants- what effects does Syrialism produce, how it affects the politics of the things it finds itself entangled with.

So, what does Syrialism want? Or rather, what does Syrialism do? Which realities does it draw out, which experiences does it intensify, which war stories does it (re)make- how does it affect the way we engage with war and its violences? I think that, keeping this laundry-list-of-unbelievably-stirring-Syrian-art in mind, as a 'design-practice', this form of Syrial story-telling, with its ***emphasis on the twisting of socio-relationalities between materials, spaces, temporalities, technologies, bodies, affects, senses and sensibilities when it comes to the 'living' of/ through/ from/ within martial violences***, declares-

A) that ***surreality/ Syriality*** is the ***texture of the lived experience of war and its violences***- a texture that we can map, trace, feel, and therefore, investigate[77]; a

[77] At first, I wanted to argue that by soldiers from the World Wars (Remarque's "All Quiet on the Western Front" and/or Passos' "Three Soldiers" for instance), by historians and memoirists of the Vietnam War (The Vietnam War series by Geoffrey comes to mind), by journalists writing on the genocide in Rwanda (Jean Hatzfeld's "Machette Season" is a good example), novelists recreating the Yugoslavia War (like Julian Borger's"The Butcher's Trail"), by anthropologists working in Palestine and Somalia (for instance, the works of Gil Z. Hochberg and Anna Simmons), by relief workers and organizations (think here of the reports and special issues released by the Human Rights Watch and the International Committee of the Red Cross, in particular the cases published in the International Review of the Red Cross on War in Cities, Testimonies of Former Child Soldiers in the +Democratic Republic of the Congo, or Detention: Addressing the Human Cost and so on) and so on, all speak of this "surreality" in one form or another – 'anyone and

texture that allows us to 'stay with the trouble' of looking at/through the embodied experiences of war's violences. **It wants to be recognized as a conceptual description/ a "working concept".**

Think here for example of how this entanglement betweenSurrealism and War is not unique to the Syrian context, i.e., theirentanglement is not necessarily always (shaped as) Syrialism. Instead,their peripatetic affair stands well- documented.

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everyone in the business of war-testimony' as I have mentioned in the sticky note there – and that that is what makes this Syrialism or surrealism a "feasible subject of inquiry".

Insert profanity of choice, again 'Feasible subject of inquiry': I cannot quite express my distaste for that phrase either. Either way, though that was my intention, I found/ continue to find myself woefully incapable of engaging conscientiously with the affective experience of war – the anger, fear, humiliation, terror, hope, resilience, creativity through which it is lived. I am not sure how to access this affect, how to work with/through someone else's emotional experiences, how to do right by those stories, how to even (re)tell them in the first place especially when these are stories of life, death, pain, anger, anguish, hope, resilience... of living. I am terrified at the prospect of being violent towards those whose stories I would want to tell, of lacking the vocabulary to convey their flesh-and-blood-ness, of not knowing how to capture, especially not verbally, the sheer depth of human emotional experience of anything, let alone violence. I wouldn't know how. I keep thinking of Derrida and his conceptualization of eating the other in the "rhétorique du cannibalisme" (1990–1991) lecture series. According to David Krell, "Derrida's entire course turns about a conundrum: All you can eat is something other- not just any other, of course, but the nourishing other; yet ingestion is followed by excretion, the elimination of what in the nourishing other could not be assimilated; hence one cannot eat all of even the designation other, at least not without residue, not without what the French call les restes. There are always leftovers and scraps, not to mention the unmentionables, to be eliminated and then purged by water or purified by fire- inasmuch as purification is pyrification..." (KRELL, 2006) A while ago I had mentioned that in an attempt to practice care as best as I can, Iam trying to leave as much room as I can for my interlocutors to tell their own stories. However, in keeping withthe quiddity of the work we do as researchers i.e., in trying to 'make sense' of/from their stories I extract a particular violence on them: I consume them. This *Insert profanity of choice, again* eating haunts me because while this consumption is what sustains me as a researcher, what nourishes this dissertation and this project, what sustains this intellectual labour; it is also, inevitably, violently selective. I leave out – 'eject' – parts of their stories I cannot process. I forget – and therefore sometimes misplace – where the emphasis lies in what I am told, 'pissing away' their importance. I misinterpret gestures and silences I am sure, essentially 'spitting' at them, reading into them only what I think I see. How do I perform effective waste-management? How *Insert profanity of choice, again* do I practice ethical cannibalism? As I have mentioned earlier, there are others who have brilliantly and courageously struggled with these questions. I don't quite feel ready yet to try and follow in their footsteps, petrifyingly inspirational though their work may be. And so, focusing on this aesthetic lexicon of 'excess', of 'twisting', of 'surrealism', of that which cannot be explained through the (frankly) suffocating structures of our Cartesian-ized 'rational' thoughtscapes, is more feasible, more honest, for me. And, as I spoke of earlier, these aesthetic representations are, undoubtedly, both sites to understand politics and political sites in themselves. It is in this regard then, that I turn to surreality as the texture of the lived experience of war and its violence- a texture that we can map, trace, feel and therefore, investigate; a texture that allows us, at least me, to 'stay with the trouble' of looking at/through the embodied experiences of war's violence. [For a more detailed discussion on the representation, aesthetics and the politicality of it all see inter alia: (Agius, 2013; Amoore, 2007; Bleiker, 2001, 2015, 2019, 2021, 2012; Hansen, 2011; HANSEN, 2015; Harman, 2019; Lacy, 2008; Lisle, 2007, 2017; Sylvester, 2015; Welland, 2017, 2021)]

Journalists, historians,anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, investigators, soldiers, victims, witnesses, perpetrators – anyone and everyone – in the business of (re)collecting and (re)producing "testimony"/ intimatestories of war's violence, all tell us that War and its violencein/from the 'frontlines' is 'chaotic', 'absurd' (Arendt, 1970),'slippery' (Taussig, 2007) and has an 'abundance' (Bousquet et al.,2020) or at the very least, it feels chaotic, absurd, slippery, andexcessive- surreal.

For me, the presence of this lexicon of surreality that captures the embodied experience of martial violence – this notion that there was an 'excess' beyond sense/meaning to its affective, sensory, and narrative experience was/is rather intriguing.

If war – as I had mentioned above, expanding on Scarry and thinking with Sylvester – "'unmakes' worlds, both real and conceptual" and grotesquely reassembles the cadavers, the relics, the detritus, then surreality, in these stories, is the mechanism of generative unmaking (of an "uncanny reversal of worlds" (Hirsch, 2014)), of twisting, through which the lived, embodied, excessive, 'surreal' experience of war becomes intensified. It is about thinking with Bousquet et. al. that, "inwar, through war, beyond war, the tumult of conflict periodically unsettles and shatters the reality principle of our understandings" (Bousquet et al., 2020). These surreal stories derive their lifeblood from the "stream of consciousness that experiences war" i.e., their power, their affective potential – their potential to affect – lies in theirability to tap into and magnify moments/ experiences/ slices-of-life where war and its violences are made sensible through an "unbridled deregulation of the senses and emergent subjectivities (Bousquet et al.,2020)", through an utterly violent, and violating, twisting.

B) that ***surrealist/Syrialist storytelling*** (as a genre/method) fights to emphasize certain ***dimensions*** of this lived experience: it emphasizes that conflict-violences can be sensed/felt/experienced and made-sensible as (i) ***embodied*** (co-produced) ***processes*** that are (ii) "***multiple"*** (Mol, 2003) in texture and "***plural"*** (Blaney & Tickner, 2017) in valence and as such (iii) consistently, though not constantly, "***partially connected"*** (Strathern, 2005) to other violence/violent processes. It tells us that through expository (iv) ***defamiliarizations*** and (v) "***critical re-imaginations"*** (Choi et al., 2019), these surreal stories, widen the apertures through which we understand war, allowing for a (vi) ***re-"figuration"*** (Haraway, 2004; Weber, 2016) that bring actual machinations of the injuries of war and the particulars

of how it is sensed and made sensible into focus[78,79,80]. **It desires to operate as a "device"-ive methodology, or rather an "ethico-onto-epistem-ology".**

And why shouldn't it? The etiologies of the art-form itself stand embrangle with the history of World War I. From what I understand, beyond/beneath/beside the totems of the bowler-hat-man of Magritte and/or the moustache of Dali – and perhaps his melting clocks – surrealism's skeleton is seared poetry, revolution, military service, psychoanalysis,medical science and manifestos, and forged in the socio-political ecologies of the 1920s and1930s Paris (Amy Dempsey, 2019; Breton, 2020; Chadwick, 2022). The 'movement' was formed around a reaction almost, a response, a rebellion, against the structures of thought and social life that certain artists (who had lived through the war) believed had led the world to this war in this first place: structures of control grounded in (Western, modernist) rationalism. Tinted by the political alignments of these artists – most of them identifying eitheras Trotskyist, Communist or Anarchist – the movement was designed to re-imagine the verymetaphysics of our worlds, and the manners in which we engage with them such that Surrealism became a modality of being more than just a form of aesthetic expression. Artists, poets, playwrights, literary critiques of this bend were all

[78] Disclaimer: This is not an archaeology or genealogy of Surrealism as an artform- there is no excavation of the discourses around/of surreality to trace what it means, nor is there an attempt to understand and analyze what theconcept meant at different intervals in time, in different epistemic traditions. It is simply a mapping of the concept-an open-ended description of the work Surrealism has done, and continues to do, in the becoming of our lifeworlds.

[79] It has been rather difficult to find surreal archives and histories beyond the west for there seems to be a (barely) latent Eurocentrism in crafting its histories. But the works of certain authors, such as Dr. Anneka Lessen (expert in the Surrealism of the Levant) has helped tremendously as have books like (Bellan & Drost, 2021).

[80] Quick note on the 'unmaking', the 'excess', the 'twisitng'- I have already talked to you about how this twisting is a form of surrealism – Syrialism – and how it allows us to encounter the embodied experience of war, the multiplicity of/in war and explore its connections/ relationalitiesto other processes. But there is something else that these authors touch on here- they identify an abundance of sensory and affective experience that goes unnoticed/ un-analysed/ un-articulated, at least verbally. I think that this abundance, this excess, is the content of Syrialism (at the risk of extending this analogy rather brutally becausethere isn't really a difference in the form and content when it comes to surrealism: As I mentioned in the Dedication for the text, and repeat again, "The medium is the message"(McLuhan & Fiore, 1967)). Here, I am thinking with Dr. Antione Bousquet, Dr. Nisha Shah and Dr. Jairus Grove's "Becoming War: Towards a Martial Empiricism" and a special issue in Security Dialogue that accompanied this article. Among other things,the authors, spoke of what an encounter with war's processual multiplicities might look like, emphasizing its sensory and affective abundance (an abundance haphazardly captured by Clauzewitz admonition of War's inexorable randomness, which the authors also allude to) – and for them, I think and I concur, war is waged by, through and on the senses with visceral effect. Taking inspiration from (Anderson, 2010; Herr, 1991; Serres, 2008; Sloterdijk, 2011) among others, they argue for a martial empiricism that would allow us, as scholars, to move beyond testimony or ethnographically thick descriptions and away from the parsimony of "the conflagration of battle"-accounts towards an understanding that when we 'encounter' war, it seems surreal.

aiming to somehow "resolve the previously contradictory conditions of dream and reality into an absolute reality, a super-reality", or sur-reality, because their lived experience of the war haditself eroded these boundaries. What these works then had in common was an "insistent obsession with rendering the supposedly self-evident strange, of transforming platitudes intoparadoxes through contortions, and rhetorical twists and reversals" (Hirsch, 2014). The "object was to undo the reigning bourgeois mentality of order and luxury and to replace it with aesthetic forms derived from the deepest depths of the human imagination" (ibid).

The movement, then, I think, desired to make visible and render absurd – among other things – the naturalized, internalized control- structures of our societal infrastructures, borrowing visions from what could have been and can be. In this regard, beyond/beneath/beside dreams, automatism, the sub/unconscious and absurdism, Surrealism, Hirsch thinks, and I wholeheartedly concur, "is first and foremost, about the uncanny reversal of worlds"; about the experience of twisting and the deductions and excesses born of it. It was born of, expressed, and found expression within, a moment where a world war and its violences re-assembled worlds, individual and collective; and it is in that capacity that I think it finds putrefying symbiosis with any expression of the lived experience of war.

This relationship between surrealism and the embodied experience of war becomes evenmore pronounced perhaps in the more recent, and more global, histories of surrealism. Looking atthe encounters between Surrealism and Haiti, Martinique, Cuba, Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, Algeria, and of course, Syria, art historians and critics seem to find some consensus in the notion that while surrealism remains 'multiple' (Mol, 2003)– its manifestations unique at every juncture, its semiotics deliciously diverse and divergent – there is an echo, a refrain of two themes.

For one, as described earlier, Surrealism was birthed as a form of expression, a way of seeing the world, a way of experiencing it – and giving voice to that experience all at once – where embodied reality constitutes not just the rational (or often not the rational at all) but also the sensory, the affective, the corporeal, the material and the technological- all as equals. Reality itself is seen, experienced and expressed as Frankenstein; especially violent reality; especially the reality of violence.

And second, as Ahmad Sadawi and Hassan Balasim so poignantly makes clear, and as I alluded to earlier, this embodied experience shares a thematic- it is an experience of constant processual un-making and grotesque reassembling… a "derangement of the senses" … a surreality born of twisted relationalities, creating an alternate ordering. Surrealism is/ has always been a highly populated affective worlding, and Syrialism and the violences of war are but one of its inhabitants.

C) And therefore, ***Syrialism*** – at least within the rather porous limits of this dissertation – can best be understood as a "***machine***" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2009; Kleinherenbrink, 2020), i.e., **it wants to be – and be seen as – an "act"-ive method.**

According to Deleuze and Guattari, ***"A machine may be defined as a system of interruptions or breaks (coupures). These breaks should in no way be considered as a separation from reality; rather, they operate along lines that vary according to whatever aspect of them we are considering. Every machine in the first place, is related to a continual material flow (hyle) that it cuts into. It functions like a ham-slicing machine, removing portions from the associative flow: the anus and the flow of shit it cuts off, for instance; the mouth that cuts off not only the flow of milk but also the flow of air and sound; the penis that interrupts not only the flow of urine but also the flow of sperm… In a word, every machine functions as a break in the flow in relation to the machine to which it is connected, but at the same time is also a flow itself, or the production of a flow, in relation to the machine connected to it. This is the law of the production of production"*** (Deleuze & Guattari, 2009).

There is quite a bit to unpack here, but I think, what is perhaps most useful for us is the idea that this 'breaking', this 'interruption', that a machine produces/ generates/ creates[81], *this slicing off*, ***is simultaneously a moment of rupture and in that it breaks away from something and is a moment of re- assembling/ re-production/ re-creation, of suturing, and in that it generates something new/ different/ else… something twisted. Unmaking-Remaking. Re-making-the-Unmaking. Unmaking-the-Remaking.***

From where I stand, then, Syrialism is a machine – in fact, I would argue that it is a desiring machine – that slices us off from certain war-stories (and the machines that produce them) and instead generates an affective kind of war- story: a chimeric account of the lived experiences of war allowing us to feel, to sense and make sense of war differently. Perhaps,

[81] These interruptions/ breaks can take three distinct forms: The first, of course, is that of a hiccup or a rupture in the circuitry of a given machine through which another flow is generated- it is a slicing-off. The second form that this breaking can take is that of detachment, while the third can be characterized as the residual break (coupure- reste). From where I stand, any given machine may perform any given twisting – or all of them at once – at any given time depending on the processual circumstances; and Syrialism is a rather surreal machine.

this – at least for me, for us – is the most crucial 'affect' of Syrialism: it is an avenue/a tool/ a machine through which we can attempt to "translate war experience into war knowledge" (Sylvester, 2013a) and in/through that translation give us an 'opening'/ a 'fracture'/ a 'rupture'/ a moment of deterritorialization in which we can critically re-imagine the very 'figuration' of war itself.

Refrain.
Syrialism, then,
is an analytical lens but "not only" (De la Cadena, 2015)
it is a particular gaze but "not only",
it is particular aesthetic and/or
a particular aesthetic technique but "not only",
it is a methodology but "not only",
it is a particular positionality but "not only",
it is a particular way of thinking but "not only",
it is a particular imaginary but "not only":

because it is at once a worlding/ a war-experience that is generated, the process through which that worlding/ war-experience is generated, and the epistemological tool through which is worlding/ war-experience is generative of war-knowledge; it is all this and more – it is *a desiring machine*. And its desires have shaped this text.

Syrialism desires a worlding wherein war is seen, felt, understood and analysed as an acutely social and embodied process that intensifies the multiplicity and (partial) connectivity of the actors (human, non-human, technological, material) that shape/inhabit it, such that its politics are sensed/ become sensible through iterative (re)entanglements with practices, logics and affects of violences that are considered discrete and ecologies that are considered removed from the war-front. It (re)creates an affective story of war that essentially erodes figurations of sanitized-war-as-an- extension-of-politics, instead insisting on its messiness- on the dissolution of dichotomies such as exceptional-mundane or home-war fronts or its different typologies. War becomes about injury, about harm, and their daily machinations because war is felt through this injury, this harm. Its socio-political register then shifts from a focus on groups, military tactics and/or cause-consequences to processes, practices, performances, their embodiment, aesthetics and affects: an image more akin to 'gore capitalism' or 'racial surveillance'.

In doing so, Syrialism – Omar's and mine, differentially, but repetitively – elicits "war's incessant becoming" (Bousquet et al., 2020), insisting that war and its violences be 'studied'/ 'understood' as they are sometimes 'felt'- as intensely embodied, aesthetic and affective

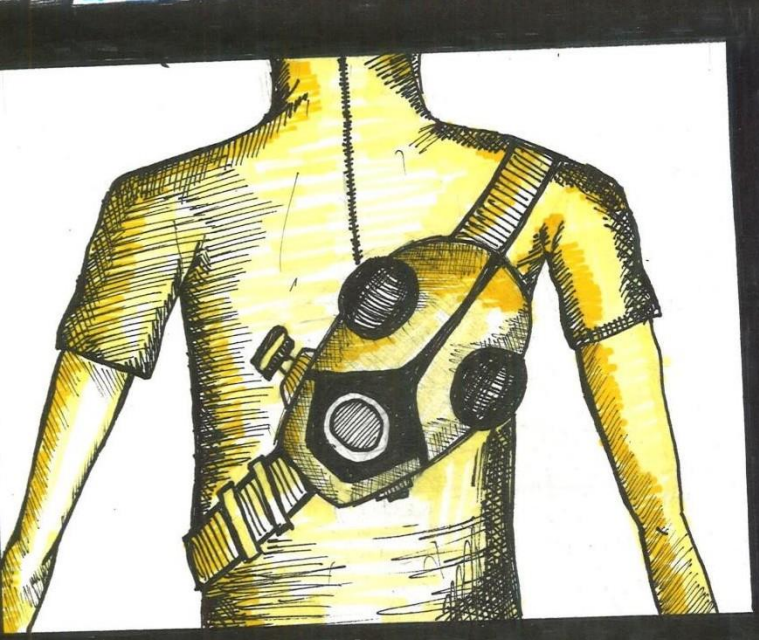
processes that violently "unmake" – and 'remake' – "worlds, both real and conceptual" (Scarry, 1987) so we can trace the politics of its daily machinations… the politics of injury and harm.

At the cost of repeating myself, Syrialism/ surreal-story-telling as a machine generates war-stories that emphasize the twisting of the relationalities between materials, spaces, temporalities, technologies, bodies, affects, senses and sensibilities that participate in any violent/violence process and in doing so, declare that: war and its violences are felt/ sensed/ experienced as (1) ***embodied*** (co-produced) processes that are (2) ***multiple*** in texture and (3) consistently, though not constantly, ***partially connected*** to other violence/ violent processes. Through expository (4) ***defamiliarizations*** and (5) ***critical re-imaginations***, these surreal-stories, widen the apertures through which we understand war, allowing for a (6) ***re-figuration*** that brings the actual machinations of the injuries of war and the particulars of how it is sensed and made sensible into focus.

"And I realize… Three fundamental truths at the exact same time."
- Satisfied, (Miranda, 2016)

"*Number one*", Syrialism, then, allows us to sense and make sensible, war's incessant becoming. And we will see how in the next Chapter on 'beheadings'.
"*Number two*", Surrealism – (should) allows us to (also) sense and make sensible the incessant becoming of our socio-political pluriverse– at large.
Did we already see that when we visited their home?
"*Number three*", Surrealism finds refrain in the texture this pluriverse then, its morphology, its cadence, its rhythm, its resonances. And we will see that in the 'Conclusion'.

Difference and Repetition (Deleuze, 1994).
Different Repetition.
Differently repeated.
Repeating Difference.
Repetition and Difference.
Repeat?



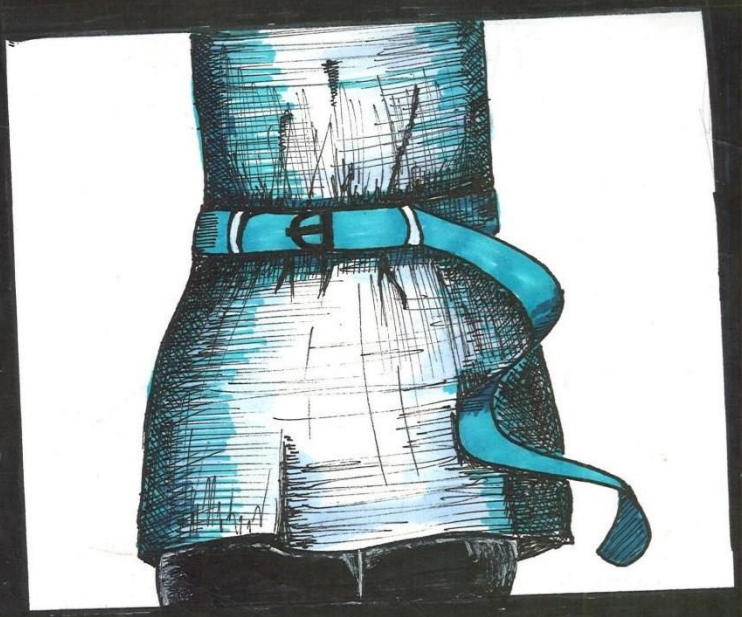


Figure: 83- Meet Syrialism.
(Puri & Saupin. The Syrial Last Supper. Comic Strip. 2023).

(Pronouns: They, them, Age: 13 years- same as the Re volution)

(Identifying features: the gasmask a gift from Cruelty, the belt a trophy from White-supremacist-capitalist-imperialist-patriarchy, the Guillotine heels borrowed from Ruination,



the tattoos that they and the Death triplets got inked together, and the jacket that muffles them.)







Figure: 84 – Meet the Death Triplets

(Pronouns: They, them)
(Age: As old as the idea of life itself)
(Familial Status: Children of Syrialism)

(Identifying features: besides being triplet?

The 'headphones' and 'screen-mediation-ing-laptop' of 'aesthetically sanitized Death we see on Humanitarian posters',

The 'tattoos' that 'ethnographically grounded lived Death- the death that care-fully cares about the living' is getting inked,

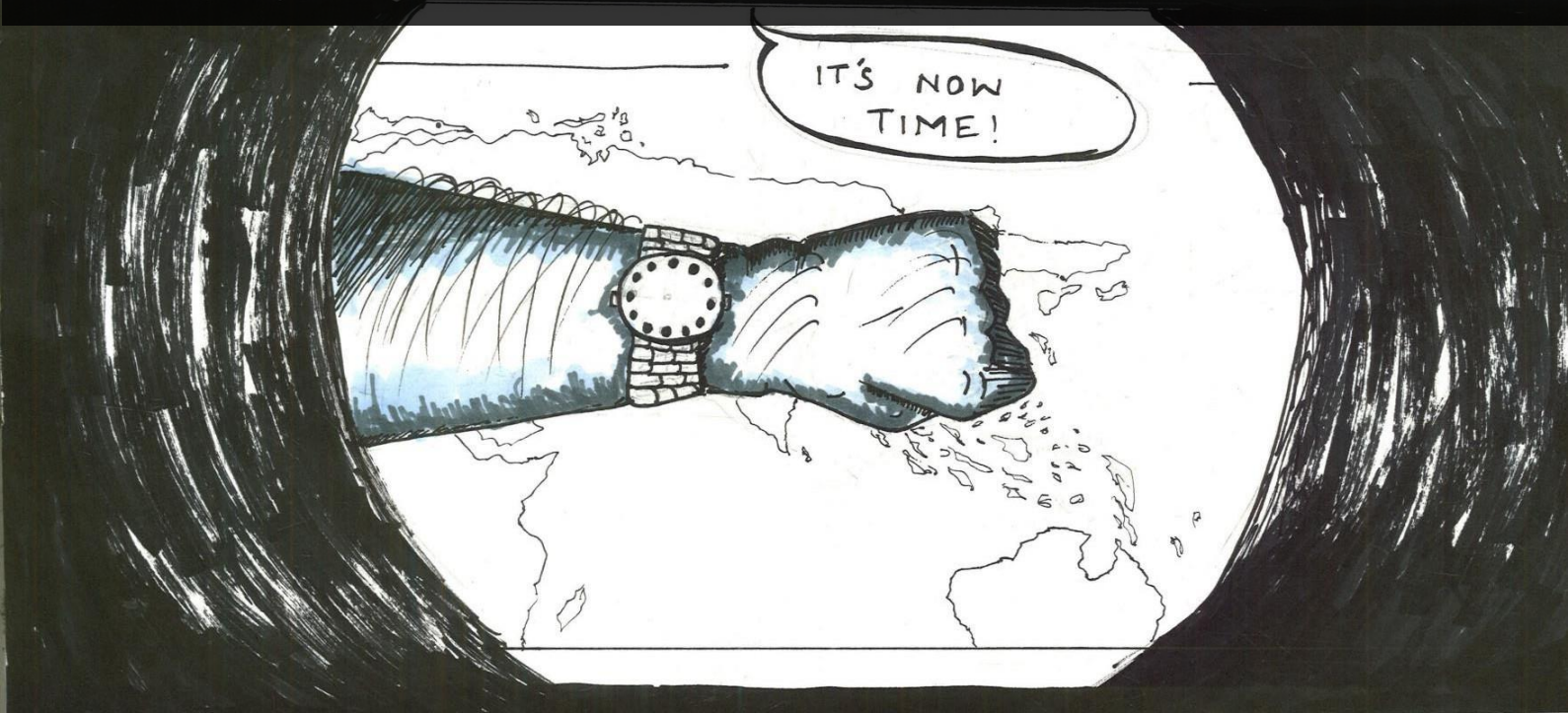
The 'glasses' on 'statistically mediated Death who refuses to 'see' dying, focused only on measuring death'.)



Figure: 85 – Meet White-Supremacist-Capitalist-Imperialist-Patriarchy (ibid)

(Pronouns: He, Him)
(Age: Apparently as old as our current worlding)
(Familial Status: Grandparent to Syrialism)

(Last known address: at "Everything Everywhere All at Once.)



Syrial Interludes

Field Note: 1-
Navigating Non-Representation

You and I have spent quite a bit of time briefly waltz-ing with the idea that vocabularies of collectivity and of distinction are (almost) offensive within the multiverse of this dissertation, but in some ways, every now and then that runs against the grain of its non-representational (Vannini, 2015) texture. I suppose its only fair that when talking of things, ideas, practices, and worlds, that are coherent but not cohesive, that are multiple (Mol, 2003), that the theoretics of this text echo that as well.

How do I put into strict-ish classifications that the 'syrians' here are supposed to be (1) not all 'S'yrians, (2) not the syrians from the first Little Syria, (3) not all syrians from even the other two Little Syrias, (4) not even all syrians that did give names to these silences, and dove head first, as I have said here, into the exploration of their own embodied experience of the violences of the revolution, (5) but rather, just the few syrians, and their worldings, within this larger field of self-exploration that I could somehow manage to get access to- online, in person or somewhere in between. Their words, ideas, theories and experiences in no way, shape or form represent the experiences of all 'S'yrians, nor those of groups 2,3 and 4. They do not even "represent" the experiences of each other, in both the affective renditions of that word: these 'syrians' do not speak on behalf of (even) each other (let alone all 'Syrians) and their experiences do not amount to a reflection/ portrayal of the experiences of all 'S'yrians.

These 'syrians' – Omar, Ayham, Khaled, Sulafa, Malu and Zaheer and others whose words are the stimulus and sustenance of this text – 'simply' are the group/ community/ social-section that gave me access to their violence/ violent lifeworlds and across whose lifeworlds that is an 'echo', a 'repetition, a 'refrain' in the description – not explanation – of what the embodied experience of violence is sensed and made sensible, to them and through them to me. The social demographics of this group, the distribution of the privileges and disadvantages across it, and therefore their positionalities make it so that there is no easy way to create boundaries around this 'group' at least within the constructs of socio-political identity (i.e., because of the socio-political makeup of the group itself I cannot say the group constitutes Syrians, from X city, within Y age group, of Z gender, and explores their embodied experience of violence across A, B and C dimension. That is exactly the kind of research I found myself unqualified to perform for all the reasons I have mentioned previously and will detail again in the pages to come).

So, I stick to 's'yrians with that small 's' and find unsatisfactory solace in knowing that this group can best be described as an 'affective' community (remember the Theoretical Note about it and the promise to return to the story of the Medusa-tattoos?) and that, at least to me, almost necessarily means that its margins will bleed transversally across the classifications of our socio-political mappings. Or rather, that it can best be described, first and foremost, as a "small world" (Austin, 2017) onto itself that, then, has certain affective registers to it (and these registers form "line of flights" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2009) connecting it – sometimes durably, sometimes bumpily, always partially – to other small worlds.)

I would argue, that in a way at least, this is precisely the point of an Aesthetic approach to understanding and performing IR. And is precisely why I felt to need to go hunting for the third little Syria. When I was still in the get-to-know-the-context-of-the-place-you-wish-to-study, i.e. the "desk research" stages, I came across a book that course-corrected(?) this dissertation, almost singularly. The only other "encounter" (which, in 'Encountering Syrialism', I had drawn out the impact and definitional contours of) of this "intensity" (Lisle, 2021) was me finding Omar's Syrialism. In fact, Syrialism had sent me in search for other artists that were doing the 'self-exploration' I speak of in the footnote above and along with

initiatives like the Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution, a few Facebook pages here and there, back then at least (in 2017), there were only a few spaces that were meticulously archiving the sheer deluge of creative expression that was flooding out of Syria and had been since the early days of March, 2011. Well, at the very least, for the non-Arabic speaking non-Syrian, there were very few avenues that gave an aggregated view of sorts (all the violence of inclusion and exclusion accounted for but suppressed in the face of the necessity of an introduction- a 101-course, so to say) of the creative resistance that was charging across the country. One of these spaces was the book, "Syria Speaks: Art and Culture from the Frontline" (Halasa et al., 2014).

With/ Across 36 entries, written by and/or featuring almost twice as many artists, writers, performers, musicians and/or art- collectives, Malu, Zaher and Nawara had found a way to give us one the most 'fiercely vulnerable' (I use this turn of phrase quite a bit and will return to why when talking you through Adichie and how she shaped my understanding of "embodied experience") work of art(s) that detailed every single imaginable and unimaginable aspect of the lived experience of the revolution. And I knew (though the 'frustration' I had been feeling until then that I describe in this episodic encounter is a good measure that I had always suspected) as soon as I finished reading it, and talking to both Malu and Zaher, that the third Little Syria – the Little Syria that was populated by syrian art and artists was going to be 'home' for this research. I even remember the exact sentence that made me 'decide' (and you can see from the writing here that conclusive-ity is not of my strong suits.)

"I was born, I grew up, came of age, fell in love, abandoned someone, and was abandoned, all on a demonstration that ended yesterday."

This was the opening sentence to the story that Ossama Mohammed (translated by Alice Guthrie) had contributed to the collection: The Thieves' Market.

It was a (fictional?) story about Suad (named after the aunt whom she didn't want to become like but who made her peace with that name when Suad Hosny starred in Watch out for Zouzou), a woman who lived in and through Damascus before and during the Revolution. It walks us through her life in primary and secondary school, through her relationship with her best friend, her classmates and her school teacher, through her abusive marriage, through her political engagement (state-mandated at first, and then conscience-mandated) and the embodied experience of it all.

The thing is, if you don't know why Suad hated and then loved her name, if you don't know who her best friend was,

or where she went to school and how, if you don't know how her husband treated her,

I think, you cannot know that the revolution, that living through it, that knowing how it is sensed across every surface of your whole being, and how you struggle – and fail over and over again – to make sense of it,

how all of this can only, really, be measured in school chants,

"…With his hand over his mouth the teacher chanted: 'Syria, Syria who created you? I shouted: The Socialist Ba'ath Party"

in 'compulsory donations' to the "war effort",

in solidarity marches for "the Lebanese, the Iraqis and the Palestinians",

"After all those marches with Khadija were over, I missed marching with her. What astonished me was the way she would chant the slogans for Palestine and Syria until she wept- until we both wept."

in classmates being arrested on the stairs of your own school- having been sold out to the Mukhabarat by other classmates.

"One day during the first year of secondary school, Samiha – who known as the 'Communist' – got control of the school PA system, which usually played Ba'athist songs to us between classes and interrupted the hymn 'God Protect You', replacing the word 'God' with a shout of 'the people'. So the class informers brought the Mukhabarat (secret police) and they arrested her on the stairs."

If you don't really know Suad, you cannot know that the violence of it all, can only be measured in forced attendance

at demonstrations she has coercively been attending since primary school, in mandatory blood donations in secondary school,

in a husband's habitual, brutal, abuse, and/or in his gifts of Samsung fridges, Sony televisions and a "Filipina maid",

and in the maddeningly conflicting stories you heard simultaneously.

"We stayed up late every night watching the coverage of the revolution in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Libya, on every channel. After the events in Deraa my joints rattled in their sockets and my mind froze over…From my colleagues I would hear how many civilian martyrs there had been, and from our television, of the military deaths."

And we wouldn't know that making sense of this violence – and not 'just' sensing it – can only be measured

in the death of a best-friend, a bus-ride to Homs and a funeral in al-Qabun

and how this death, the ride and the funeral burn your whole world and being to the ground

until you find yourself, and her, betrayed by – and betraying – the very demonstrations you marched in, every single time.

"I felt that I was under siege, and that some great desolation was looming. So my heart defended my love for Syria. In April I chanted my support during the first demonstration in Seven Seas Square for the regime. My heart was chanting for deliverance. In June I held the edge of the giant Syrian glad that reached to very end of the Mezze autostrade. Laughing, I told my husband to go and hold the other edge of it- but he didn't laugh. In Umayyad Square in July I sang along with George Wassouf when he changed the chorus of his hit song, kalam al-naas to kalam at-net (Who Cares what People say to Who Cares what the Net says). I relaxed, because I don't have an Internet connection, and I repeated my oath of allegiance.

And then yesterday came.

Yesterday my soul changed course.

…….

I glanced at the television screen, and I glimpsed her: a bloodied corpse on the road.

…..

My life flashed before my eyes, as it does in the moment of death- but it was not just my life I saw as if on film, but hers, and not just her death, but mine. The march of my life finished yesterday. My mind had been asleep since Deraa; now it cringed and shrank back like a hunted animal. Oh, my God. Now my senses awakened. I died and I finally noticed what was happening. And then my questions started streaming out. Khadija was killed in Homs while I was chanting slogans in the demonstration."

To me, this, Suad's story, was "oral history" but "not only" (De la Cadena, 2015), and/or a "local", "everyday", "feminist" narrative but "not only". This wasn't just Suad's oral, local, every day, feminist account of a given political event or period. This was the story of her life that happened to be deeply

enmeshed with certain political events and periods. The 'subject' and 'object' in those sentences shifts when we look at it this way.

It was a "history of living" through/with/within the violence of the revolution and beyond it and not 'just' a 'living' history (one that is dynamic in perspective and narrative) of the revolution. And these are the stories I wanted to look at. The way I saw it, it was our/ my 'job' to (1) be able to record, track, trace, map, archive this history of how she – and anyone else who was willing to share with us the most intimate details of how they – actually did the "living", the actual machinations of it, when raw violence (physical, psychological, emotional) was 'just' another "dimension" (of living, (Nordstrom & Robben, 1995)) of their reality; (2) be able to name, acknowledge, appreciate, and investigate the 'surreal'ness (processuality, embodiedness, multiplicity, plurality and connectivity) of it all and (3) be able to see patterns and echoes and refrains across these stories, these surreal histories and to let those details surprise and educate us, because the truth is that (at the very least I wouldn't have been) we wouldn't be able to see the depth of how a "bus", for instance, is a mechanism of state-sponsored violence, or how connected "demonstrations" are to 'intimate partner violence', or even see the embodied dimension of this socializing mechanism and its affective register (demonstration as bartering, for instance) and/or get insight into how mass-'betrayal' is a political affect that needs much further investigation.

"The demonstration?! What does that word mean? How would it be translated? 'Walking'? Or 'Workshop'? 'Walking workshop' or 'walking market' or 'thieves' market'? It's battering- stolen peace for stolen security."

And/Or,

"I began walking around the house, watching television. Footage was being shown of crowds marching in a demonstration in Homs. As I marched in the house (after resolving to expose her husband's abuse), they marched in Homs."

And/or,

"I felt the demonstration betrayed her."

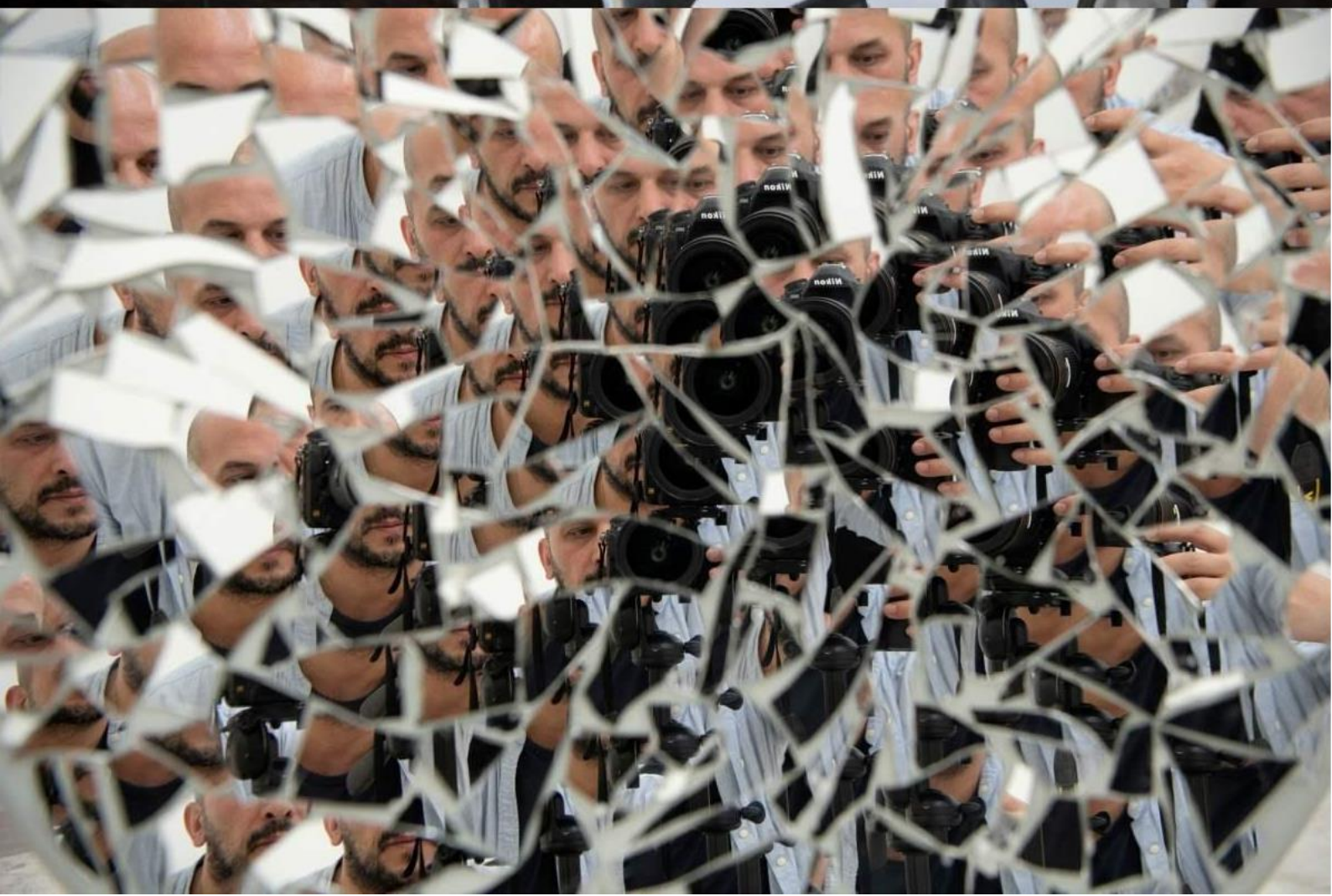
Now, Suad's story, is a work of art i.e., to some extent it is 'fictional'. But as I have discussed earlier, the aesthetics of it make it equally – and in its own right – a rather intrinsic subject of study. I don't make a distinction between stories that are 'fictional' or overtly 'autobiographical', not in the stories that populate Syria speaks, and not elsewhere in this dissertation with other works of art, because at the end of the day, these stories are truly important as 'sources' and 'data' for mapping this history of living, because they are so intensely affective: through their aesthetics they generate certain affects, and through that, they also act as a moment of truly (a/)effective encounter- they deeply affect the way we see the revolution and its violence.

And, for all the reasons I have tried to track and trace in through the encounter 'episodes' as a whole, I had no way of getting to these stories myself- I had to rely on the stories that were made available to me, fictional or autobiographical or as I soon learnt mostly-somewhere-in-between, by the 'syrains' in the third Little Syria.

I get the need to make this distinction though, I really do. After all, one of the reasons that I went out to start interviewing these artists in the first place was because I wanted the "real" stories. But I had to unlearn that, mostly because of them, because they made me see that there was no distinction for them. Their art was their life which was their politics and how they participated in our world. And if I really wanted to do right by them, I had to see the world the same way. It went back – and landed me at (who

knows which way that directionality went)– the whole non-representational, rhizomatic, affective worlding apparatus I have constructed here. And it helped me grapple with, the singularity, at least to me, of Aesthetic approaches to IR: these aesthetic representations are both sites to understand politics and political sites in and of themselves (something I have discussed, I hope, quite a bit in the Prologue and Translator's Note).

The "subject of study", therefore, (as we can see from this discussion and will see in the very next pages when I walk you through Syrialism's house) is it the artwork itself, the artist, the experience of making that art, and the experience of the violence that is depicted in that art- all of it. It's the lived experience of 'violence', of how it sensed and made sense of. And it is the sensing and the sensemaking, simultaneously, because the 'affect' of these aesthetic works is a constant becoming that is the interaction effect, to put it in brutal/ unflattering simplicity, of all and the sensing and sensemaking of the viewer, writer, and reader. Everything, Everywhere All at Once (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022), remember?









Figures 86 & 87: Photographs from "Shattered Images of the Self" and "Images of the Image Makers" themes of the Design of Necessity collection (introduced at the beginning of the conclusion).
(Barakeh, Khaled. Shattered Image of the Self. Multimedia Art Installation. Website. 2021)

Caption by Khaled: "...brought Barakeh and the twelve Syrian asylum seekers and activists together to ***share their stories of survival and resilience***. ***They broke mirrors into shards, which they then fixed to the inside of satellite dishes. This reproduced a technique Syrians developed under sieges to harness the sun's rays in the absence of fuel and electricity.*** *This is how Syrians heated scarce water and food, notably mushrooms, to survive.*

Design of Necessity artwork made with the participation of Amer Kazkaz, Dima Sada, Fadia Alokla, Ghazal Shemi, Haya Termanini, Joudi Obaide, Lojain Ajek, Ola Ajek, Rami Mahouk, Tarek Kelani, Yasser Omar, Yousef Fares.

...Additionally, the workshop's participants ***each took a self-portrait using their reflections in the shattered, recomposed mirrors on the satellite dishes,*** *which were hung inside the church for the exhibition taking over the space for the summer of 2022.* ***These portraits communicate the shattered images of selves and communities that Syrians carry after years of political repression, siege, starvation, forced disappearance, and forced displacement. The photographs also serve as a reminder that Western media rarely, if ever, represent Syrians as a complete image: either victims or threats, Syrians are not permitted to appear as full, complex human beings."***

Field Note: 2-
Mapping an Affective Community

We have already gone over the 'affective community' bit of this 'mapping'-entry in Theoretical Note: 4, but the 'mapping' of it, I think, has a substantial impact on how we understand the basic infrastructural/conceptual networks of this manuscript as well. So let's dive into it. There has been quite a bit of discussion, at least within the Actor-Network Theory (ANT)[1] landscape, about the differences and

[1] **Any given 'act'/ 'event'/ 'iteration'/ 'instantiation'/ 'practice' of any violence, here, in this manuscript is *always* without any exception compositionally an "assemblage" and metaphysically a "process".**

Insert-profanity-of-choice the hell(fire) do I mean by that? Glad you asked.

(JK. I know you are sick of it, but it will all make sense once you meet Ruination and Cruelty, later in the text). Like I said earlier, I have embarrassingly little knowledge (relatively anway) to my brilliant colleagues when it comes to the intricacies of new-materialism/ STS scholarship. But I am going to try my best to walk you through, now, my *very* 'twisted', 'biased', reading of how I understand the two and their relationship. The way I understand it, is that both these "Iconic Conceptual Figurations" work within/ and reproduce the larger cosmology of 'Process philosophy'. I have come to arm-float-y it for myself as the branch/tradition/performance of philosophy that argues that 'becoming' (as fundamental to this thesis as the 'rhizome' itself) is the thing that keeps our worlds worlding, i.e. that the answer to the question that has been asked since pretty much humans have been human-ing in whatever forms they human, the answer to what the *insert-the-most-intense-profanity-you-can-think-of* is reality even made up of, is "becoming."

Western philosophical traditions, I think, in my mind, because I am thinking of DeleuzeGuattari here, can be broken up into 'being'-people and 'becoming'-people. And the same goes for, (please do not murder me before I finish this manuscript, after finishing is fairplay - but if you do, let it be poison, I prefer Wolfsbane), or at least went for, International Relations: there were 'realism' people, and 'social-construction' people.

P.S.- please consult, (Braidotti, 2013; De la Cadena, 2015; De Landa, 2021; DeLanda, 2005, 2006, 2013a, 2016, 2019; Deleuze, 1988; Deleuze et al., 1986; Deleuze & Guattari, 2004; Deleuze & Parnet, 2007; Faber & Stephenson, 2011; Lisle, 2021; Lorraine, 2011; Massumi, 2021; Omura et al., 2018) , to know more.

Let's return to Calvino's Venice (that you will visit in the next few pages) for a moment.

Ethico-Onto-Epistemology	Venice	Composition and Change
'Being' People	Would see the 55 cities that Polo describes as all concrete cities, with specific unchanging characteristics. So that memory, trade, death, desire, naming, would/could all effect the city but not alter some of its more enduring foundational features. It's very Shakespeare-an (only in this quote from Romeo and Juliet) It's very Shakespeare-an (only in this quote from Romeo and Juliet)- for these	Hence, they are those who thought (1) there were 'actual' and 'virtual' (very roughly, the concrete and the conceptual) substances with 'essential' properties that made up 'reality', and the processes and occurrences and events were (2) comparatively less agentic because they could not affect'/ 'change' the fundamental nature of the 'being' (person or

	people, "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet" and therefore still be, technically, a "rose."	thing or reality) even if it could impact it a little.
'Being' People	(Just like Romeo, they thought there was something 'enduring' about a person/ thing that won't change with "external" or internal stimuli no matter how weak or intense that might be… something 'essential'.)	Remember the Ship of Thesus? They would argue that though there was a process of change to the components of the ship, the 'nature' of the ship remained the same and it will *still* be Thesus's ship.
'Realism' People	(I see them as intimately entangled with the Being people.) Would only take on board the descriptions of the 55 cities that Polo describes that they thought were 'corresponding' to the 'truth' of their realities completely, i.e. that they would think about tracing and tracking power and relationalities between these 55 cities based on 'actual' 'facts' about their 'essential' characteristics, and decide a course of action based on what 'rationality' demanded, not taking into account how Polo felt about/being in the cities. (A rose here too is still a rose, but we know it is a rose because reason-able-y we have no 'reason' to see it has changed.)	Hence, these are those people that think that (1) there were 'actual' and 'virtual' substances with 'essential' properties that made up 'reality' independent of whether we could experience them, and (2) processes and events and occurrences could potentially be agentic, but 'within reason'. For them then, the ship of Thesus, will always remain the ship of Thesus, despite how many logs we change out, or how we or Thesus experience the ship, because the ship's thesus-ness, its ownership, is a 'truth'/ 'fact' that is 'objective'. It is his unless there is a title-transfer or capture, or any other kind of physical, concrete change to the ownership.
'Social Constructivist' People	Would argue that what 'truly' matters is the reality that Polo and Kublai Khan, and Calvino and us as the audience, construct, quite literally, together and the process and power dynamics that go into constructing that reality. So, it doesn't matter if these 55 cities are real or not, what will become social 'fact' will be what Polo can convince us of as the 'real' and the extent to which we will buy into the reality he is constructing through that performance.	Hence, these are people that think that (1) the relationship between the actual and the virtual is not an inherent or objective given, but rather, a socially constructed, stable and agentic, semiotic bind that constructs and reflects the realities we live in and as such, (2) change is possible but only through a rigorous process of social reproduction. So, whether Thesus's ship
	(Here too, a rose will still be a rose because we typically tend to think of Romeo as quite a powerfully agentic	continues to remain his ship or not will be dependent on whether we, as humans, who

	narrator and as such will buy into the reality he will create.)	socially construct the norms and knowledge that govern are lives, have set structures in place that would allow for this form of ownership, and if not, then it would depend on whether we would be willing to construct – socially – a different set of norms, knowledges, and structures.
'Becoming' People	Would see the 55 cities that Polo describes as cities, that were in a constant state of always becoming those cities- mutating but also remaining roughly the same with every new iteration of them being remembered, explained or experienced. So that memory, trade, death, desire, naming, would/could all effect each city completely altering it since there are no 'essential' characteristics to any object, idea or being. The rose would no longer be that exact same rose if it didn't smell as sweet even if we continued to call it a rose.	Hence, these are people that think that (1) the relationship between the actual and the virtual is not an inherent or objective given, but rather, dynamic process of constant 'becoming' (but unlike social-constructivists this open-ended-ness is not dependent on human interpretation) that is influenced by processes of interaction, of intra-affect, where the agencies of all things (human, non-human, ideas, objects, spaces etc.) interact and influence each other to form momentarily, contextually, contingent shapes and as such (2) change is not only possible but the very driving force of this metaphysical universe: change in/of/within the constantly morphing relationalities between heterogenous entities. Here, the ship of Thesus would never have remained *that* ship of Theseus even if none of the boards were removed, but say, it treaded more water than it had a moment ago.

And it is from these 'Being' people that the 'Neo Realism'/ 'Transcendental Realism' and 'Speculative Realism' People take inspiration hanging onto the: (i) non-essentialism of form, (ii) the importance of 'processes', 'relationalities' and the 'becoming' of things, (iii) difference being expressed in/through intensities, textures, resonances of these relationalities, (iv) of the complexities of the relationship between the 'actual' and the 'virtual' being such that there are potentially infinite realities possible from with in/through the interaction of any given pair of 'actual' and 'virtual', (v) making 'reality' itself, and therefore, 'future', thoroughly open-ended.

All of this to say, that,

similarities between 'mapping' and 'tracing' as onto-methodologies. I truly have comparatively limited insight into ANT, so I strongly encourage that if it interests you more you reach out to Prof. Austin, Pedro Dos Santos Maia, or Dr. Luisa Lubato. Being strictly purpose-full, though, here is my best (albeit pitifully thrashed) summarization of the discussion, condensed to how I operationalize these terms: I see them, as "tracing-mapping" and not "tracing" vs. "mapping".

> "Make a map, not a tracing […]
> What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that
> it is entirely oriented towards an experimentation in contact with the real.
>
> The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious.
> It fosters connection between fields, the removal of bloackages… the map has to do with performance,
> whereas the tracing always involves an alleged 'competence'".
> - (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004).

For Deleuze and Guattari, who to their credit produced philosophical worldings around topographical considerations, a map is more than a mimetic device- it is actively productive.

The question then arises of what shape this becoming takes and how something/ anything becomes. And here, there is a whole new lexicon that opens up for us from within the New-Materialism, Actor-Network Theory, Object Oriented Ontology, and so on. And somewhere within/across these are nestled our "Iconic Conceptual Figurations" of Assemblage and Process.

Here is what I think of them, briefly:

Assemblage: Rooted in DeleuzeGuattari's 'agencement', 'assemblage' is truly of those concepts that has taken a life of its own differently across IR and Political Sciences, the Sociology of Knowledge, Anthropology and other disciplines, but in each case it desires to **make sensible the dynamic connections between heterogenous entities, the fluxes, stabilities and other contingencies of these connections (that are seen as momentarily coalescing, within the contextual parameters of a given configuration) and the specific morphology of that particular contextually embedded "act or effect of brining together different parts and forming a new object" without it becoming a "totality", i.e., where the individual heterogenous actants (material, human, non-human, technological, affective, social, conceptual, spatial etc.) connect to form a different entity, but do not fuse/ combine to do so.** And in 'opening up' the 'how' of the particular shape and form a practice/event/process takes, this methodologically device, allows us to sense and make sensible the immanence of entities in a way that is inherently open-ended. Khaled's beheading, for instance, or any particular example of a beheading, and the practice of beheading itself, is seen as an assemblage here. But "not only". It is a 'process' in its own right, as well.

Process: To be fair, an assemblage is deeply processual- that is, at the cost of oversimplifying, the point of it: to unwrap the "prehension" of things i.e., to be able to see how things become de/re-territorialized in a processual world. But there is a difference in emphasis with **'process' being more about the mapping the intensity of flows, temporalities, directionalities, relationalities and pathways that enter, inhabit, cut across, exit, different 'shapes' of gathering - different assemblages -** rather than being about the contextual construction of the shape itself. They are both intimately acquainted colleagues working with/within a "Relationality"- centric metaphysics that desire to sense and make sensible how things dynamically, momentarily, and yet somehow stickily, relate to one another, what the extent of their influences are on each other, how these affects are produced, what shapes they take and which socio-political registers they become entangled with. They just focus on different 'steps' as it were, of 'becoming'. For instance, for Khaled's beheading to be an assemblage processes of emergence, composition and collageing all had to contribute, as did, 'process'// 'politics' of ruination.

(P.P.S.- Do you also think there is a paper here? A worlding/designing the/a "perpetrator" as (a figuration that is) a "cyborg"? // Or an IPS of Perpetration: Fracturing Violence/Violent Assemblages to Map a Figuration of the Perpetrator as a Cyborg.)

It is not 'simply', or "not only" (De la Cadena, 2015), a visual representation of how spatial features, or ideas and concepts, or individual actants, or collectives, or phenomena relate to one another, in a given area, in actuality, at any given point in time (and this, to them, is tracing). Instead, it is a complex system (think an assemblage almost) that also includes all the other – multiple – elements of reality, i.e.:

(1) It is a representation *and* a construction mechanism aiming to tap into creative, unknown, potentialities- it makes sense-able, both the "virtual" and the "actual" (Deleuze, 1988; Massumi, 2021) aspects of reality.

In this figuration then, there is a focus on the non-hierarchical (anarchic, I would argue) connectivities between the heterogenous dimensions of reality itself.

(2) It is multiple, too, because this act of 'representation' is not technically about mimesis at all- it does not concern itself with "interpretation, meaning, and defining a body's limitations or form" (Lenz Taguchi, 2013), instead it is about the "investigation of forces and intensities in the events… [as relationalities] connect, intersect, or traverse each other and become productive of differing" (Lenz Taguchi, 2016; Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2014). It is therefore, about spatial features *and* ideas & concepts *and* individuals actants *and* collectives *and* phenomena *and* all their entanglements across the "virtual" and the "actual" i.e., "what defines it [this multiplicity] is the AND, as something which has its place between the elements or between the sets. AND, AND, AND" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007).

There is, then, also a complex non-linear dynamism to this image/imagining of a map and a heterogeneity of actors, interactions and affects (alongside the very dimensions of reality), as well.

A quick tangent so we can catch our breath:

I am jumping to conclusions here, with Olympian dexterity, so just ignore this "line of flight" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2009) if you are perfectly comfortable in the Deleuze-Guattarian world.

It's just that, for me, working with and from within the metaphysical mechanics of any theoretical-worlding that I have 'only' heard of/ tried to make sense of/ been taught/ had explained but haven't *really*, wrung-ly, lived through, was and is (by far) one of the hardest skills I have had to learn, i.e. learning to assay an argument based on its own merits, so to speak – or rather assay it based on the assumptions of the larger theoretical-worlding it lives within – has been a tough assignment.

And in those confrontations/moments, I am always acutely grateful to researchers/ writers/ instructors that give us a 'For Dummies' example or two that we can use as arm-floaties to swim alongside them.

(P.S.- I am not sure if 'assay' is a good translation for परखना (parakhna: Hindi). Technically, yes, it is a 'testing for the quality of an entities compositional elements or its quiddity as a whole', but it resonates more in the 'sizing-up', 'assessment of merits', 'robustness check' registers. There is a deeply embodied and almost tactile element to the investigation-y aspect of it that 'assay' or 'testing' can't quite attract: for instance, in Hindi it used quite often to signify a testing of the 'true measure of a [wo/]man'. Anyway, back to the arm-floaty-examples.)

If you would like, I can try and do the same for you by gifting you an Italo Calvino shaped pool-float. I think, I had 'encountered' Invisible Cities, almost two lifetimes before I even heard of Deleuze and

Guattari. It's a bit of a blur, but I know with relative sharpness that I had been living in and through DG's worlding well before I knew it was there/their's,
and that I had in that pre-encountering-them space-time spent delectable months tour(ist)ing through Italo's Invisible Cities- 'assaying' Italo's Venice, grateful at having found a text that could help me make-sense of my own metaphysical experiences//
my lived experiences of questions metaphysical.
The setting of the book is 'surreally' 'simple':
Marco Polo is regaling the ageing Kublai Khan with stories of his travels along the Silk Road. That's the framing scene anyway- we, just sit there, lounging, next to the Mongol emperor, and watch with our whole beings, utterly transfixed, as Marco Polo/Italo weaves a tapestry of 55 fabulist prose-poems,
each a lyrical "mapping" of a (seemingly) different city (Calvino, 1978).

'Lyrical'- I think of it as 'lyrical' (besides/ beyond the 'medium' of the 'message')
firstly, because, at the outset of the book itself (in "The World's Cities),
we are told that each city, besides/beyond being a complex productive material environment inhabited by, and generated through, entangled but/and differently textured socio-political dynamics,
is also simultaneously an equally complex metaphor for
a different aspect/dimension of the human-'lived experience.'
The cities themselves, "live" lives, have relationships, are birthed, 'grow' and 'die',
and have complex relationships with "Memory", "Desire", "Language/Sings", "Looking/Seeing: Eyes", with "Names and Naming," with "Thin-ness", with "Trading/ Negotiating Relationships"
and with the "Dead and the Dying".
Each of these textures of 'living' being one of the 8 themes or sections along which
these 55 entries are divided/ (currently "territorialized").
Living, here is profoundly embodied experience (and saw in theoretical note: 2, therefore,):
a collage of sensing and sensemaking across all textures of
the body, of materialities, of affects, of sensory, of reflection and reflexivity.

Second, I think of it as 'lyrical', because the story/telling– to me at least, is a more Deleuze-Guattarian than Deleuze-Guattari texts themselves when it comes to story/telling – about the metaphysics of this universe is aimed at (with remarkable precision) making the multiplicity
of its reality, affective and sensible.
The real is sensed, and made sensible, as an affective collage of 'actuality' and 'virtuality', i.e., 'real' – as opposed to the 'possible', for Deleuze and Guattari, and Calvino – is composed of both the actual
(the "concrete", or the "material" – depending on which substratum of
metaphysical thought you want to engage with)
and the virtual (the "ideal" which is equally agentic, affective and impactful:
"Real without being actual, ideal without being abstract (Deleuze, 1994)" – which is a quote, if my Deleuze trivia-facts are correct he distilled from Proust's definition of "Memory"** as a
phenomenon of lived experience. Here too, 'idea', 'abstract', 'virtual', 'potential' and
'probability' are

"essentially contested concepts (Gallie, 1955)" that have their own substratum-universes with deep contentions- universes that I find fascinating but am in now shape of form capable of traversing.

**"Yet a single sound, a single scent, already heard or breathed long ago, may once again, both in the present and the past, be real without being present, ideal without being abstract, as soon as the permanent and habitually hidden essence of things is liberated, and our true self, which may sometimes have seemed to be long dead, but never was entirely, is re-awoken and re-animated when it receives the heavenly food that is brought to it."
– Time Regained, Volume: 6 of In Search of Lost Time (Proust, 2010))

This "real" and/or "reality" then, is deeply surreal- or rather, magical-realist and/or fabulist.
(I will come to the difference and repetitions between them later)
We have no way of knowing if these cities exist in actuality, if their descriptions are factual, if the details of Polo's travel are concrete, material and accurate. We have no way of knowing how these ethereal cities – because it really does feel like he is building/ materializing each city from and in the ether around us, shaping them to be these cyborg-y, quantum-y, absolutist-ly liminal beings: part idea, part substance; part abstraction, part matter; part dream, part reality; part fact, part fiction – still, somehow, constantly and consistently, feel 'real'.

All we know is that "Kublai Khan does not necessarily believe everything Marco Polo says when he describes the cities visited on his expeditions, but the emperor of the Tartars does continue listening to the young Venetian with greater attention and curiosity than he shows any other messenger or explorer of his."
And we, like him, find ourselves, equally, attentively, spellbound, perhaps –
scratch that, I think precisely –
because Polo/Calvino manages to make sense-able, through his aesthetic performance- through these 'lyrical' moves, the intensity of each city's 'virtuality', 'actuality' and the undeniable agency, and affect, of their Pasodoble… she manages to make sense-able, for Kubali and us, the multiplicity of [each of individual city's, and of the 'framing story's,] reality itself.
Swathing us in this patchwork-(ethnography)-lyrical-tapestry-quilt, Polo whirls up a 'sama' (remember footnote: 13) where the actual bleeds into the imagined; the imagined impregnates the actual; dreams & dreaming blister with substance-ial, tangible, tactility;
and the materialy-fleshy-cerements of the concrete start peeling off around the jagged edges of its cicatrices – the ideal and ideational once again ripping at it – resurrecting gnarly memories of previous lacerations that lay shrouded, but pustulating, under the lattice of its corporeality.

Like I said, surreal.

(Wait.
Did you hear that too?

I could have sworn I heard Scherezade's (Mahdi, 1995)voice, or definitely, at the very least, an echo of it, slithering and storming across Ponte dei Sospiri.
Then again, I did just watch the new adaptation of "A Haunting in Venice" only a few days ago, so I might just be hungover.
Or, maybe, 'framing stories' – stories hosting other stories// stories nestled within stories –

from within the surreal-magicalrealism-fabulist chromatic family could be a differently repeating// repeating with differentiation motif that I might have to return to. We'll see.)

Anyway, back to DG and their multiplicity and mapping.

---

(3) It is also multiple because this act of creative construction is/causes a dual-movement, doubly. First, the map, acting rhizomatically as everything does within the Deleuze-Guattarian world (and within this dissertation), simultaneously captures and stabilizes these relationalities (performs territorialization) and works with their "nomadic" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007) impulses to put to work their offshoots, mutations, expansions, ruptures (performing deterritorialization). And second, in working with and through this stabilization-nomadism 'dynamic' dynamic, the map actively metastasizes affectively connecting, interrupting and dissecting relationalities across different territories.

(If it wasn't a flat, hyperconnected, rhizomatic world where beginnings, endings, entries, exits, within, without, larger, smaller, whole, parts were effectively un'traceable', and constantly in flux, I would say, it performs the dual-movement twice: first in marking the contours for any given territory by tracking relationalities within it, and then in charting the morphologies of the larger topography by tracking the relationalities between these individual territories.

But, of course, that is complete and utter blasphemy- so I won't say it.)

"The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation … A map has multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing, which always comes back "to the same" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004)."

It is because of this multiplicity, on all three accounts, and/but – echoing the arguments presented by – especially keeping in mind this dual-movement, that I would like to inscribe onto "mapping", within the bleeding confines of this manuscript, the "figuration" (Haraway, 2004; Weber, 2016a) of simultaneous tracing-mapping. The Deleuze-Guattarian world, I think, explores stasis and sedimentation as much as it does flux and flight, but the latter, more often than not, are such interesting strangers to us that we treat them preferentially, getting caught up in/with getting to know them better.

Getting back to the point though- what *insert-profanity-of-choice* does all this exploration of mapping/tracing mean for us here? There are three answers to/for that question. Or rather one answer that mushrooms three tacit questions and their corresponding implications as well: the 'methodological' apparatus for this dissertation can be "mapped" as, a 'mapping a [surreal] history of syrially living' with/within/through the Syrian revolution. Simply put, "mapping" is an(other) 'onto-methodology', here.



Figure: 88-
Artist Caption: Rooted Communities
2022, mushroom bags, various sizes
Imitating how the Syrians were farming mushrooms while living under the ground, small stacks of growing mushrooms were placed throughout the church, lacing the air with the scent of fungi. This smell echoed the physical presence of the satellite "cookers" hung on the tower outside.
Author Engagement: Rhizomatic Affects // A Medusa-Tattoo Community
(Barakeh, Khaled. Rooted Communities. Multimedia Art Installation. Website. 2021)

Field Note: 3 & 4-
Lived Experience & it's Subject-ivity // Position-ing Syrial Writing

"I have had many concerns about writing a book that so explicitly describes my own attacks of mania, depression and psychosis, as well as my problems acknowledging the need for ongoing mediation. Clinicians have been, for obvious reasons of licensing and hospital privileges, reluctant to make their psychiatric problems known to others. These concerns are often well warranted. I have no idea what the long-term effects of discussing such issues so openly will be on my personal and professional life but, whatever the consequences, they are bound to be better than continuing to be silent. I am tired of hiding, tired of mis-spent and knotted energies, tired of the hypocrisy, and tired of acting as though I have something to hide."

- ***Kay Redfield Jamison, An Unquiet Mind***

"As I wrote, the ethnographer in my wanted to know: Who is this woman who is writing about others, making others vulnerable? What does she want from others? What do others want from her? The feminist in me wanted to know: what kind of fulfilment does she get – or not get – from the power she has? The novelist in me wanted to know: What, as she blithely goes about the privilege of doing research, is the story she isn't willing to tell?"

.....

"What bother critics is the insertion of personal stories into what we have been taught to think of as the analysis of impersonal social facts. Throughout most of the twentieth century, in scholarly fields ranging from literary criticism to anthropology to law, the reigning paradigms have traditionally called for distance, objectivity and abstraction. The worst sin was to be 'too personal.'"

- ***Ruth Behar, The Vulnerable Observer***

Critical Distance - that is what all this^ boils down to, for me, i.e., that is what the nearly unbearable intensity of an 'ethnographic sensibility'-approach's existential debates, dilemmas and complexities amounts to in/from/through my lived experiences of them: Writing – Encountering/ Researching/ Worlding/ Figuring – about the lives and living of others demands a constant, if not consistent, re-negotiation of critical distance between the observer, the observed and Syriality of their engagement.

Or, simply put, I think this book should have been written. Just not by me.

I have already spoken to you, most recently in the first 'field note' above, about how this text is non-representative in the sense (and in its sensibilities as) that the observations, theories, worldings, the Syriality of the Syrialism, are all grounded in/ derived from the particular experiences of certain 's'yrians- those for whom the Syrial was both the given condition of their lived experience of martial injury, and the martial-story they wanted to tell about their injuries. (Remember, again, from the Abstract & Prologue this is a descriptive endeavour.) I would like to add another caveat to that: it is also grounded in/ derived from my particular (injurious) lived experiences (of injury).

There are a couple of rather stark implications that come with this^ understanding, at least vis-a-vis the production of/ philosophy-/ising of science. Let's circle back for a minute to the three elements identified by Behar: distance, objectivity and abstraction.

There was no substantive distance between the 'object'/-ive of the study and my own 'personal' objectives (between the scholar and the person), barely any between the 'subjects' and I (given our 'affective community' despite our very very different experiences, positions, positionalities, contexts, contextualities and backgrounds), and affectively/ effectively no distance whatsoever between the stories found, the stories wished to be found, the stories told and the stories wished to be told. It was all in service of a quite blatantly self-ish/-centred agenda: I needed – more as a person than a scholar-ship producer – a lexicon/ a vocabulary/ a sensibility through which to make sense of 'injury', my own or anyone else's. I needed – or so I thought – an explanation/ a mechanism/ a concept/ a description/ a map/ a name for (i) what it 'felt' like to be injured, (ii) of what it 'meant' to be injured, (iii) how any injury 'happened', (iv) what it 'meant' for it to have happened in the ways that it did, and at least, at the beginning of it all (though it fell away pretty quickly) how any injury was even possible. A 'simple' assumption formed the substratum for this entire (re-)search: I thought/ was convinced/ hoped that if I could thoroughly 'comprehend' (understand and embody an 'reason'-ing) the different dimensions of the lived experience of injury, that I could exorcise its hauntings out of my system (and being). I came to this manuscript not as an IR scholar looking to untangle/ tackle a 'puzzle', but as an injured body, completely lost/ 'unmade', desperately looking for a way to 'remake' my world/worlding/selves, however twisted – however Syrial – it had now become (and perhaps always was: I just 'knew' it now), i.e., I came to Syrialism as a "vulnerable observer".

And that is why there is no objectivity here, and no pretence at one. I am not, and have not been at any point in the process of producing this manuscript/ being produced by it, been 'objective'. I wouldn't know how to be even if I tried. I wouldn't know how to leave behind/ set aside/ not bring along the girl that had 29 scars on her body before she turned 12 (most of which were gifts from truly well-meaning but deeply 'misguided' parents), or the girl who suddenly couldn't return to the house in Srinagar where she had spent her summers eating cherries and making friends with 'roaming street tanks', or the 9 year old who had an absolute blast eating rice and Ajinomoto for days thinking of 'curfews' as real-life Bollywood film-scenes from the 'freedom fighters time', or the one whose first attempt at suicide was at 13, or the 15 year old who spent 11 months in a deeply abusive relationship with someone a little over half a decade older, or the 17 year old who couldn't wrap her head/ body/ being/ life around the word 'rape' unable to even utter the term until years later and/or even barely now, or the 19 year old who survived it all by making it to the bottom of every tumbler & bottle encountered at record rates while working three jobs just to be able to go to college, or the 20 year old who sat in a grey-walled-clinic with her best friend trying to get an abortion in a place where its legality was only nominal. Or, the 21 year old who thought it would be a good idea to begin this research as a Master's project in the first place. And/or the 28 year old that just – *insert profanity of choice* finally – wrapped it up as a doctoral dissertation.

And what this means – at least to me – in terms of 'abstraction' is that anything I can, will and do say here, is and should be seen as, *deeply*, *truly*, non-representative and entirely un-generalize-able. For

it to be anything but, I think there should have been a certain 'critical distance' – not so much distance between the researcher/ observer and the observed/ subject or object of study that they wouldn't/ couldn't quite immerse themselves into injury's Syrial worlds/worldings (something that has often been flagged as an 'iykyk' moment by trauma-survivors and we have touched on as well with the 'silence' encountered in Three Little Syrias and in the interview transcripts, especially with Omar, about not being able to/ not having the vocabulary to translate these experiences for 'others' outside/ not in/ only barely in the 'affective community') and not such intense an intimacy/ familiarity/ lack of distance either where the researcher/ observer is so acutely rooted within the community itself that 'critical' reflection (whatever that might mean) was not quite possible from within the entrenchments of that positionality – that I did not/ do not possess. All of this is to say that though I am not sure if this manuscript could have been written, at least not Syrial-ly, if it wasn't written without any regard for this 'critical distance'/-ing, but I can whole-heartedly see, for the sake of the project/ the conceptual worldings and 'tbh' my own selves, all the arguments for why it should have been.

Syrial Sites

لعشق الخراب //باسم الخراب



Figure: 101 – Conceptual Photograph by Omar Imam, from the Syrialism Collection. (Imam, Omar. Conceptual Photograph. Website. 2019)

Caption by the Artist: ***"God sent me a message in a magical moment. He wanted me to stop beheading people. It was my salvation."***

*Author Engagement: Hell(Fire) // Revelation // That *insert profanity of choice* teddy ("Remember, remember", the Teddy from Figure: 74).*

This seemed like a particularly good conceptual photograph to mark a moment of transit/ transfer/ translation between Syrial Surfaces and Syrial Sites.

In one of the interviews, Omar and I spent quite some time going over his methodological techniques when it came to creating these photographs (and others, essentially going over his artistic process). Since "Live, Life, Refugee", Omar had been doing long form semi-structured interviews with his participants and then, based on their stories, he would come up with a 'concept' for the photograph, run it by them and together, collaboratively, they would head into the shoot, to 'realize' the 'reality' (actualize the virtuality?) of their – the participants' and Omar's mingled/mangled together – 'embodied experience' of the martial. (I think Omar had been Omar-ing with his participants to co-produce these photographs well before I tried Omar-ing for Syrialism.)

Here, for example,
"…. I think most wars, many wars, our mistakes came only out of logistic reasons. Like people who couldn't translate well, or couldn't read maps well, like people who couldn't do very simple decision at very simple moment and they ended up in a very difficult situation…. Like I remember this jihadist who told me about his brother and about the moment when the jihadist wanted to leave the Free Syrian Army to join the jihadists, so he propose it to his brother, but his brother was a smoker and he said like they prohibit tobacco with the jhadists so he will stay with the Free Syrian Army. And for me it was like mind blowing. Because everything you read in the media, about like extremist ideology, about people who make decision and sacrifice their life because they believe strongly in the ideology but in that case it was choosing a restaurant, or a coffee shop, or a café… like you go here or you go there because you like the look or the colour…
… and the photo I made with him is one of the best photos in Syrialism and I had eight people asking me about the price of that photo but… and the background and story……and, and, it is a brilliant moment I share and it can be inspiring for anyone, even if you are not jihadist… because he shared with me the time he received message from God to stop beheading people because he used to behead people, literally. And, and, somehow he received that message upon… and something happened with him and his brother and he got this feeling… this message. And of course if you analyze this he was tired already and he wanted to stop fighting killing. But something physical happened. And I thought 'Aah'… it is a good transformation moment and we should capture it… and so we describe this, and we had this coloured atmosphere around the teddy bear and I wanted to have a knife and victim… because he, he, killed victims… and he was a victim himself because he was fighting ISIS and and with lighter skin and blonde hair, he would be a hero. But because he was Syrian and dark skinned he was still a jihadist… because the jihadist themselves, because the jihadists and ISIS were fighting amongst each other. They started out as friends and then.. and then… went other way…
… (and after we spoke of how lifechanging this interview was for Omar himself, about his 'set-up' fear of this interview, about the fear he felt before meeting the person in the photograph, about obsessing with the ethical questions surrounding it, and the ethical questions surrounding making a sardonic humor-y photograph of

something like a beheading, something we sifted through in Field Note: 7, he explained how quickly when he was actually there it shifted and became about…) and I was asking him how he did it physically, like how he grabbed the head, and then he said like ya from here, and then I said what if he was bold- how would you grab his head, and then he showed me like different techniques, and I was questioning his like, motivation, and his fears…. And his background, and he told me like I joined the fight when I was 15 years old… like like…. What do you expect me to be? Like a fashion designer or what?... and he was smoking weed in one of the session and then he was telling me about one of the time they attack someone's house and bomb it… and he told me like ya, and we found like a lot of alcohol and marijuana, and I told him, ya but you are smoking weed yourself so why you bomb someone's house for that… and he said like no… it was a different time and place… now it was fine but it was different then… and for sure it wasn't the only reason (for the attack)… it was someone who took their flag and put it on the floor and they moved like a little army to bomb that man house. Like probably he was just high on something when he did it… but he lost his life because of this act… and then to have this kind of conversation and then to go back home and talk to my Dutch friend about what they will take to some festival or what gift we should take to someone… you know like…it's all of it just it is surreal."

Invitation to (a) Beheading[1]:

Syrial-ly Encountering Khaled al-Asaad's Beheading // Encountering the Syrial-ity of Khaled al-Asaad's Beheading

"Syrian archaeologist 'killed in Palmyra' by IS militants" - that's all BBC (2015b) told me.

It was the fall of 2018. I was sitting in the library at IHEID. Perched on a tall bar-stool-esque chair, suspended in a mild cognitive trance. All I could see through the window, all I could see at eye-level really, were railway tracks. *Surreal*, I thought. That's why I loved it there. I loved it because if I allowed my mind to tiptoe to the brink of the inconceivable, I could convince myself that I was sitting with my legs buried beneath the tracks themselves. I could rest my elbows on them- not the best table manners, and the gravel would pinch, but the situation demanded exception. I could see the train-ed wheels as if they were centrepieces. The trains, of course, were gravy boats. It was always surreal sitting there.

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[1] The title of this chapter takes inspiration from Vladimir Nabokov's "Invitation to a Beheading".
The novel, I think, explores the relationship between totalitarian conformity (and the oppression therein) and individual expression (and the resistance therein) and the absurdity - dare I say, the 'surreality' - of it all. It follows Cincinnatus, a man who has been sentenced to death for the crime of "gnostical turpitude" (Nabokov, 1989), a charge as vaguely absurd as the fundamental premise of the plot itself- **though he knows he will be beheaded, he does not know when.** I could talk endlessly about individual-will-vs-soceital-totalitarianism, about the notion of "normalcy" (especially writing this in the Netherlands where "Do Normaal" is a political moto), about Orwell and Kafka and how the only way in which we seem to be able to sense and make sense of totalitarian violence is through absurdity or 'syriality', about subjectification and Foucault and Bulter (which would be exhilarating given that the judge and the jailer, and, the only other inmate and the executioner have the same faces), or even about the metaphysics of the work itself- the relationship between reality and perceived reality of the prison (given how prominently Cincinnatus depends on his imagination for survival- and the **surreality of survival** itself), and/or the notion of the "beyond", the quote from Pierre Delalande (the other inmate/ executioner) about becoming-a-person. And, perhaps most importantly, about this novel is quite an exceptional commentary on incarceration itself, its cruelty, its arbitrariness and its absurdity.

His only crime, through it all, seems to be, as Disney best but it,
"Look there she goes... // A most peculiar mademoiselle // It's a pity and a sin // She doesn't quite fit in // Cause she really is a funny girl //A beauty but a funny girl // She really is a funny girl // That Belle!"
- "Belle", from Beauty and the Beast.

But, at least for now, what I would like you to think through, is the "(a)" in the title of this chapter. Within these pages, I will touch on, draw from, stagger into many, many beheadings but I will speak - truly speak - of only one- Khaled al-Asad's. But let me be clear- Khaled al-Asad's beheading is not a representative case. I am not implying in any way shape or form that by studying, understanding, sensing and making sense of Mr. al-Asad's beheading we understand something fundamental/ foundational about all beheadings. This isn't an inquiry into the "nature" of beheadings so to speak where Khaled's is but one "case". All I am hoping to talk about (by taking 'non-representational theory, from Field Note: 1, as the north star in this regard) are the echoes, the mirrorings, the lines, the microcosms… the "refrains" that can be heard across different beheadings (I won't dare say 'all') once we investigate the machinations of even one of them.

The cadence of online research didn't help- scroll, click, revert, repeat. Scroll, click, Repeat. Click, Repeat. Revert. Repeat. Repeat.

Perhaps the mild trance was merely mechanical.

In either case, I think boredom (at least of this^ flavour) has quite a unique tune/ tone to it, especially when you are torn between **(i) finding yourself apathetic-ly, mechanical-y, staring at evidence of very *real*, pain-full, injuries with a level of disassociation where you are barely registering colours, acts, sounds, words, environments, materials tallying them like counting cards and with the same level of discretion that goes into sorting laundry piles, (ii) hating yourself, in a very *real*, primal, from-the-bones kind of way, for engaging with these injuries with such blatant disrespect and cruelty (because, as I will re-iterate, later in this chapter, care-less-ness is – also – cruelty), wondering, again, in a *real*, primal, in-the-bones kind of way, if studying monstrosities has made you monstrous, terrified to look at yourself in the mirror – to really see yourself – because you can't shake off the feeling that maybe it is the other way around: that you study monstrosities (and can study them so... 'efficiently') because you already were, and always have been 'monstrous', (iii) trying desperately to slam your disassociating mind back into the pain-full-ness of the injury, out of this fear/ guilt, out of overwhelming compassion, out of a frantic need to do right by these violated bodies, out of the righteous convictions of the 'critical scholar', out of sheer *insert-profanity-of- choice* helplessness, zooming in on every aching detail of the harm that is inflicted, driven frenzied by a rootless compulsion that has you convinced that somehow, by some miracle/ 'magic' (/magical thinking), mapping the process in all of its detailed minutia will change the outcome all the while over-compensating in your writing until the detailing become violently poetic in/ through the description of these minutia and paradoxically going deeper 'into' the event brings you – and the reader – further away from it, and you are left stunned and standing/sitting (iv) only to realize that this Pessoa-n unravelling of yours has also cracked open the carefully curated vaults in which you have been burying-alive your own traumas.**

And now you not only *see* – quite viscerally, even if it isn't actually – Omar's tooth when you try and brush in the morning; or Sara's "Butcher" hook with pierced, flayed, exposed, organs hanging off of them whenever you see a knitting needle or barbeque skewer or an injection (which to your mind is immediately a 'lethal injection' now, and suddenly every chair/ reclining surface you lay your eyes on is florescent green and you can *feel* the – obviously non-existent – sores erupting across every inch of your calves, and if you are lucky, the chemical burn-ing sensation only lasts a moment before the smell of charred flesh runs you straight into Lens Young Homsi's ash-caked-wall-blasted-homes); or the wall of Zaher's detention cell in every thin-single-line-framed-official-y-portrait; or Khaled's asylum stamps when the club-bouncer imprints on your arm;

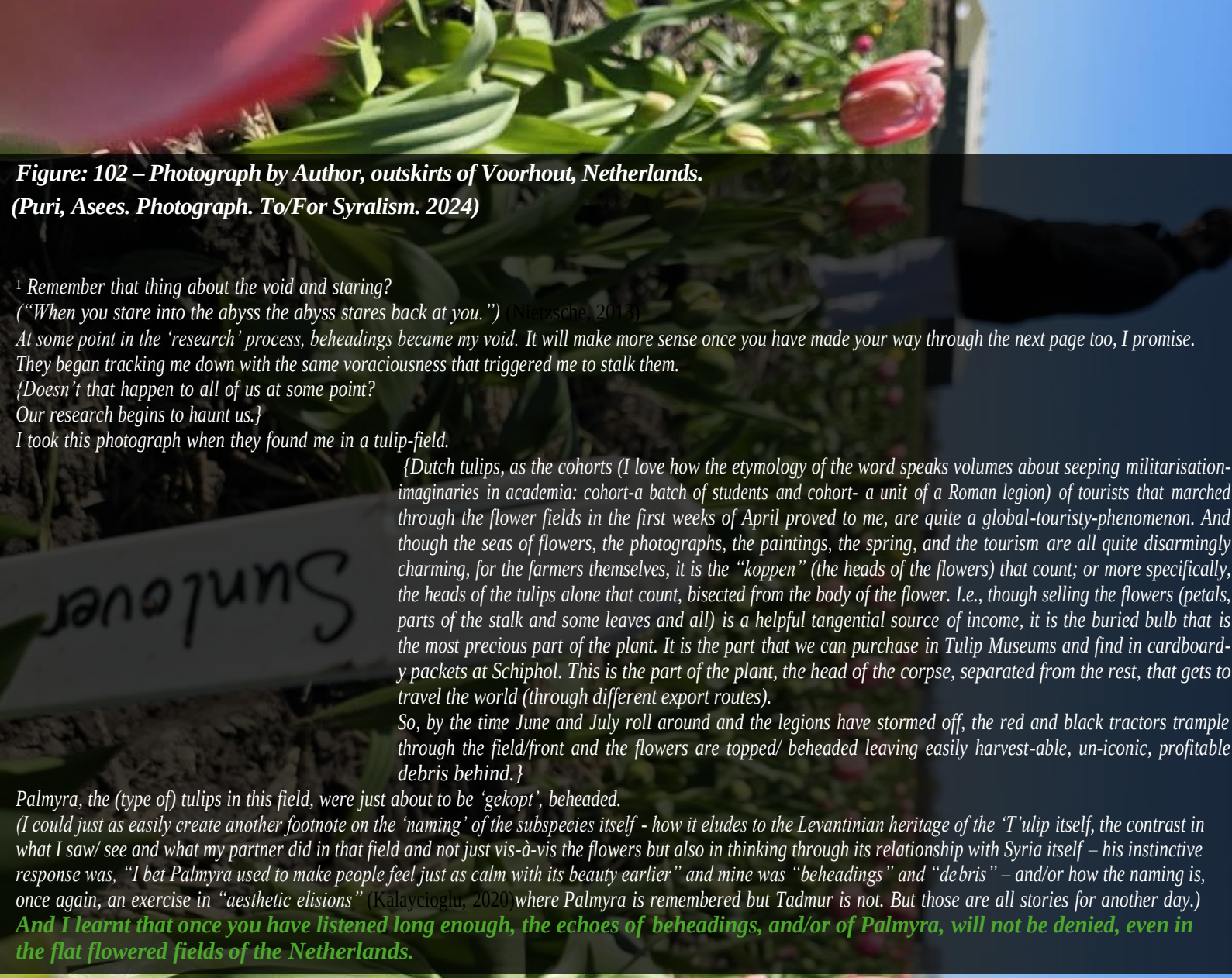


Figure: 102 – Photograph by Author, outskirts of Voorhout, Netherlands.
(Puri, Asees. Photograph. To/For Syralism. 2024)

[1] *Remember that thing about the void and staring?*
("When you stare into the abyss the abyss stares back at you.") (Nietzsche, 2013)
At some point in the 'research' process, beheadings became my void. It will make more sense once you have made your way through the next page too, I promise.
They began tracking me down with the same voraciousness that triggered me to stalk them.
{Doesn't that happen to all of us at some point?
Our research begins to haunt us.}
I took this photograph when they found me in a tulip-field.

{Dutch tulips, as the cohorts (I love how the etymology of the word speaks volumes about seeping militarisation-imaginaries in academia: cohort-a batch of students and cohort- a unit of a Roman legion) of tourists that marched through the flower fields in the first weeks of April proved to me, are quite a global-touristy-phenomenon. And though the seas of flowers, the photographs, the paintings, the spring, and the tourism are all quite disarmingly charming, for the farmers themselves, it is the "koppen" (the heads of the flowers) that count; or more specifically, the heads of the tulips alone that count, bisected from the body of the flower. I.e., though selling the flowers (petals, parts of the stalk and some leaves and all) is a helpful tangential source of income, it is the buried bulb that is the most precious part of the plant. It is the part that we can purchase in Tulip Museums and find in cardboard-y packets at Schiphol. This is the part of the plant, the head of the corpse, separated from the rest, that gets to travel the world (through different export routes).
So, by the time June and July roll around and the legions have stormed off, the red and black tractors trample through the field/front and the flowers are topped/ beheaded leaving easily harvest-able, un-iconic, profitable debris behind.}

Palmyra, the (type of) tulips in this field, were just about to be 'gekopt', beheaded.
(I could just as easily create another footnote on the 'naming' of the subspecies itself - how it eludes to the Levantinian heritage of the 'T'ulip itself, the contrast in what I saw/ see and what my partner did in that field and not just vis-à-vis the flowers but also in thinking through its relationship with Syria itself – his instinctive response was, "I bet Palmyra used to make people feel just as calm with its beauty earlier" and mine was "beheadings" and "debris" – and/or how the naming is, once again, an exercise in "aesthetic elisions" (Kalaycioglu, 2020) *where Palmyra is remembered but Tadmur is not. But those are all stories for another day.)*
And I learnt that once you have listened long enough, the echoes of beheadings, and/or of Palmyra, will not be denied, even in the flat flowered fields of the Netherlands.



or the yellowing bruises on Osama's jaw and her arms when you clumsily smack your shoulder into a doorframe or see any protest-y/ social-activism-y poster and all you can think of is her demonstration-buses, (which, of course, is immediately followed with a montage of displacement-busses, and then prison-buses and then every single picture you have seen of Tadmur) and so on; you now also see the tear-shaped scar from your right wrist clutching onto the injured knees and shoulders of children in Aleppo, or find flashbacks of your grey-walled-clinic- and-legally-grey-abortion dripping off the skin of death-bitten babies (like those photographed in "Rescued from the Rubble", by Ameer Alhalbi, or rather, Walid Mashhadi), or feel the already-healed gashes on your thighs mysteriously-burn as your spine encounters knives, blades, belts, scars, or lacerations, or hear your own sputtering-choking-gasping-snot/ed-sweltering-throbbing-chest wheezing when you work through lived accounts of others' waterboarding while inserting your memory of Bisleri-water-bottles-as-torture-devices into injury-stories that have no room for them having been filled to the brim already with rusting steel buckets and creaking troughs.

And, once you are there/ in here/ at this stage of encountering violent realities/ realities of violence:

1. all sense of distance, subject-ivity, object-ivity, individual-ity, position-ality, witness-ing, experience-ing, view-ing/-er just… fractures, twists.
2. Only the Syriality of it all becomes/ is sense-able and makes-sense.
3. It all 'just' *becomes* a power-full-y vital, ever-morphing, deeply affect-ive rhizome of harm, martial-control-resistance that you are, simultaneously, encountering, experiencing and examining (or rather, simultaneously, encountering, embodying & embodied-ly experiencing and translating).
4. It is 'just' an intensely kinetic rhizome of absolute violation that you are living 'through'.
5. and, surviving through.

Anyway, back to the library at IHEID.

I can't say for certain how long that digital ethnography-ish surf was. Time is particularly relative when confronted with rhythm. I remember though, I only moored when I (finally) saw the photograph.

Figure: 103 – *A photograph of Mr. Khaled al-Asaad at the Museum of Antiquities in Palmyra, Syria*



(AFP. Khaled Asaad is pictured in 2002 in front of a sarcophagus from Palmyra, dating back to the first century. Photograph. International Business Times. 2015)

There he was: an 83-year-old archaeologist, author, translator (for Aramaic), head of antiquities at Tadmur (/Palmyra) for over 40 years – *Khaled al-Asaad*[3] – hanging[4] by his wrists from a traffic-light somewhere in the city, *beheaded*.

[3] I will do my best, in the latter half of this chapter, to properly introduce you to Khaled al-Assad. But, if you would like to know him more, please read: (BBC News, 2015a; Cocks, 2015; Davies & Shaheen, 2015; Independent, 2015; Joanna Paraszczuk, 2015; Leriche, 2015; Segal, 2015; Shaheen & Black, 2015; The Telegraph, 2015). Or, take a moment to listen to what his son, Walid, has to say about his father's death.

There is, however, something I would like to flag here. In the pages to come, I too will participate in the violation of Khaled al-Asad's body and being, by dissecting the feral dissections he was made subject to by DAESH. And so, I am pleading with you - and myself - to return to remembering al-Assad as he is here. In this photograph, at least to me, Khaled al-Asad is a 'real' person, at least to me, not yet reduced to a symbol, a warning, a photograph, a visual marker, an emblem to rally for/behind, or a subject of study. He is, in all his embodiedness, himself, here in Figure: 86.
Our bodies are never our own (this is something I will come back to repeatedly in the second half of this chapter). But I truly believe/think/feel that they, our bodies/every-body (human, non-human, material, spatial, ideational), also rebel against this notion of not being 'our own' in some form or another.
For me, Mr. al-Asaad and his body do this in two ways.
First, like Cincinnatus, in and through photographs like this one, he accomplishes the seemingly impossible/ surreal. He becomes more than the body that holds him.

"He stood up and...took off his head like a toupee,
took off his collarbones like shoulder straps,
took off his rib cage like a hauberk...
what was left of him gradually dissolved, hardly colouring the air"
(pg. 32),
And then again,
"Through the headsman's still swinging hips, the railing showed.
On the steps the pale librarian sat doubled up, vomiting...
Cincinnatus slowly descended from the platform
and walked off through the shifting debris (after being beheaded)." (pg. 222).

Now, unlike Nabokov, I am not advocating for some Gnostic-inspired dichotomy-of-spirit-and-flesh argument/reading of these acts, replete with religious connotations. Well, not those of Nabokov's anyway. But, I am thinking through these acts as foundational moments of a deep need/ desire/ performance of defiance. **Khaled al-Asaad's photograph and Cincinnatus's ghost/spirit, both, defy the bindings of their mutilated bodies and re-turn to us as reminders that embodiment is so much more than the body and that memory G remembering-s owe them, their defiance, their rebellion, a debt that can only be paid by giving them their due- by remembering them above/ beyond/ other-than just through the violations that were imprinted upon them.**
And then of course, because I am positive at this point that I have lost-my-mind-and-become-irrevocably-gloom-and-doom-seeking, I can hear (like in full-blown conversations, dead-sober,) these photographs, both of Khaled al-Asaad pre-DAESH and post, mock me/take pride in knowing that through their 'hauntings' they have staked their claim on the (already rather muddied) mind of this impressionable(?) researcher - and I am sure they will do the same to you soon enough - to the point that I cannot seem to expunge these images of ruin/-ing/-ation from the walls of my irises. They insist that their impressions can only be washed off my lenses once they have been avenged, heard, seen and remembered through words/ worlds. This is the second way in which Mr. Khaled al-Asad and his body are reclaiming their ownership over it, and its ruins- through the encounter that birthed this chapter.

[4] Hanging, itself, is a peripatetic practice with its own partial connections to the worlds we build- it is its own "small world" (Austin, 2017). It has a horrifically/mundanely rich historical and cultural presence in the worlds we inhabit, and its equally rich visual lexicon is/will be undoubtedly a useful entry-site into exploring this genealogy. I am thinking here of the works of Wood, Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-

Red, Yellow, Green – and Black. *Surreal*. Khaled's severed head lay at his feet – feet that were struggling to grasp at the ground, being tortured[5] in perpetuity – as if it was an offering made to a raging goddess; a bloody bayou coagulating around it, bleeding from the head's jagged, tattered edges, spilling off the road divider. Red, Yellow, Black – and fleshy rose-Beige. The Green came after. Doused in Khaled's blood it stretched across the length of his acephalous torso achingly arched above the black that caked his pants, the belt that mumbled into being misty, murky, muddled memories of other tortures, and the stark, squealing white which bore the carmine engravings of Khaled's 'crimes'. Green, White, Black- and Red. It had taken me a very long breath to even begin to process that (invisiblised) gaping vacuum between his criss-crossed up-stretched arms.

As if in mutiny, my mind wanted to force me to think he was hung upside down… as if in mutiny, my mind wanted to 'auto-correct' the image so that at the very least, even if the body was in excruciating pain of being hung upside down, it was whole, intact… at least at some level unimpaired[6].

1940. (Wood, 2011), Vaidik, My Son's Inheritance: A Secret History of Blood Justice and Lynchings in India. (Vaidik, 2020) and particularly, Ohl and Potter, "United We Lynch: Post-Racism and the (Re)Membering of Racial Violence in Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America" (Ohl & Potter, 2013).

[5] When I finally began to really see the photograph, to really 'look' at it, one of the details that burrowed itself into my bones was the slight gap between Khaled's feet and the ground. I could feel his toes reaching out to grasp the concrete while his heels remained suspended in mid-air aching for the sheer repose of solid ground. That gap, for me, was instantly flooded with images of Pfahlbinden (stake hanging) and/or the Strappado, photographs from Abu Ghraib, testimonies from Amnesty's Torture Archipelago report (Amnesty International, 2012), discussions about "stress-positions" and sketches of 'Hanging by Thumbs'. This corporeal lexicon of torture-through-feet-just-ever-so-slightly-off-the-ground-while-the-hanging-body-writhes-and-contorts-under-its-own-weight became my immediate (free?) association with the gap under Khaled's heels. It is what makes me think/say that in/through this photograph it is as if his body is being tortured in perpetuity.

[6] I know that dichotomies and clear distinctions are not welcome guests in the onto-epistemological worldings of this dissertation. Wholes are never just wholes. Parts are never just parts. Parts don't just make up the Whole. Wholes are never only just cumulations of parts. The laws of classical and constructivist mathematics are rendered quantum. Here though, I find myself disserting my own cause. My mind, and my stomach, in a rare moment of agreement and cooperation, want* to manically believe that there was a Whole that Khaled's body was, it constituted parts like his head, and that made up the sanctified, hallowed clear-boundary-ed entity whose borderlines were not violated.

*Unpacking the horrors of subliminal biases in this wanting: The implications of it for people with disabilities, illnesses, mental health challenges, choices such as vasectomies, hysterectomies, abortions, or even tattoos and piercings, etc. are grotesque.

Then there are the questions of whose and which bodies count as 'whole', in which political contexts, and with what rights and boundaries. As a person of colour, born and raised in a 'decolonised', 'third world', 'developing' country from the 'global south', that identifies as a bisexual female in a cisgender marital partnership that has exercised her right to an abortion and is diagnosed with Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder I can safely assume that there are at the very least 5 different but entangled socio-political contexts where I would not qualify as a 'Whole person' despite all of my many, many privileges (the logic being: Whole = Normatively Preferable, 'Normal' = Deserving of Dignity, Rights and Equalities = Protections and Comforts of a comparatively more comprehensive Social Integration). So, I find this wanting, this instinct, upon reflection, hideous. And for that I sincerely apologise, and hope that I have incurred just enough trust with you that you that you would see this wanting as the imbecilic but innocent instinct – as it was intended.

I think it wanted me to look away[7].

Slowly though, in the span of a second, my eyes adjusted, attuning to the image's abhorrent contours. The photograph was screaming; my mind had to concede. I *had to* recognise the tightness of the rope around Khaled's wrist. I *had to* accredit the carmine that had calcified on the khaki of his shirt. I *had* to register the single white string from which hung the placard that asserted Khaled's crimes: "*apostate, participant of indecent conferences, director of idolatry and visiting heretic Iran*".

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[7] ***"Look away, look away***
This show will wreck your evening, your whole life, and your day
Every single episode is nothing but dismay,
So, look away…// … Just look away,
There's nothing but horror and inconvenience on the way
Ask any stable person, "Should I watch?" and they will say: // Look away. // Look away, look away."

"Look Away" is the main theme song of the television adaptation of "A Series of Unfortunate Events". Composed by Nick Urata with lyrics crafted by Daniel Handler, the song is performed by Neil Patrick Harris and plays during the opening credits for the show. It acts as a stand-in for Lemony Snicket's (the character who is seen as the author and narrator of the books in the 'series' of unfortunate events) author/ publisher-warnings/summaries that form the preambles for each of the books. These warning-summaries (and the main body of the song) foreshadow the dreadfulness that is to follow and caution against ***diving headfirst into the horror, and in doing so - in asking the reader/ viewers to "look away" - play a twisted trick of 'reverse psychology': I, and I am assuming most of us, find myself/ourselves more drawn to 'looking' because I am/we are being asked to 'look away'***.

"Look away, look away
…. It's hard to fathom how (the orphans) *anyone* manage(d) to live through it,
Or how a decent person, like yourself, would even want to view it.
… Spoiler alert! A villain comes to steal and murder,
And so if I were you, I wouldn't even watch one minute further."

My relationship with beheadings - with the paintings, the photographs, the videos (re)inscribed in the pages to follow - emulates the same dynamic. In the beginning, everything in my world(s) and my body wanted to shirk away at even the hint of a beheading. It's always in the gut, isn't it? You know what you are about to see even before you have seen it and your stomach lunges as far away as it can from your lungs which find themselves gasping as your eyes involuntarily, intuitively, instinctively force your sight away. In 3 seconds, your body wholly rebels against the idea of 'looking' at anything mutilated, gore-y and/or gruesome in an attempt to somehow shield your senses somewhat as if seeing the aftermath of an assault was an assault in itself.

It's the abundance of carmine and flesh I think. Our eyes have been trained to avert their gaze when there is too much red.
But the more my body wanted to 'look away', the more I read about the dreadful horror(s) of beheadings, the more I worked from within the assumption that their place in our world(s) is with the 'monstrous', the more I was pulled towards looking at them. I dove in headfirst. But I shouldn't have.
Lemony Snicket - as always - was right. And so, every now and then, I am entreating with you, look away. But if like me, you can't resist the urge (that I, like Snicket, am undoubtedly/ twistedly encouraging while also requesting that you suppress it) there is always Pandora's Box (in the next footnote).
[P.S.- Definitely, look away, from the four manipulated versions of the photograph in the next pages corresponding to these 4 'acts'.]

In my mind, each letter of that placard was a stitch of a barbed wire from which dangled the very meat of(f) Khaled's body(/bones). I *had to* acknowledge the brutal dislocation of his head.

Green, rope-y brown, and fleshy rose-Beige – and no head in between. Yellow, Black, Red, and fleshy rose-Beige – spinning/ spanning around a dis-bodied head. *Surreal.*

This is how I 'encountered' Khaled. Ruined.

This is how DAESH wanted the world to see him. Ruined.

[[P.S. Please remove the literal black boxes to see the photographs[8] in this chapter clearly

[8] To show or not to show- Perhaps because of this dynamic (in the previous footnote) I struggled quite a bit with the question of showing the photograph in question and the ethical complexities of any potential resolution. I was reminded in turn of Woolf, her Three Guineas and Sontag's reading of that novel essay (Sontag, 2002; Woolf, 1966). There's quite a lot that these essays touch on and their individual primary theses are both interesting in their own right, but what I was/am reminiscing about in particular was their approach to photographs- particularly, 'photographs of war'.
'Photographs of War' are photographs that show "**mangled bodies of adults and children. They show how war evacuates, shatters, breaks apart, levels the built world.**" These are photographs that scream, "**This is what war does… War tears, rends. War rips open, eviscerates. War scorches. War dismembers. *War ruins***. (Sontag, 2002)"
They are the photographs that this manuscript is built around.
They are the very photographs that I struggle to show… and see.
For Woolf, it seems these photographs had a unifying effect. She thinks that despite the socio-political structures that violently separate her from other audiences of these photographs (particularly, upper-class, educated, men such as the lawyer her letter is addressed to), a confrontation with them would *have to* universally inspire shock, disbelief and outrage. I agree, or at least, I want to. But as Sontag, I think rightly, points out, "the photographs could just as well foster greater militancy on behalf of the Republic". Photographs, here, like artworks elsewhere in this manuscript, are agentic and the agency is treacherous. They inevitably and invariably enable collateral realities.
À la Woolf, I could show you photographs of the beheadings hoping that your stance against capital punishment or ritualistic death of any kind would be affected or that the rage, the nausea, the grief would chip away at whatever compassion fatigue you might face. But in doing so, I would have to assume that the "you" is singular and therefore will react in exactly the same manner across the differences that populate our world and our selves; that the trauma that these photographs sow can be justified if it begets public outcry; that these photographs will not lend themselves to contorted collateral realities like giving actors like DAESH the attention they crave.
That's three assumptions too many for me. Therefore, I have decided to withhold these exact photographs. I would like to not be complicit in their circulations, their platforming, their witnessing and the traumas they generate- not more than I already am by virtue of working with them, through them and being worked by them.
Instead, besides this photograph here, **I will be presenting a 're-imaginations' of these photographs. I cannot guarantee that these re-imaginations will be any less/ in any form less problematic than the photographs themselves. But I am trying to make them different- to disrupt in whatever small way I can the semiotic worlds these photographs inhabit, displacing them ever so slightly, all of course, rather selfishly, in service of the arguments this manuscript presents. Sometimes you will encounter black-boxes, quite literally, within which some of these photographs lay buried. If you choose to unearth them, simply click+delete the box (in word)**

only if you really want to...
if you absolutely must.

I recommend "Look Away".]]

or follow the link to Pandora (the drive folder where they reside, for pdf-versions) or, if you are reading this in print, and really want to see them, please email me and I will give you access. The choice is yours, all I will say is "Look Away". Other times you will notice collages of memes, or photographs of paintings set in museums or stills from TV shows or vivid descriptions of different instantiations of beheadings (as if words are somehow less scarring than images- the irony is not lost on me). Every now or then you might also stumble upon a digital illustration and/or painting that I have drafted myself.
Please feel free to engage with them as per your own convenience.
Like I said before, it's all in the gut, isn't it?
P.P.S- If/When you do decide to open Pandora's Box, Click here.

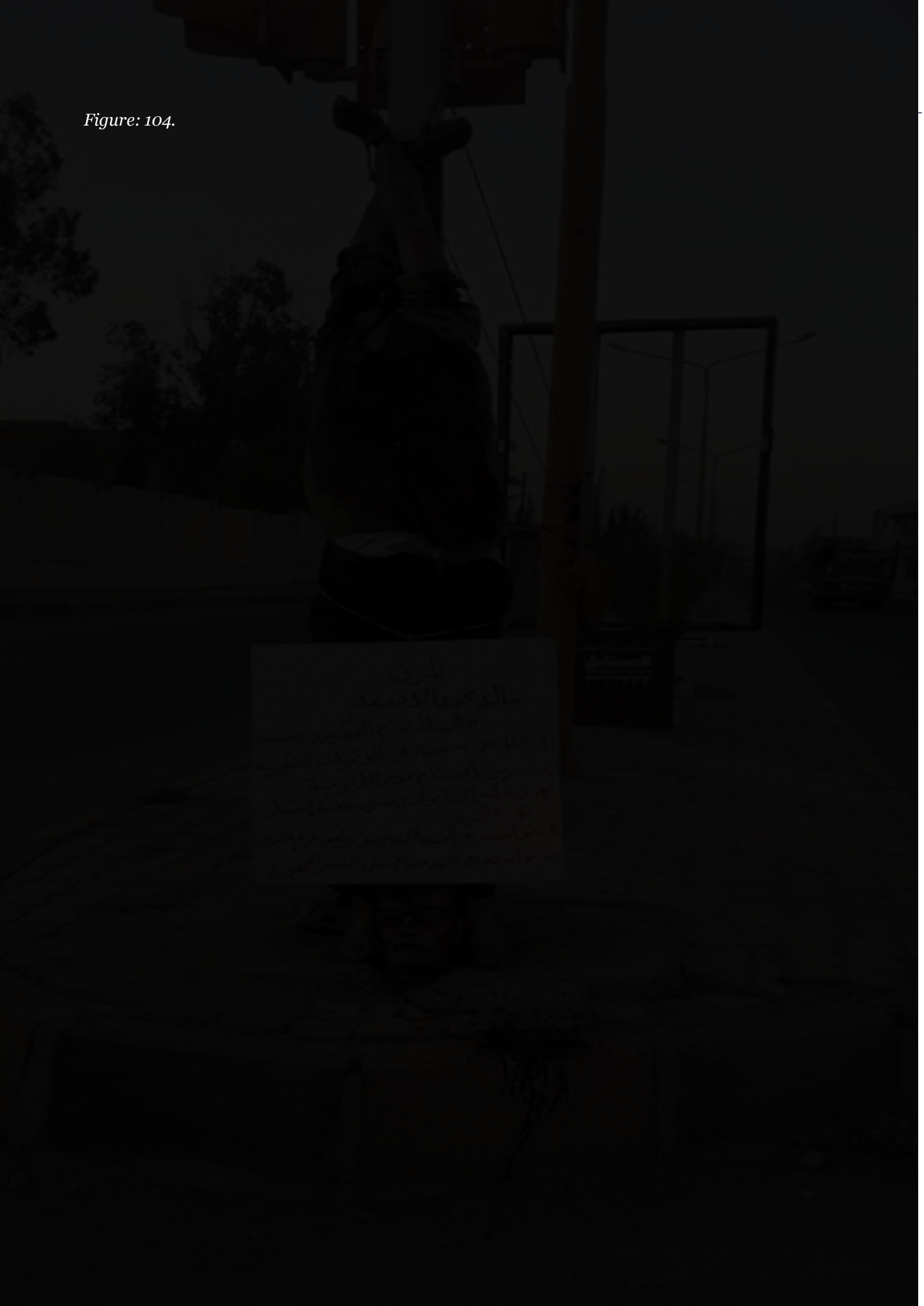


Figure: 104.

I am not entirely sure if this photograph is, or ever was, an "iconic"[9] photograph (not in the way I think (W. J. T. Mitchell, 2020a) meant it anyway). **But it was "viral", ever so briefly** (though I suppose the 'briefly' here is implied considering the disposition of virality[10] itself). I am flagging this here despite how categorically repulsive it feels to talk about the 'iconic'ism and/or virality of a photograph such as this, a photograph that documents Khaled al-Asad's harrowing death in its very gory minutia which is also something I find myself desensitised to at some level (?), **frankly because I have no other way to explain why this (of all the photographs/ videos of all the beheadings that are/were circulated by DAESH in/from Syria[11] over the past 12 years) is the photograph that haunts me; why this is the photograph I chose to write about/ through; why this is the photograph that I 'encountered', and not 'just' saw.**

Perhaps it's because the photograph is visceral, but "not only" (De la Cadena, 2015).

If I had to guess, I think it has burrowed itself into my visions because it seems to capture a moment of the immediate aftermath, but brings us to this aftermath, as if it were a moment of (faintly) frenzied movement (almost) - a Pollock-ian blur of the corporeal, the theatrical, the virtual, blending… a Pollock-ian blur that renders sensible the embodied dimension of this (a/) beheading.

Or rather, **I think the photograph plagues me because of how *surreal/ Syrial* it all seems**- all, the fact (and form) of the (/a) photograph existing itself, the contents of the photograph, of its very circulation[12], the ways in which it 'affects' me,

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[9] I suppose what I mean, at least in the W. J. T. Mitchell-ian world, is that there is nothing particularly 'metapicture'-y about this photograph. If this is of interest to you, please follow along this path: (W. J. T. Mitchell, 2005, 2007, 2013, 2020b; W. J. T. Mitchell & Mitchell, 1995)

[10] Given its complex relationship with temporality.
I couldn't find much written on it but my hunch of a hunch here is based on observing that anything that goes viral is only viral for a brief moment (it can be a few hours to a few days) until it is quite rapidly, stochasticly, replaced by the next viral thing. There is a temporal ambit here, somewhere. Someone should probably look into that. (Academic-buck-passing: 1, Me: 0).

[11] This does not pertain only to photographs and videos from DAESH beheadings (of which I was able to track down at least 24 similar ones and which are listed later in the chapter) but also beheadings by other groups such as Nour al-Dine Zinki Movement, the al-Shamia Front, Jaysh al-Islam as well and the list goes on. Moreover, the photograph was not my first, nor was it more or less iconic than say the James Foley beheading video or the video of a young boy beheaded by members of Nour al-Dine Zikni. In fact, it isn't even a video, which methodologically, would have been differently comprehensive. So this haunting, in very strict academic terms, is/was 'weird'.

[12] Think here of the temporal, spatial and contextual twistings that allow me, as a doctoral candidate writing in/from Geneva in 2023 being able to access a photograph of an event in Palmyra years after it occurred and the plurality of circuitries the photograph has had to traverse to reach my screen from the camera of a member of DAESH, uploaded to either LiveLeak, YouTube, BareNakedIslam, SyrianFight then/or platforms like Diaspora, to Twitter accounts and placed in newspaper articles.
Khaled's beheading tried as hard to reach me as I did to reach him.
Insert-profanity-of-choice Void and *Insert-profanity-of-choice* Nietzsche.

and the ways in which I present it to you here[13].

I could, and still can, almost *see* (in/ through the photograph) that the physical act of decapitation has only just finished, the blood still fresh, still flowing, still sedimenting. It pools. The wicked pallbearers that were hoisting, hanging, and discarding Khaled's body, only seconds ago, have only 'just' stepped off the platform, 'just' barely slipped through the edges of the frame, their murderous prints still fresh on the rope. The photographer-from-hell has only 'just' captured this homicidal moment and we find ourselves stuck in that moment of/ that time-loop of an ever-present-now. The exact instance of clicking is now a suspended-present/ a 'present' suspended. Once this image finds/found its 'on(line)-life', Khaled's body and his beheaded head exist(ed) in Schrodinger's[14] timescape.

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[13]Remember the Footnote where I discussed my "To Show or Not to Show" dilemma and those design-notes at the beginning of the dissertation?
Just to re-iterate. I have experimented around quite a bit with how to best, most care-fully but also most surreal-ly, bring these photographs to you. And so, there are visuals that have black boxes shrouding them, those have been built from scratch for the surreality of this chapter alone (a scene from a comic, a painting, a photograph, a digital illustration here and there), and those that have been planted tall in a nanoscopic attempt at resisting other more violent (and typically more hegemonic) scopic regimes (like the photo of Khaled and not his beheading, or the photos of Palmyra's past.) And more importantly, this is also true for the way in which that chapter is written, but that we have spoken of already (as well).

[14] Thanks to the pop-cultural penetration of certain aspects/ theories of quantum mechanics, we all know about the (poor) cat in the cardboard box. Now, I love a good thought experiment as much as the next person, perhaps even more, but this one seems particularly cruel-ish (at par I would say with the 'Trolley problem'). My best attempt at a summary of Erwin Schrodinger's (1935) experiment is the follows: **a poor, innocent, unaware (I think I got my point across) cat is placed in a sealed box alongside a radioactive atom, a Geiger counter, a vial of poison and a hammer. Now, if the Geiger counter detects radiation, the vial is broken and the poison seeps into the air causing a very painful death for the cat. On the other hand though, if the counter does not detect the radiation, and/or until the counter does not detect the radiation, the is/ remains alive.**
And therein lies the 'paradox' of "superposition". According to some of the foundational principles of quantum mechanics, **before the box is opened and we observe the outcome, the cat is in a state of superposition i.e., it is technically both alive and dead simultaneously. Only when we open the box to observe the outcome does one of those *potential* (and that's the key term) realities collapse into the other, at least in our given/perceivable lifeworld-timelines.** This experiment, then, is a tactile thinking tool for us to mull over two key concepts within the quantum world (1) **that particles can exist in multiple states of being simultaneously, i.e. across/ within/ through 'multiple' realities, and (2) that the act of observation, here, holds incredible power-power of almost haptic, tangible, palpable, concretizing… conclusive (though still deeply constructed and existential) texture.**
Okay, *insert-profanity-of-choice* it. Just watch 'Coherence' (Byrkit et al., 2015). It explains everything about the latter metaphysical dynamics much better than I ever could. Or Ant-Man- just any of the 3, but mostly Quantumania (Loveness, 2023).
Anyway, getting back to beheadings.
I have fudged around with dead-living, body-unbody, now-past-future boundaries quite a bit earlier on in this text as well, but here it becomes even more important for us to really look at what that "twisting" does. **Here, Khaled al-Asaad's death lives long after he has died// or Khaled al-Asaad continues to live through his death, i.e., his body, his head, and his life continue to 'affect' our world because they are in one reading/ sense-making of**

The physical body has long since decomposed, but the physicality of its memory persists[15]. There is a lingering on-going-ness in the content and the form of this photograph, and the conflict itself, a processuality[16]. *Surreal.*

There is a performance, an exhibition, still on-going: the body and the head are being deliberately displayed/ displayed with deliberation in ways that attract a "twisted" (Hirsch 2014) visibility (you cannot look away, but it is not something you want to look at), in a space that catalyses it. Everyone looks at a traffic light. We have to; We must; and perhaps because of that user-friendly pragmatism its functional mechanism is relatively simple: Red → Stop. Yellow → Wait. Green → Go. No beheaded bodies dangling from the pole.

Here, however, everything is "twisted" (Hirsch, 2014). Red → STOP. Yellow → STOP. Green → STOP. Khaled's tortured body was slung over the pole. The chromatic lexicon, the materiality of the object as a whole and of its individual parts and their very semiotics shift, fracture, contort, distort, warp. The traffic light is still a traffic light but "not only" (De la Cadena, 2015). It is now also a gibbet.

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the world no longer with us, and in another, still quite present. This of course is no attempt at any reassurance or comparability. Khaled al-Asaad's beheading still living on in this dissertation, or any other research work, will never be of any solace to his family. And buying into the worlding where Khaled is no longer with us, and therefore truly "gone", would never do justice to the legacy of the social-change his beheading could/is producing. But taking this multiplicity of being seriously, staying with the trouble of unravelling the affects of this 'superposition', will allow us to better scrutinise the machinations of this beheading, the socio-political worldings that lie entangled with it and trace the affective politics that, (again) both, generative of and generated by this beheading's "on-life".

Plus, because of the seriousness bestowed on the question of observability, it forces us to pause and think about the "gaze" of the researcher (something I have briefly touched on previously, and will return to in the next section of this chapter when we discuss 'looking'/ 'seeing'/ 'feeling' through the ecology of Palmyra and 'sensing' Tadmor and al-Asaad's beheading through DAESH's "lens".

[15] Again, **this is a false dichotomy that is set up here for narrative clarity only**.

In a networked world, especially in the manner in which we have defined embodied experience, there are no clear boundaries between memory and physicality, between where the self and/or the body begins and ends and no clear sense of temporal linearity by virtue of which decomposition itself would be seen as clearly defined within a discrete moment of time when a body is in a specific state. It is always, again, "Everything, Everywhere, All at Once (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022)."

[16] If we see the photograph as I have described here - and I know that that is a big 'if' - **the instance captured in the photograph is no longer that of an episode, or moment, or event, or statement, or a discrete act. The instance appears then as an entangled process with its beginnings and ends being very hard to track, trace, or measure, begging the question of whether they exist at all- the instance becomes a patchwork quilt with loose, open endings. There is structure and shape even but no margins. It's a mid-movement-assembling whose boundaries are porous at their most solid, and completely translucent at their most transparent. It is never (a) 'still' (life/ photograph).**

The same stands true for the body itself. Torsos aren't supposed to be headless. Heads aren't supposed[17], to be trophies and/or warnings[18]. Hands aren't supposed to be forever-out-stretched. There isn't supposed to be so much blood, not on the outside of a body. The collars of shirts[19] are not

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[17] But it does have a long surreal (if I may) history itself.
Let's talk about Headhunting, Medical Experimentation and Taxidermy.
Just kidding. I will let you figure that one out on your own, if it interests you at all. But if I might say something to sway your decision just a bit- ***I had a 'great time' tracing the etymology of 'head'-'hunting' from it being a practice where the beheaded head of the vanquished was a trophy-of-combat and perversely preserved in, among other things, jars of pickle juice, to its echoes in taxidermized heads of animals that are*** (*coughs loudly* brutally murdered in the name of sport, I mean *stops coughing*) ***that are targets at hunting games and decoration at lodges, to the ways in which the 'hunted', more like scouted, for academic/scientific research*** (and here the further sub-divisions of the anatomical parts of a head become even more interesting because practices for organ-storage and experimentations – eyes and tongue especially, more so than nose, were very different from medical practices for experimentation on the brain, which were only tangentially related to a whole different set of research practices on the skull and a different set for just the scalp itself) ***and the macabre clinicality of all that*** (especially, again, the preservation techniques before the mainstreaming of refrigerators), to its ringing in law-enforcement, particularly, bounty-hunting practices, and how at the very least, each of these practices, if not more (like 'head'counting') bled into contemporary 'human'-'resources' (you are seeing it now too, even in this term itself, aren't you?...The grotesque grisliness of some of our most commonly used words) worldings as a term for recruitment. So, if you are curious… read on, over there, out there somewhere.

[18] **Think here of, besides everything mentioned in that^ Footnote, the literal sign/symbol/icon for danger: skull with crossbones underneath.** Have untethered heads (with flesh or 'simply' skeletal) always been warnings? I really think there is an entire "IPS of Heads: A Politics of (Clinical) Fear" paper waiting to be written here if there isn't one already- though I am positive that something of the sort is out there. I know of the 'literary theory' version of it already: Regina Janes's absolutely thrilling, "Losing Our Heads: Beheadings in Literature and Culture" (Janes, 2005).
(I really don't mean to have an unhinged Harley Quinn (Barba & Perrin, 2017) moment grinning about the book, but it is one of the most gripping academic books I have ever read. It took me just one, very traumatizing, weekend to lap it up cover to cover. But, I will return to this book later, soon enough.)

[19] Remember when I talked to you about being an 'unreliable narrator'? Back in Field Note: 3? This is a good example for the arguments made there.
By this point in the research process, i.e., when I was writing this out for the first time, I had reached a stage where I was doubting whether what I was physically seeing (not metaphorically or anything) and the connections and conclusions I was drawing were even remotely plausible or if things appeared to me the way they did because I was looking for them. Every underground tunnel or basement I read – to me – irrespective of whether it was in Aleppo or Douma or Idlib or Hama was instantly, most probably, a torture chamber. Every wooden beam, every fan, every iron rod in any picture or video was torture-debris. Every demolished building with sheets flapping across the length of its windows meant there had been snipers in the area. Every bundled, bunched up, cloth-y blob on the roads and/or buried under burnt detritus was a wrapping for a mutilated body-part of someone. And then it escalated. I would be looking at suit-ties and images of nooses were flashing against my eyes. Or cocktail glasses would become glass shards which would become images of blown-up buildings, rubble on roads, and White Helmet rescue photographs (yes the ones from the first few pages of this chapter). Or they would become syringes or surgical lightheads which would become photos of the Kafr Nabl Surgical Hospital bombing. And then it escalated more. **Suit-ties inspired images of hematomas(/-c bruises) on different limbs in different stills across different photos/videos bringing with them memories of my own ecchymosis-tic wrists. Glasses became road debris (I could literally hear the crunching of glass-under-shoes with every photograph) which became perfume bottles which brought flashes of my own bare skin, small lacerations, trickling blood, and the stinging of sprayed perfume over fresh wounds. I kept thinking about what Omar said**

supposed to be tucked into the discoloured, purplish meat of the exsanguinated neck, stuck in place because of broken bones, torn muscles, and drained capillaries.

From what I have learnt, in the 3 to 4 seconds after the head has been cut-off from the body, there is a complete loss of consciousness. 3-6 minutes later, irreversible brain damage sets in and there is permanent cell-death. Excitotoxicity sets in and oxygen is sequestered from both the body-less-head and the head-less-body. All that remains is a *tadpan (*तड़पन*)*[20] : a few moments of tortured

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about his toothbrush- even now, 6 years later, every now and then when he looks at it - or any toothbrush for that matter - he is back in that basement **(the one we talked about in Chapter: 2- To/for Syrialism).**
This beheading-void-that-I-was-staring-into was dragging me into all possible basements- mine or other's. So, I mean this with the best of intentions, I am a wholly unreliable narrator because, despite my ruthless attempts at brutal, fierce, vulnerable honesty about my affective positionality, I still lie*. Or at the very least, I still speak in half-truths. And that's okay for now I think, because, after all travel logs are only interesting because you know just enough about the narrator to be able to place yourself behind their eyes, but not so much that you can't relate to them. **They aren't generalising nor entirely personal… they are simply attempts at subjective, grounded, shared, relatable knowledge production, more often than not about terrains that have relatively less foot traffic.**
And it has to be fine because I am already shitting my pants. I physically cannot squeeze more information about my *insert-profanity-of-choice-again* onto-epistemological positionality out of my *insert-profanity-of-choice-yet-again* phalanges even if I tried. The toothpaste tube is now empty.
*I am thinking here of how Auchter thought of the relationality between any attempt/ pretence/ performance of objectivity when it came to the scholarship of death. To explore this, she gives us the following anecdote (Auchter, 2018):
"At Choung Ek, the Killing Fields in Cambodia, an audio guide tells the stories of survivors, of Chum Mey, who founded the documentation center of Cambodia. He tells how at Tuol Sleng prison, the survivors had to tell stories. They had to tell a lie, to believe their own lies, so they could be forgiven. When you ran out of stories, you'd be killed.
On my way out of Tuol Sleng, Chum Mey sits at a table selling his book. I buy a copy, and he poses for a photograph with me, of course. I return a few months later and buy another copy. Who wouldn't want their photograph with a genocide survivor? Once, twice. I wonder how many people who buy the book actually read it. I read it a month or so later. I read an excerpt aloud to my students that is the confession Chum Mey was forced to sign that admitted he worked for the CIA. He didn't work for the CIA.
So many lies. My own lie: the purported objectivity of the scholarship of death. So many stories. My own story: a family history of Jews killed in the Holocaust, unresolved anger over a childhood where this history seemed distant, and where no one talked about Rwanda and Bosnia even when they were happening at that exact moment, and the guilt over the untold stories that has somehow led me to this: the travels of the death tourist."

[20] I suppose the loose translation for it would be an anxious, tormented, throbbing that can be both physical and affective. And that is what makes it a suitable signifier here: it is more than just a tremor or a trembling or a twitching or a quiver. It is all of that, but at a deeply emotive level as well as a physical one. Usually, at least in the Urdu-poetry multiverses for example, **it is a flipflopping-of-a-fish-that-was-only-just-amputated-out-of-its-water-kind-of-throbbing that signifies the embodied (in every sense of that word) ache of longing or heartbreak or of being-ripped-from-something existentially-necessary… of yearnings of all shapes. It's the "Bronte-ian (think Wuthering Heights), Plath-ian (think Ariel or the Bell Jar), Pessoan (yes, again, The Book of Disquiet)" register of yearning, i.e. what yearning looks like in/through "mingled bodies"** (Serres, 2008).

jactitation. Limbs may twitch, torsos may jerk, eyes may blink as the last semblances of living-life are drained from Khaled al-Asad's/ a body[21].

[21] You know how I keep telling you to "Look Away"? Of course, besides the reasons I have already mentioned, there is an element of been-there-done-that-and-really-wish-I-hadn't. My stomach is pretty un-flippy, for better or for worse, when it comes to really "sensing" the gore, guts and embodied-ness of violences of most kind- just the tools, and product, of the trade, I suppose. So, I had relatively fewer moments of "*insert-profanity-of-choice* I really really should have looked away, that was so *insert-profanity-again* dumb" tinged regret, **but this move - trying to figure out what happens to the body, in its machinations, when a decapitation takes place - easily makes it to the top-5 on that list. So, look away, because I am gently and briefly, going to talk to you about the corporeal dimensions of this "tadpan". Or rather, I am just going to drop off some quotes from Camus here - from his Reflections on the Guillotine - and summarise some insights from biological studies on animal decapitation and just slowly-walk-away.**

A quick summary of findings from (Derr, 1991; Holson, 1992; Kongara et al., 2014) vis-à-vis the physiology of death through decapitation: I won't stress again, how repulsive, animal testing is. From how I felt about the poor imaginary-cat-in-Schordinger's-experiment whom you met a few pages ago you can imagine how I feel about the fact that we experiment on rats, cockroaches and snakes when studying the 'effects' of 'decapitation' on 'mammals'. [[Hang on to the scientificity of the language tree for later, because I will return to the making-sensible-as-making-digestible aspect of it, when thinking through the entanglement of 'science' and capital punishment later in the chapter]]. So, let's just dive into it- Justifications for why we even need these studies in the first place can, apparently range, from 'tracing how long the brain remains active post-death' to 'finding ways to make head transplants feasible; to 'testing for more "humane" methods of euthanasia. **[[And see, here again, the *insert-profanity-of-choice*, friction (Tsing, 2005) that governs our lives and worlds comes back to taunt me- I have always been a very strong advocate of/for euthanasia. How do I square that position with this "need" for animal testing to supposedly make it more feasible?]]** There are quite a few studies, though, that have become "iconic" because of their findings- (1.) **Within a span of 2.7-6 seconds, all animals tested loose complete consciousness, do to a sudden and immediate "fall of intracranial perfusion of blood",** (2) **This is seen as an indicator/ measure of 'humane'ness, since the loss of consciousness is seen to imply an inability to perceive 'distress and pain' which in this case, would be effectively instantaneous;** (3) **Brain death, i.e., the complete**	Quotes from Camus's Reflection on the Guillotine about the physiology on death through decapitation: **"….Those courageous doctors, invited in the interest of science to examine the bodies of the guillotined after the execution considered it their duty to sum up their dreadful observations:** "If we may be permitted to give our opinion, such sights are frightfully painful. **The blood flows from the blood vessels at the speed of the severed carotids, then it coagulates. The muscles contract and their fibrillation is stupefying; the intestines ripple and the heart moves irregularly, incompletely, fascinatingly. The mouth puckers at certain moments in a terrible pout.** It is true that, **in that severed head the eyes are motionless with dilated, pupils;** fortunately they look at nothing and, if they are devoid of the cloudiness and opalescence of the corpse, they have no motion; **their transparence belongs to life, but their fixity belongs to death. All this can last minutes, even hours, in sound specimens: death is not immediate...** Thus, every vital element survives decapitation. **The doctor is left with this impression of a horrible experience, of a murderous vivisection, followed by a premature burial.".**" "…An executioner's assistant (hence hardly suspect of indulging in romanticizing and sentimentality) describes in these terms what he was forced to see: "It was a madman undergoing a real attack of delirium tremens that we dropped under the blade. **The head dies at once. But the body literally jumps about in the basket, straining on the cords. Twenty minutes later, at the cemetery, it is still quivering."** … The present chaplain of the Sante prison, Father

And the smell. The smell always lingers.

Every time I look at this photograph, I instinctively want to hold my breath. I can almost *feel* the stench of the cadaver itself (like freshly rotting fruit and meat that has spoiled for too long) lingering, an invisible but decisively perceptible tentacly-smokey-shape[22] waiting for rigour mortis to set in and in that process incrementally learning how to explode in its onlife. Soon skatole will bring a distinct faecal odour to the table, and it is typically[23] accompanied by mothy-smelling indole, and the rotten-egg-y smell of hydrogen sulphur and finally the notes of rotting cabbage (methanethiol) and pungent garlic-y-acid (trisulfide) tie the putrid harmony together. **Mostly, to me, death smells**

absence of electrical activity in the brain, typically occurs within 1.5 minutes, with their being a period of 10-14 seconds for/of "nociception" (the process through which the sensory nervous system perceives, transmits and encodes 'noxious' stimuli// 'painful' stimuli) as the medulla oblongata (the portion of the brainstem that acts as the connecting/ connector space for the brainstem and the spinal cord) is either bisected or otherwise severed from the spinal cord; (4) The remains of the body, depending on the species of the animal, and the state of the individual test subject (there is a lot of variation here based on individual-level physiological characteristics), may continue to 'operate' independently - sometimes for days - until the metabolic and nervous systems inevitably shut down.	Devoyod… an account that goes rather far and renews the story of Languille, whose decapitated head answered the call of his name… When he was executed, we were a short distance from him. **His head fell into the trough in front of the guillotine and the body was immediately put into the basket; but, by some mistake, the basket was closed before the head was put in.** The assistant who was carrying the head had to wait a moment until the basket was opened again; now, during that brief space of time we could see the condemned man's eyes fixed on me with a look of supplication, as if to ask forgiveness. Instinctively, we made the sign of the cross to bless the head, and then the lids blinked, the expression of the eyes softened, and finally the look, that had remained full of expression, became vague: . . ." The reader may or may not, according to his faith, accept the explanation provided by the priest. At least those eyes that "had remained full of expression" need no interpretation."

For more information on the same, I highly recommend: "Stiff: the Curious lives of Human Cadavers" (Roach, 2004). Though the book only has one chapter on 'decapitation' - the other 11 topics ranging from body snatching, cadaver-plastic-surgery, corpses used as crash test dummies and so on, ending with, a self-critical-and-sardonic-humored entry on what Roach thinks about her own (inevitable) remains - it presents a rather well informed map **tracing a contemporary history of scientific practices and/of knowledge production from 'animal' to human 'testing' (for head transplants) in the bio(socio)logical-sciences when it comes to cadavers.**

[22] Do you ever wonder what shapes different smells have? Or is it only 'just' a colour variation for you, and in terms of shape all smells repeat the configuration of smoke but in vastly different textures? I ask because the smell of corpses, depending on how old they are, to me, from the few that I have seen, often, looks like an Eldritch claw (from Dungeons and Dragons) that has a pistachio-green-y-diaphanous aura which stands in a very stark contrast to the smell and/or shape of Sarin in my mind. You will meet the latter at the end of this chapter when we meet another member of Syrialism's dysfunctional clique, Cruelty, and talk about (my failure to be able to talk to you about) the surreality/ syriality of sarin gas attacks and politics of breathing.

[23] Of course, **all corpses smell different based on the body's inner flora and fauna.** This is simply my closest approximation- anyone who has been to a morgue before or lived in close approximation to the body of a deceased who had to wait a few days before they could be buried would perhaps recognise it, but only tangentially so. **It would smell different to them, I think. It would always smell different to us all- but perhaps there are echoes** (yes, again with that *insert-profanity-of-choice*).

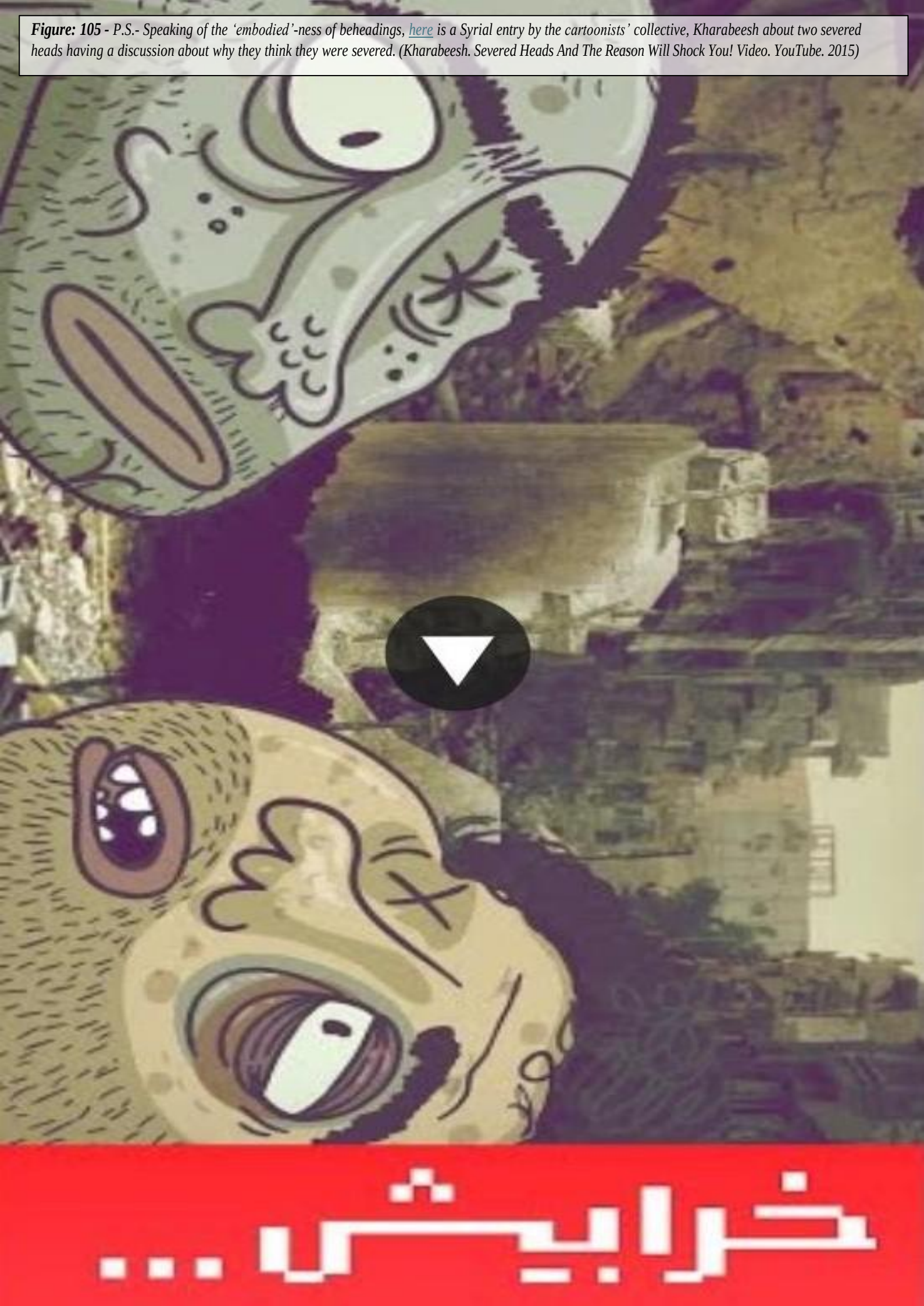
like moribund roses and meaty, coppery ash[24]. This smell isn't supposed to be misting around traffic lights, and I can't think of any traffic lights that are housed in hospital morgues, private mortuaries, funeral grounds, crematoriums, cemeteries, in waterbodies bobbing with bloated putrefied drowned corpses- places where this smell, usually/ typ(e)ically, builds home. **And though all death is the ruin of some sort, the ruination of the body, the self, the person, the social node, the political actor is just not supposed to be so achingly visible.**

But it is. Here. **All of it is "twisted"** (Hirsch, 2014). **Khaled al-Assad's ruin, – of the body, self, being, personhood, subjectivities, relationalities – the process and products of his complete and utter ruination at the hands of DAESH, are rendered visible, or rather sensible here, through this achingly visible embodiment.** And through this embodiment, Khaled al-Assad's body and this photograph affectively speak to us well beyond the spectre of the script DAESH tethered to them, quite literally (think placard). Khaled al-Assad's ruination is felt here in all of its embodiment as if it were a phantom limb. *Surreal.*

Remember the Refrain;
The process is surreal.
The embodiment is surreal.
The multiplicity is surreal.
The plurality is surreal.
The partial connectivity is surreal.
The surreality itself is surreal;
Twisted twistings// twisting twists
Remember the Refrain.

[24] For instance, (from^) I grew up burning the dead. Burials, on the other hand, as I have more recently learnt, smell more dew-y, like after-rain-earth.

Figure: 105 - *P.S.- Speaking of the 'embodied'-ness of beheadings, here is a Syrial entry by the cartoonists' collective, Kharabeesh about two severed heads having a discussion about why they think they were severed. (Kharabeesh. Severed Heads And The Reason Will Shock You! Video. YouTube. 2015)*



And/ Or perhaps this photograph is haunting me (yes, all that was only reason: 1) because I find it intensely affective (?). **I think Khaled al-Assad's spectral present-absence here cries out for a re-investigation of what such a beheading is, what it does, how it becomes, how it affects our worlds, and how our worlds are affected by it?** It demands that we fundamentally rethink the very composition of this practice, of how this practice comes to matter (both materially and semiotically) and how it re-inhabits, re-builds, and re-morphs our embodied, socio-political realities. **It demands that we reimagine beheadings surreal-ly: an imagination where beheading is an earnestly embodied verb (and not just a noun[25] i.e.,**

[25] The obsession with this distinction is beginning to sound, at least to me, a tad like nails-against-metal, but regardless, it does remain the easiest way for me, Stoler, Mol, Law (Law, 2009; Mol, 2003; Stoler, 2008) and others to **continuously emphasis the process/event, process/practice, process/performance, process/ enactment distinction and so on,** driving focus back to the "active"-ness of the 'verb' in question as opposed to some of the stasis that sets in when the same action/practice is thought of as a noun*. The nail-y-screachy-raspy-lingering-bone-crackling sound, the grima (yes! I was amazed it had a name too! Well, it doesn't at the moment, technically, but there is a group of psychologists that are trying to bring 'grima' from the Spanish pluriverse into the English one by calling it thus and classifying it as a "distinct emotional concept"! (Schweiger Gallo et al., 2017)), I think is because of the 'or' emphasis again. I know that we, scholars using that distinction, stress the distinction explicitly and rather forcefully, but I think, at least that is the case for me, that that is more a rhetoric device to concept-work and world-build, than to say, that any given practice *must* be seen as *only* a noun. Here, it is always a noun-but-"not only" and therefore, also a verb. It's a shift to a different dimension of the practice/ process/ enactment and not an insistence on the dimension being the *only* reality of it (though I think - and that is perhaps where 'our' infighting will begin - we would argue varyingly for the importance of studying/ understanding/ sensing and making sense of this dimension over others). Think back to how I conceptualised 'maps' and 'mapping'- it is always the actual and the virtual, the representation and the reimagination, the actuality and the potentiality, the stabilizing moves and the destabilizing moves, the difference and the repetition… the noun and the verb always together, everywhere.
That, and the fact, that it's run riot in processual-thinking-scholarship; much like sense and makes sense, for Sensory IR.
*There are a million ways to understand what 'noun' means here and depending on where one stands along the different metatheoretical "camps" of/in International Relations and/or 'P'hilosophy of Metaphysics, perhaps a million more. But, playing the Dummies game again, I tend to see the 'fissure' around whether or not a researcher/person thinks that ideas are 'figurations'. If, like for me, you think ideas are figurations that actively participate in building our world, and that our worlds and us actively participate in making then the 'noun' is already to some degree and active process (think back to Theoretical Note: 5). **However, the difference is in the level/ intensity of stability, durability and "territorialization" when compared to a verb.** A beheading as a noun for me, is still/always 'active' in the sense that is an agentic "productive images that can be inhabited", but the emphasis there is on its response-ability as a (roughly cohesive and cohesively performing agentic) actor vis-à-vis our pluriverse. As a verb on the other hand, the emphasis changes, for me, and I can now take (more) seriously, its embodiedness, its multiplicity, its plurality, its partial connections… just its sheer surreal multidimensionality and as such render complex its entanglements with the world, reimagining these response-abilties (Barad, 2010). It's almost a 'level' of analysis issue: Remember the Pollock-example I walked us through when we were talking about morphologies within a networked universe? If I asked questions about how the comet impacted the painting, the artist and the viewer, I would be asking questions about the comet as if it were a noun. And if I asked questions about how the comet became the comet through an interaction effect between the painting, the artist and the viewer and how it in turn then affected them, I would be asking questions about the comet as if it were a verb. Both realities exist simultaneously and interconnectedly and it is 'simply' a matter of (from) where and when we choose to// where and when we encounter the comet.

it is, as we have seen above, processual and embodied) that is meaning-fully multiple, simultaneously participates in quite a few different worldings and in that is plural, and is deeply entangled (no matter how hiccupped, bumpy or partial that connection might be) with other violent verbs/practices/ "small worlds" (Austin, 2017)**.**

I took me a while to get here, so, bear with me. It was a lot for me too.

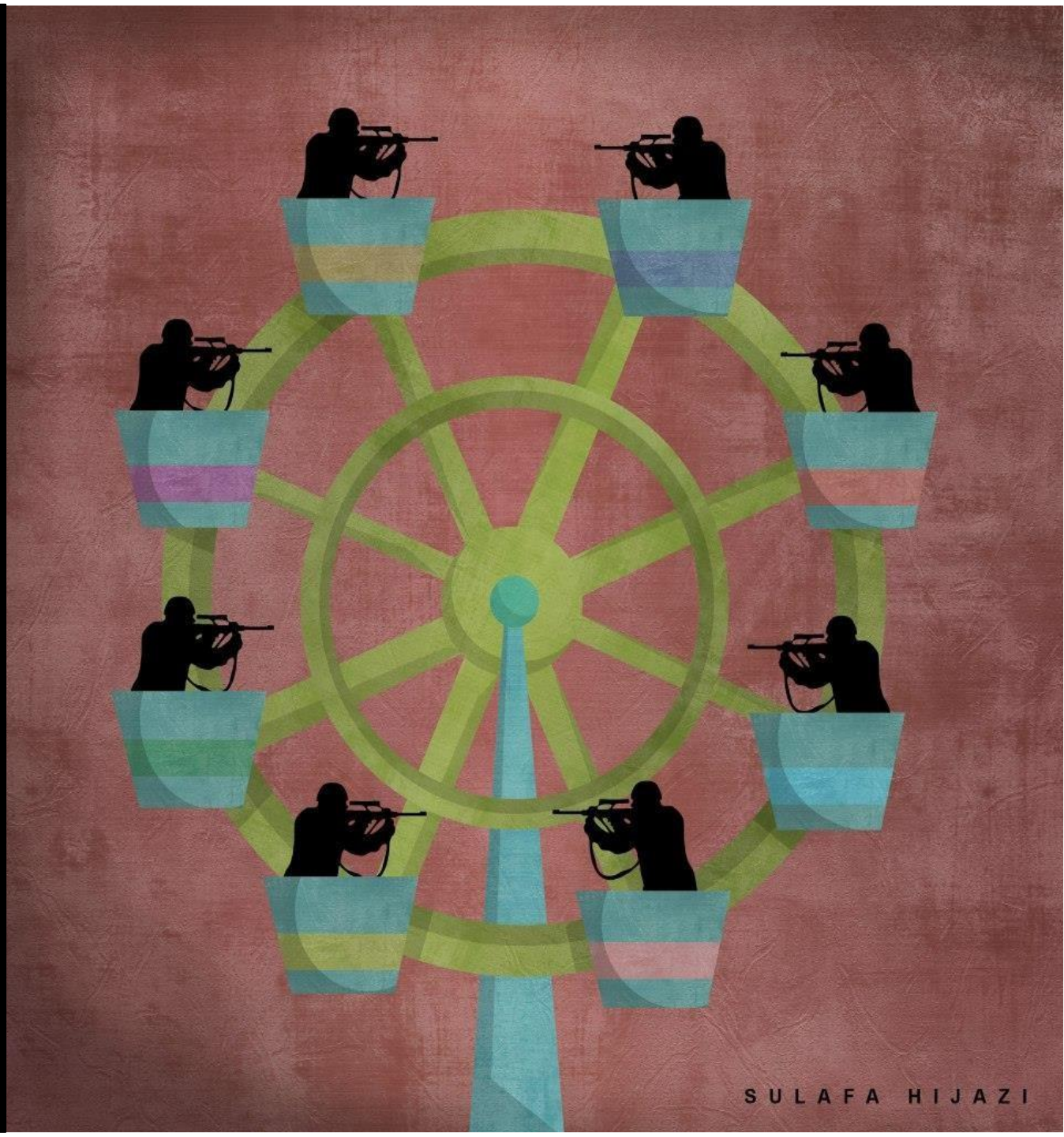


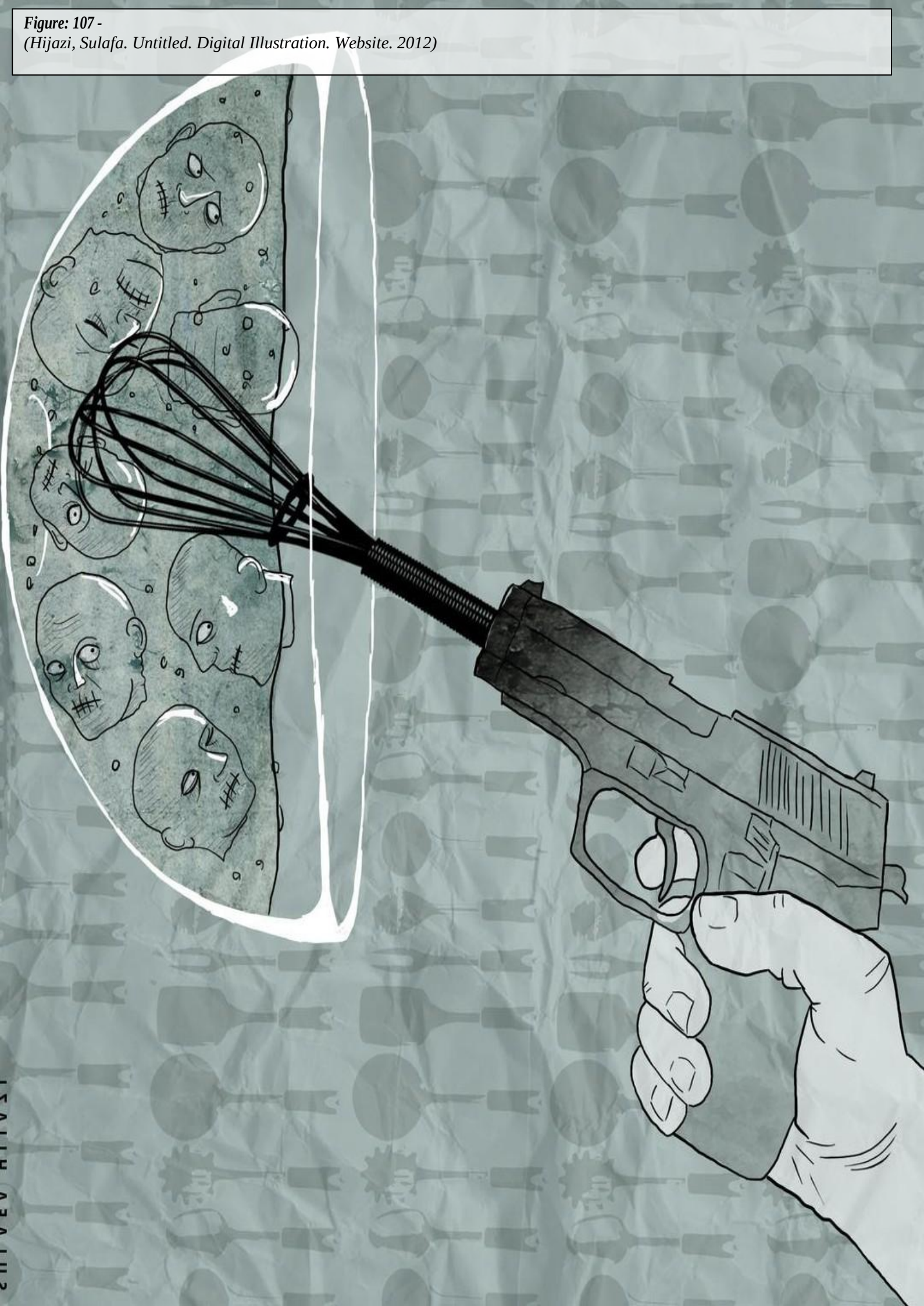
Figure: 106 – *Illustration by Sulafa Hijazi titled, "the Cycle" (made, in partial-connection, to the other Cycle of Sulafa's that we discussed in the Translator's Note)*

Caption, Sulafa, or rather Sussane defining Sulafa's work: ***'It is not merely the war that is an ongoing process – it is also the continuing cycle of violence*** *and her own process of* ***finding a diasporic identity between her childhood of being taught to think in terms of the regime's systems, the traumas of war and her new-found freedom."***

Author Engagement: After-, On- and Other Partial(ly Entangled) Cyclical Lives of the Syrian Revolution

(Hijazi, Sulafa. The Cycle. Digital Illustration. Website. 2012)

Figure: 107 -
(Hijazi, Sulafa. Untitled. Digital Illustration. Website. 2012)



Living through (a) Beheading:
Ruin-ing Bodies | Ruin-ing Spaces | Ruin-ing Subjectivities | Exhibition(s) of Ruin-ation

First let's tackle why I think that the photograph wants Khaled al-Assad's beheading to be seen as "multiple" (Mol, 2003). I stuttered my way to/through this metanoia-c realisation after spending months on end trying to figure out why any kind of description for this photograph felt so… slippery. I knew it was more than 'the-usual'-writing-about-violence-and-the-personal-simaltaneously-and-too(?)-entangled-ly but I didn't know what it was. There seemed to be endless entry points into the photograph (again, in more than 'this-is-Deleuzian-relationality-writing-issue' way), a seemingly endless list of things that I was interested in exploring and worst of all, every time I returned to the photograph (which was at the very least at least once a day for months until it, quite literally, broke me) I was feverishly sickened by a different aspect of it. **There were so many layers, so many dimensions, so many degrees, of ruination in just this one photograph, so many threads, colours, tones, and notes I was grasping on that by the end of it I had constructed my own version of Borges's Library of Babel**[26]. At least in my head. And **every**

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[26] *I think, the library is quite a compelling visual. Borges constructed the library as an infinite space/structure that holds every possible book that could have been conceived using every permutation and combination of the 25 basic characters that build the English language- 22 alphabets, the period, the comma, and the space in between words. This effectively means, though, that most of the books housed here are gibberish, and yet, the occupants of/in the library ardently buy into the flipside of that coin: the library must, by the necessity of its infinity, also contain every coherent version of every book ever written or every version of any book that has slight inconsistencies, anomalies and mistakes but is otherwise coherent. Adding to the confusion* ***and/or absurdity/ infinity/ unbounded-infinity-of-virtuality-finding-translation-in-the-bounded-infinity-of-the-concurrent-morphology-of-its-actuality/ rhizomatic-ness(?) of it all*** *is the structure of the place itself- though the library is built in the form of endlessly connecting hexagonal rooms that stand adjacent to one another,* ***the books are arranged in a completely/ seemingly maddening manner within this orderly façade.*** *They seemed to have been placed completely randomly echoing the theme of the reality-of-chaos-within-the-pretense-of-order.*
And the different practices and performances of librarian-ness that are subsequentially birthed in this worlding only heightens this transfixion (with this visual) for me. ***There is an epidemic of despair and madness - and a 'craze' for the "search for meaning" - to the point of suicide-triggering depression. There are cult-ish groups, and beliefs in messianic figures ("Man of the Book"), and 'Purifiers' who believe that they can bring order to the library by simply burning everything they encounter as 'useless' until only 'meaning'-full books remain, and those that think 'rationally' that there must be a book-of-contents-listing-all-books and drive themselves to death, starvation and insanity in a blind search for this pre-existing ordering manual.***

You can see why I find this visual a rather compelling allegory for (at the very least) the research that went into tracing 'ruination' in this photograph, into this chapter (if not this whole dissertation) in particular, and knowledge production more generally (as was Borges' intention, I think).

*There's quite a few motifs here that can be pulled out to make that argument- the labyrinth, the spectrum of 'reason'-ability, the metaphysics of infinity, the 'belief' in an 'absolute truth'/ 'correct meaning', the 'puritanical' violences that that generates, it's comparison to Borel's dactylographic monkey theorem (or the infinite monkey theorem: a monkey sitting at a type writer hitting its keys at random for an infinite amount of time will with near-absolute certainty, at some point in time, generate the complete works of William Shakespeare; *insert-profanity-*

book in that library was only about this one photograph. Everything was about this one photograph. Everything, for me at that point, was about this one beheading, about beheadings, about fictional/mythical beheadings, about 'real' beheadings, about other beheadings, about the things beheadings were entangled with, about our worlds- worlds where beheadings live and actively participate in the (co/re)production of reality, and then back to this beheading. This would happen *every. single. time.* I tried to write. The photograph would blur, there would be a teeth-clenching, gulp-y moment, a pit would begin gnawing at my guts and I would spiral. I would say it was surreal/ Syrial, but I think it was much closer to raving delirium. I was Cloud-Atlas-ing[27] over this photograph. Dreadfully. Uncontrollably.

I tried writing through it, theorising it, charting it, dreaming about it (that was unintentional), hallucinating about it (also unintentional), approaching it through/in altered states of consciousness (does that count as intentional?), but the scratching continued- symbolically (the itch from/of not being able to pin down what you are feeling/thinking subdermal-ly but can't seem to articulate) and literally (stress makes me scratch and dig my nails into any available flesh- usually my own.) Finally, I decided to do the unthinkable (for me)- I talked about it.

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of-choice again and just watch "After the Dark", aka, "The Philosophers"), the 'fact' that full-stops, commas and spaces were operationalized as equally integral components of language construction and classification as constitutive alphabets and so on, and on, and on, and on. But the themes that gave vertigo-ed my unadulterated attention here, are, again, the sheer multiplicities and pluralities of even (technically) 'one' text/book, and their partial connections, both to each other and other iterations of other books, each somehow exceptionally unique, yet… at some level, repetitive. That's what this section is about, this photograph became about, this obsessive madness led me/us to: the rhythm of differences and repetitions, of repeating differences and differing repetitions, the echoes/ resonances… "refrains" across deeply differing and differential realities/ books, how these refrains affect us and shape our worlds and worldings and what experiencing them as such, as living dimensions/ environments/ ecologies, tells us about them.*

> *I wonder, sometimes, if the answer to all of this lies in 'simply' untangling the relationship between sense-making and ordering or rather between sense-ing, sense-making and 'making sense'/ 'making sense of', or making 'real' the politics-power nexus in there/ making 'strange' the often presumed congruence in there.*
>
> *Meh, another story for another day?*

[27] ***Remember the first fifteen-ish minutes of the movie*** (D. Mitchell, 2008; Wachowski et al., 2012) ***where we see several different storylines from like five different periods in a single cascade?*** *We essentially go from seeing Adam Ewing board the Prophetess and sail - in colonial splendour - across the South Pacific (1842) to following Robert Frobisher composing the Cloud Atlas Sextet under the guidance of Vyvyan Ayrs (123c) to stalking Luisa Rey investigate a nuclear power plant (1273) to seeing Timothy Cavendish publishing a comic-series about the characters' misadventures (2012) to finally facing off against a sadistically oppressive regime in Neo Seoul with Sonmi-451 (2144). Red threads entangle all these characters, their arches, their actions, and their circumstances through ties of beheadings, to images, practices, maps of the character's actions across space and time, and the very idea of reincarnation, of course. That's what it felt like- only with a lot more blood, gore, bone, and severed heads. And lots and lots of beheadings.*

I (post-consent) showed this photograph to those closest to me and realised that it was vaguely the same for them as well. Nobody seemed to agree on what they were most affected by, enraged by, sickened by, what "haunted" (Auchter, 2014) them the most about this photograph. **It was different for all of them, but also the affect was simultaneously roughly the same, and it was mid-way through that last conversation that it hit me, the alinea → The photograph, itself, desired to be seen as multiple.** There was no mistaking it. It was the gut-high, brief-out-of-breathness, from-the-bones-knowing that intuitively comes right before your mind registers what your body already knows- the piece was *insert-profanity-of-choice* finally falling into place. The photograph was (/had always been) declaring that **Khaled al-Assad's beheading was "more than one, but less than many"** (Mol, 2003).

From where I am standing, **there are at the very least, four simultaneous non-discrete acts[29] composing Khaled's beheading**. For this beheading to emerge, Khaled's physical body and the web of socio-cultural relationalities he was embedded in, both, had to be brutally butchered and dismembered. His remains – the remains of his body, of his social capital, of the politics he embodied – had to be irredeemably maimed and the mangled wreck of these remains had to be displayed in all their destroyed glory. This decapitation, and state of the disfigured, desecrated monuments of Palmyra that it stood analogous to, had to be exhibited in this exact form- one that

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[29] *In the previous chapters I have spoken to you about **the struggle of finding a language tree, or rather a language rhizome, that does justice to the ontology of the dissertation, of discussing violence's surreality** and, here, that applies to being able to discuss Khaled al-Assad's specific situation as well. **I cannot seem to find a vocabulary that openly allows for 'research' and 'writing' beyond discrete epistemological units, that openly allows fuzziness, multiplicity, and plurality**. All of this is an academic-y way of saying, I have no idea how to talk about the nauseating, dizzying, repulsive-y, stomach-y, overwhelmed-head-y, short-breathing-y, but also at the same time completely disassociation-from-self-and-body-y, parts of the politics of violence, and I promise others who are really, really, smart have had difficulty with this too- I really did look. There just isn't anything. Not anything… fiercely vulnerable anyway. At least not the kind that makes you immediately tear up/ want to throw up/ feel truly naked because it is the absolute perfect capture of whatever it is you are sensing and desperately trying to make sense of but just can't seem to translate/ communicate, at least not in words. **And this extends to not being able to describe 'just' the machinations, 'just' a 'simple' 'thick description', of any given enactment of political/ martial violence even after compartmentalising all of this^.***

So, here, acts are (again as with some other words in this manuscript) not acts per se. When I speak of "acts" I think of simultaneously occurring (temporally and spatially, concurrent and overlapping) machinations and practices that together assemble a beheading, each of them being non-discrete i.e., flowing into and from each other, but still distinct, i.e., we can still shape their contours and/or track the contours of their shapes. Think here of an intensely entangled POLCA loop diagram as the visual image for how these acts interact. I am not quite sure why I went with 'acts' except, I didn't want to use practice, instantiation, or assemblage for their theoretical baggage and 'acts' seemed like a good fit for the "performative" aspects of the beheading (that we will discuss later) as well.

In my mind, if the exact machinations of this beheading were rendered into a play, it would have four acts, but instead of them occurring sequentially, they would occur on the same stage, simultaneously… like there was only one song, one stage, but there were a contemporary dance recital, a kathak act, a salsa routine and a capoeira presentation all happening all at once, sharing props.

ensured maximum viewership. A photograph had to be taken for the same reason, especially since its circulation would aim to operationalise these violations towards redefining subjectivities that found themselves entangled with questions of law, state, living, citisen, apostate, indecency, idolatry, heretic-ism, governance, and the price of lacerating DAESH's norms. **By this approximation, Khaled al Assad's beheading is/ became a collage of sorts: acts of (1) *ruin-ing (a) body*, (2) of *ruin-ing (a) space*, (3) of an *exhibition of ruin(ation)* and (4) *ruin-ing (a) subjectivity*, and more, had to come together for Khaled's beheading, for even this/a single 'multiple' beheading to emerge.**

Surreal.

And then there was the question of "plurality" (Blaney & Tickner, 2017).

I was/ am convinced that the photograph is shrieking. And in/through its shrieking, you – or at least I – can feel/hear it thrashing against the perimeters of its own frame(-ing), growling-ly pouring over the edges of intended[30]-meanings, contexts, semantics, lexicons, and semiotics of any/ all other kinds. It's an outpouring, in fact, a deluge of affect and affective-ness in seemingly endless and infinitely multi-pronged directions.

It is painfully apparent, for instance, that the photograph occupies a place in the world(ings) of DAESH. This is not only because the organisation is the creator/ generator/ distributor/ photographer for this photograph of Khaled al Asaad's, but between the hanging, the placard, the displaying of his body in a public space, the performative governance of it all, the photograph – and the violence it captures – falls in line with other images from the DAESH's visual catalogue[31].

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[30] The 'intentions' made clear by the placard, and different socio-legal and cultural documents produced by DAESH that tackle the topic of beheadings and excerpts from which we will draw upon in the latter half of the chapter.

[31] Quickly returning to Della Ratta and her Shooting the Revolution (from Theoretical Note: 1) I would like to flag with you her take on the 'visual vocabulary' of DAESH. Though a lot has been written on DAESH's operationalisation of visuals and social-media, say vis-à-vis propaganda literature, cartographies of 'terrorism', the aesthetics of extremist violence and the extent of its spectacularism, the power and manipulation of algorithms and commercial logics and even the differences and repetitions in its internal and external communication visual styles, I wasn't able to find a lot on the 'nature' of the content itself ('not only' what the visuals were doing, but also what was in them- a distinction I explore in the next page when I talk to you about 'colour') - Della Ratta's analysis of DAESH's visual vocabulary being a strong exception.

Donatella begins the story of mapping DAESH's visual vocabulary and practices by observing a trend-shift in the larger on-Syria/ on/off-life-of-Syria space: **Della Ratta argues that the early days of the Revolution were marked, with much more intensity and refrain, by the "Syrian evidence-based-image" figuration of user-generated content. This was the content we spoke of as (more overtly/ readily perceived) as 'testimonial' in the Prologue.**

However, she argues that, **by as early as 2014, "a new form (of image-production for user-generated content) is emerging from the rubble- a form that DAESH has comprehended and embraced very early in its visual production, and that Syrian non-violent activists, on the contrary, could not have foreseen at a time when they were mesmerised by the evidence-image".**

This was the 'networked image'.

For her, what makes DAESH's approach to visual production of user-generated content unique is precisely that DAESH is able to work with/through the principles of networked images, having, it seems, mastered it as a methodological act.

For instance, in her theorizing, **DAESH knows that in the networked visual-space, "content does not matter so much as the operations that set up the conditions for the perpetual regeneration cycle of its onlife", especially because at the end of the day, "Daesh visual media do circulate regardless of their content" i.e., they circulate regardless of whether they are shared by supporters, wanna-be supporters, completely horror struck audiences, researchers like me (who receive and share them with others who might want to 'study' them or build databases), mainstream media outlets, international**

organizations hoping to use them 'forensic evidence of war crimes'- the result is always the same: the on-life of DAESH's content is quite robust in its vitality. And this indifference towards content is also mirrored and echoed, in a seeming indifference towards meaning itself. Through her mappings, **Donatella realises that DAESH's visual content works as 'visual projectiles', as 'operational images', "aimed at strengthening the process of digital participatory state-building and its viral spread through and on networked communication technologies."** (Della Ratta, 2018)

According to Della Ratta, there is a two-step process at play here:

1. There is the 'step' or ecology of "peer-production" at the content generation level. "DAESH encourages everyone to take part in the jihad of the 'word', which 'can be more devastating than nuclear weapons'. This ensures a decentralised structure of content production especially when seen in its entanglements with DAESH's spatial arrangement, i.e., in light of its 'wilayats' (autonomously function provinces in geographically disconnected locations from the capital- Raqqa, but connected to the 'center' nonetheless), the place of the al-Hayat and al-Furqan production houses as central 'nodes' within the larger network of production houses that are all allowed to operate independently and there are no strict 'company' guidelines as it were, as to the form of the content. Anyone can participate in this "participatory, peer-produced state-building" apparatus by creating whatever it is they feel like creating be it memes, videos, photographs, posters, images, 'docu'series, promotional videos- the act of creating, participation and the performance of citisenship become 'fused' in this framework and as such, it doesn't matter if the content is 'hard' (like the photographs of Khaled's beheading, or the video of James Foley's execution, or the "burning of the Jordanian air force pilot" titled "Healing the Believer's Chests") or 'soft' (like photo essays about trade and health projects, or documentaries on the 'gold dinar'- think here of the visual that populate Rumiyyah and/or Dabiq, their online magazines, for instance) because every individual can decide for themselves where they would like to be placed within the network. And this is all aided by the adaptability of their symbolically inscribed objects as well such as the black and white logo that marks every DAESH production whether it's coming from one of the main production houses or from an individual supporter, or rather, 'soldiers' computer. And it is **through this process that DAESH aims at "building a state, an aesthetic of a state" and these photographs, their production, and their quality** (they are all "authoritative, high-resolution, glossy and sophisticated") **reflect and real-ise that- it is about "constructing DAESH as an empire on the ground as much as an empire of images, and help spread its ideology of terror and savagery, as well as the values of camaraderie, brotherhood and solidarity connecting its followers and sympathisers."**

2. **The second step is that of 'viral distribution.'** Just like the production apparatus, the distribution network as well works with and through a decentralised participatory apparatus where anyone anywhere along any of the capillaries can activate any of the content as and when desired. This viral distribution network has become so effective that not only has DAESH's content permeated pretty much every crevice of the open web surface, it has also become nearly impossible to censor. For instance, in my experience, when YouTube began finding and removing DAESH's content from its platform, a 'cottage industry' propped up amongst its supporters that 'translated' this content by changing the names and tags on the videos and circulated them on YouTube Gaming instead where the algorithm couldn't differentiate between video-game-footage – equally violent, though very differently so – and their content, including 'rubble walk throughs' (a rich thematic, I would argue, in their visual lexicon- walking through spaces they have bombed and detailing the 'atrocities' that were visited on said place by the 'West'/ by other 'Infidels' and outlining, thus, the need for its ruination), 'military campaigns, particularly in urban settings' (another rich thematic, I think, in their lexicon that is usually accompanied by an exploration of different strategies of urban warfare and a detailing of equipment used by all belligerents involved in the 'battle' and more often than not speculation on their potential sourcing) , and of course, 'beheading' videos.

But "not only" (De la Cadena, 2015)**. It also occupies a place in the world(ing) of Palmyra**[32] **whose ruination mirrored that of Khaled al-Assad**[33] and whose amphitheatre was operationalised by DAESH as a stage for public executions**; and in the world(-ing) of Tadmur whose carceral history**[34] **echoed in/through the imprisonment and torture of Khaled al-Assad and where his body was eventually hung,** their meetings at the museum square and the traffic light being the primary spaces in need of/ utilized for disciplining; and **in the world(ing)of the three little Syrias** (each with its own permutations and combinations[35]); **and that of 'C'onflict where it inspired a renewed interest in notions of "War Crimes", "Crimes against Humanity", in the establishment of Independent International Commission(s) of Inquiry**[36]**, and in the destruction of cultural heritage in conflict**. It also occupies a place

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[32] For instance, through the entanglement between cultural heritage destruction and wartime violence not only because Khaled al Assad was the curator of the antiquity's museum at Palmyra, but also because of DAESH's operationalization of said cultural property includes making brutal visual content at symbolically relevant sites but extends well beyond that into participating in the political economy of "black market" antiquities- one of its strongest sources of revenue.

[33] **There is, of course, a symbology of ruination that is doubly echoed in the maiming and impaling of the ruins of Palmyra, the Tadmor prison, the bodies of the 25 dark-fatigues clad men that were summarily executed at the Roman Theatre by 25 'young' (read teenaged) members of DAESH, and in the body of Khaled al-Assad himself - the construction of human bodies violated, echoed through the violation of the bodies of the buildings - but "not only".** And we will return to that in granular detail in the next chapter. What is important for us to ear-mark here though is **that this refrain is as generative as it ruinous- it actively participates in the state building efforts of DAESH's on- and off-lives through visual content production and circulation, becoming a token for recruitment, becoming a disciplining tool for the socials on- and off-line, allowing for a re-curation/operationalisation of the space for military advantage, allowing for commercial gain (as mentioned above) and becoming a 'proof of might' not just in determining its ontological relationalities to the "West", the Assadian Government, the Free Syrian Army, other non-state armed actors, but also vis-à-vis other Salafi jihadist groups; i.e., there is a complex 'virtual' and 'actual' political economy emerging from the multiplicity and plurality of this photograph and it's capture/-ing of doubly-echoing-ruinations.**

[34] This, too, is something I will return to in quite some detail in the next chapter when I walk us through the actual machinations of where and how this photograph of Khaled al-Assad's found a place in DAESH's world of beheadings, but here we need to remember that **it also speaks to the larger melee of incarceration in Syria, and to the histories of living in Tadmor itself- in/ through a regime of carceral torture that didn't migrate these with DAESH, but had been a rather influential residence of the space, for many years already, through both the Assadian-governments.**

[35] We see this in how each of the three different little Syrias, differently engage with DAESH's beheading practices- **be it in the testimonies that have been seeping out of DAESH controlled areas of/about what 'living' under in their Islamic "state" looks like where the executions are as much a part of the state apparatus as the bureaucracy they have established including different tribunals, a police force, a tax office, a 'consumer protection office' and so on** (something we will return to in the next pages); **or in the photographs and videos we have seen take-over the internet of different beheadings performed by DAESH - the 'hype' around them, the real currency of their virality skyrocketing with the video of the American journalist, James Foley's beheading** (that we will return to in a bit) - **or through the art works we have seen presented across this chapter that stand in strong resistance/ opposition to DAESH's narratives, giving voice - and solidarity - to the lived experience of surviving/ syrviving in a space thus governed.**

[36] Especially given that these apparatuses now have **dedicated teams for videographic forensic analysis**, and have on the 21st of December 2016, been expanded to include an International, Impartial and Independent

in the world(ing) of 'E'xtremist efforts since this photograph, the act of the beheading itself helping DAESH – among other things – delineate itself from groups that are sometimes seen as its antecedents and/or counterparts; **and in world(ing)s of other political violences (but more on that later, when we come to its partial connections)**.

In fact, in complete sub-/in-version of intent this photograph inspired – and continues to do so – passionate condemnation and resistance[37]**, instead of fear and compliance, at least from those not in the direct blast-radius of DAESH's governance, (and for/through some that were/ are, despite the cost of it), occupy-ing a space in the "wayward"** (Hartman, 2019) **world(ing)s of Syrvival as well.** It also occupies a place **in the world(ings) of socio-political 'research'** especially when it comes to the visuality of the practice and this photograph in particular; and of course, **it occupies a place in the world(ing) defined by attempts at reimagining what a/this beheading is, aesthetically, Syrially, academically, or otherwise**[38]. **This beheading/ A beheading, then, was/is, at least within all these worldings, *Everything Everywhere All at Once*... it is "plural".**

Surreal.

Mechanism to **"assist in the investigation and prosecution of persons responsible for the most serious crimes under International Law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011"** that as an entire department dedicated to focusing on ISIL (or, here, DAESH).

[37] The response, for instance, from the "International Community" when it came to the beheading of Khaled al-Assad, was one as resounding horror and resulted in a doubled-down collaboration effort between the Assadian government and the Russian Air force towards a recapturing of Palmyra, and led to a prompt and extensive rebuilding effort for the UN heritage site (that has, indeed, since been 'rebuilt').

[38] Take, for instance, this chapter, as a whole.

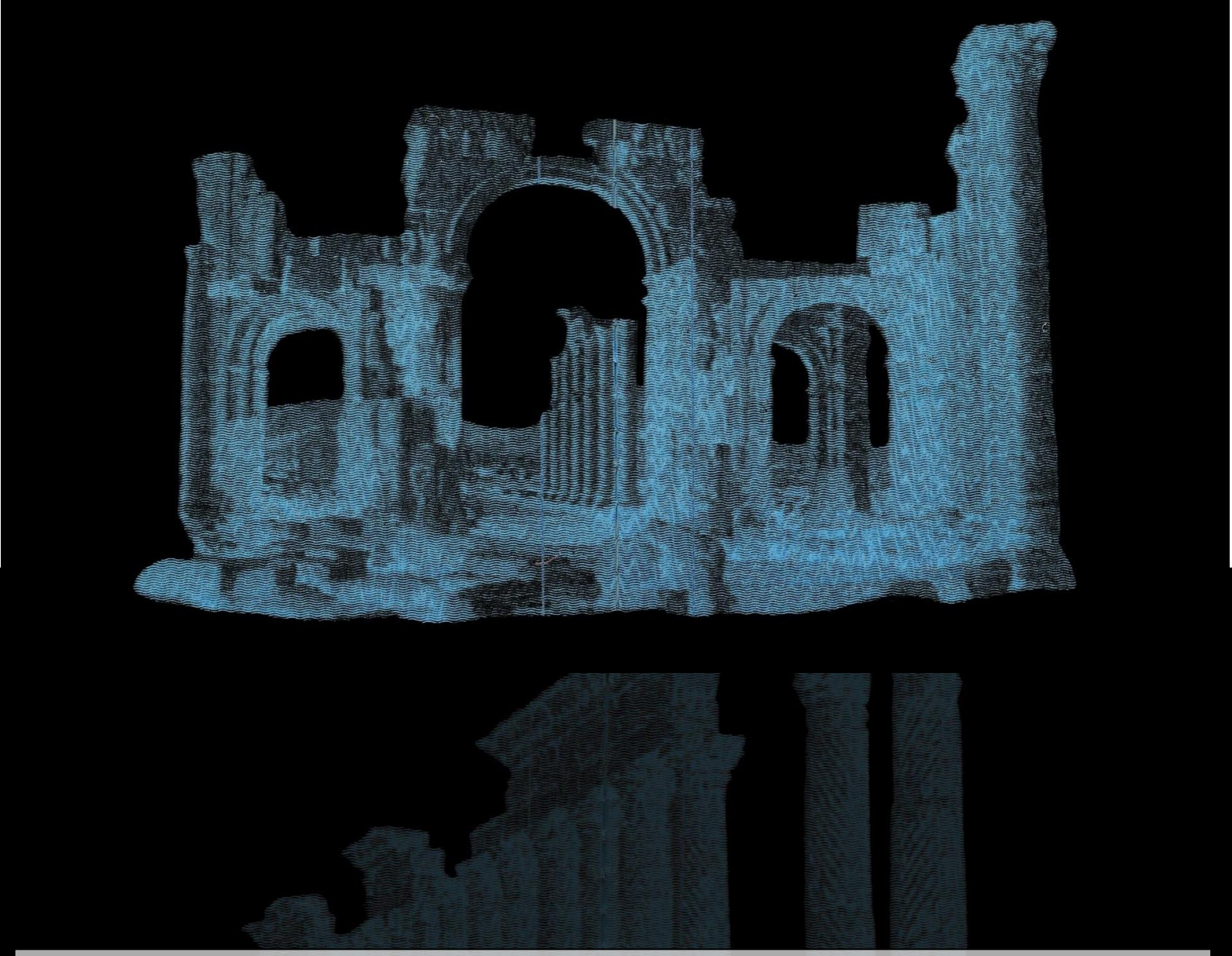


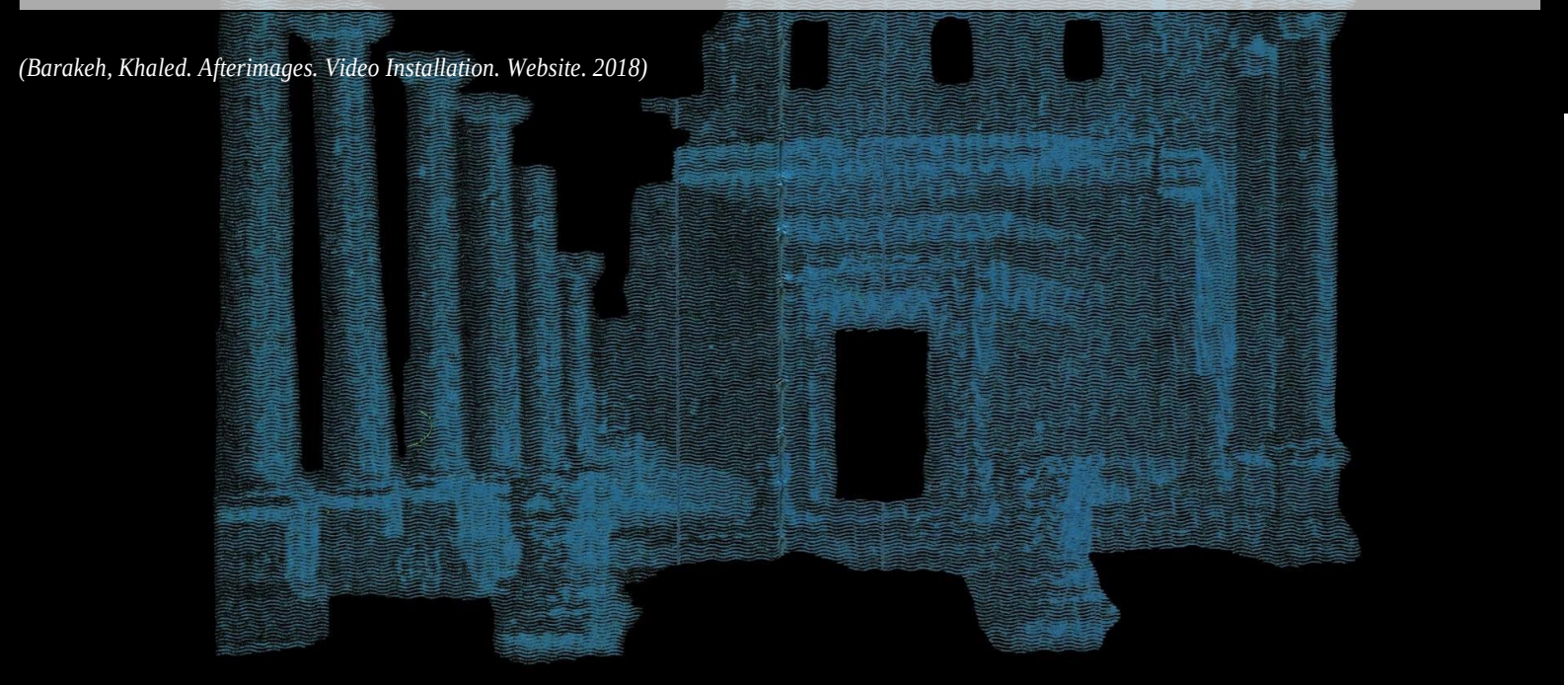
Figure: 108 – *Stills from a video installation produced by Khaled Barakeh,* ***titled "After Images"***

Caption by the Artist: "Each page of the Syrian passport is adorned with monochrome images of historically significant or modern architectural monuments. This carefully engineered collection is an effort to establish a collective, subtly pro-regime identity for Syrian citizens.

The artist has isolated these monuments, projecting them in the same uncanny aesthetics that they present on the page. ***Their new dematerialized form mirrors their actual inaccessibility due to political exile, geographical barriers and/or outright destruction****. This installation of images which continuously disappear and re-appear invites the viewer into an act of intangible sightseeing".*

Author Engagement: Haunting Spaces // Haunted Spaces // Spatial Hauntings and their Ruin(-ation)s

(Barakeh, Khaled. Afterimages. Video Installation. Website. 2018)



And then there are the "partial connections" (Strathern, 2005) that entangle this violent pluriverse of Khaled al-Assad's injurious beheading, in all its multiplicity, to both, other beheadings[39] (re)producing a "small world" (Austin, 2017) for this violent practice/ practice of violence, and to other violent "small worlds"/ small worlds of violence.

Remember the footnotes about hanging (fn: 4), or torture practices, or head-hunting (fn: 17), or the paragraphs about glass bottles, or shirt-collars and ties? Those jump-cuts are a good place to begin mapping these pluriverses that this photograph is connected to and the morphologies of those hiccupped, punctuated, ravelled, "partial connections" (Strathern, 2005).

Or not, let's try something different.

Let's first zoom into **chromatic vocabulary**[40] and the tonal range of the photograph. Red, Yellow, Green – and Black. These colours refract from the surface of the photograph, beaming towards other violent/ violence practices. If I zoom into the carmine, the/my mind jump-cuts to snapshots of mutilations, dismemberments, eviscerations, and flaying; if I zoom into the yellow my mind is flooded

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[39] For now, I am just going to covertly slide past the explanations and implications of this 'and other beheadings' and 'small world of beheadings' segments because I plan on treating this argument, with the care it deserves, towards the end of the Chapter: 3, Section: 4, once you have already met Ruination. The goal in these few pages is to first show why Khaled's beheading is surreal and for that mapping the partial connectivity (alongside the processuality, embodiedness, multiplicity and plurality of the beheading) becomes important. Once we can take this argument as assumption, we can dive into the 'so what's and Ruination can come play with us as well and let's be honest, they, Ruination, - among others, but in this dissertation primarily - are the one that work at making the small world of beheadings, a small world. So, it's only fair if we wait a while to engross ourselves in/within this set of entanglements.

[40] **I am not entirely sure how colour became such a dominant textural dimension in the manuscript, especially in this chapter.** I think it has to do with our encounter with beheadings beginning with the traffic-light that Khaled al-Asad's body was hung from. It was an 'easily' graspable, tangible, texture - a tactile observation - for me to use as a baby- walking-belt while I learnt how to walkthrough Palmyra but it could just as easily have been any of the other sense/s and/or sensory- lexicons through which we were sense-making (remember, for example, our discussion about smell?).
And of course, the 'visual' and 'aesthetic' dimensions of are the obvious contributing factor. But maybe their 'obviousness' and/or 'of course-ness' is also why I thought this was puzzling in the first place because typically our consideration of a visual (at least within IR) is 'only' as a visual, i.e., any given visual is seen almost exclusively as an object that is affective because it is a thing onto itself. Despite the rich, diverse and creative scholarship in Visual/Aesthetic IR (to 'different' streams that both operationalise visuals differently but I don't think differentially because across both cases we) think through them 'visuals' as artefacts, as data, as signifiers, as 'frames'/framings of visibility-politics and/or as measures/indicators of the expanse and limits of scopic regimes. And that has been true for the intriguing scholarship on colours and/or chromatology (in IR- read, (Andersen et al., 2015; Guillaume et al., 2016)for more information) as well. But these colours desire more. I am convinced of it. Because here, in this dissertation, not just visual artefacts (as we saw in the Translator's Note) become "portals" for us to access socio-political processes and their complexities, but rather each individual textural dimension of each of these visuals/ of each of these collages and corpses as individual 'wholes' also become, individually, portals in and of themselves. Here, then, colour is "not only" (De la Cadena, 2015) a device onto which war/ violence/ patriarchy/ whiteness/ imperialism is inscribed, that inscription then participating in world- building, but it also a "dimension" of punishment, of conflict violences, of the carceral archipelagos that heavily influence our worlds (Axster et al., 2021; Benjamin, 2019; Foucault, 1975), and other manifestations of state-sponsored ritualistic death.

with images from Khmer Rouge's S1 prison (with its mustard walls and checkered corn-and-white floors), from the Abu Ghraib files (that flaunted, sickeningly, the flaxen walls of the prison against which the tortured prisoners were photographed), from the police station in Izyum (and its blue and canary "walls of pain"); if I zoom into the green I immediately think of firing squads and their juniper camouflage, and basil-green landmines and/or sea-weed-y hand grenades and/or those (often) hospital-y-mint gurneys and surgical tray cloths that participate in the administration of lethal injections. And then there is the black- the robes of 'the hooded executioner', the torture-blindfolds, the flags of DAESH itself, the present-absence of inky carceral isolation, the trope/ figuration of the martial-night (something we will return to when we speak of the Ruined boat in a few pages).

These jump-cuts, these snapshots – these "twisted" (Hirsch 2014), hiccupped, bumpy partial connections – render sensible a whole worlding of ruination to which Khaled's beheading belongs… alongside other beheadings, other configurations of capital punishment, of conflict violences, of the carceral archipelagos that heavily influence our worlds (Axster et al., 2021; Benjamin, 2019; Foucault, 1975), and other manifestations of ritualistic death.

The same is true for the very composition of the photograph. Look at the clusters being formed- zoom in **("immerse" yourself into these colours- or at least that's what I tried to do… to not just analyze their presence and their socio-material-semiotics, but to design with them, sit with them, live through them and sense where they took me)** on the red, yellow, green, grey, black contours that spell out the different shapes in/from the photograph. Focus on the traffic light, Khaled's body, the road, the blood on the embankment, and the lines that ground the entangled amoebic affective stretches of these materialities. If you stare at them long enough, the outlines of the gibbet burst out of the photograph (like pop-up cards), breaking the third wall[41], hurtling to knowtted-ly entangle this beheading, and the very practice of beheadings, to images, practices, materialities, logics, norm(alitie)s and worldings of, for instance, the guillotine. The hanging-blood-death-punishment of it all seem to sloppily spill onto that Tadmur-ian road that cuts right through the razored edges of the photograph until it morphs into the flat green surface of a green gurney, lethal injections laying sedately on a tray nearby. They hurriedly say something about capital punishment and its surrealities. Khaled's head, as the warning/trophy it was meant to be, begins to float, like a ghostly cloud escaping the screen of the photograph and burrows a home/hole in the walls of a ski lodge, nesting next to the taxidermised head of a forlorn stag. They whisper (or do they yelp?) something about practices of headhunting, the pluriverse of cadavers, and the relationalities of heads, experiments, and hospitals… about the rituals in/around bodily remains and their surrealities. The barely visible skyline begins to gleam, sway and contort until the sheer centripetal force of the "twisting" spits out a mangled mélange of the beheadings in Acapulco, Riyadh, Paris, Jalalabad, Bonn,

[41] Or, as is usually the case in Brachtian theatre, the 'fourth wall', but that would depend on our individual inclinations to see 'affect' as the fourth dimension of embodiment: length, breath, depth and affect.

Ahvaz, in the pages of Dabiq and/or Rumiyah and more. **From there, these pictures tell me, it is just a slippery slope, or rather dusty partial connections** (Strathern, 2005) **to "urban-violences"[42] of different kinds.**

Surreal.

[42] For instance, a colleague and I, have been working on a paper that maps how a 'diagram of ruination' animates different violent assemblage// assemblages of violence, across different socio-political and geographical spaces - across two case studies: the beheading of James Foley and the current Tiktok trend of #prisontok - albeit through a difference in morphology but a repetition in compositional texture, at least within penal regimes, reproducing a politics of 'undesirability'.

Figure: 109 – Red *(Photograph by author, painting of/on the beheading of Khaled al-Asaad. Think back to Sulafa Hijazi's The Cycle and the discussion we had about the 'Design' process. This painting was 'designed' so the author could find similar ways of encountering/ engaging with the beheading).*



(Puri, Asees. Photograph. To/For Syralism. 2024)

Figure: 110 – Yellow *(Photograph by author, painting of/on the beheading of Khaled al-Asaad. Think back to Sulafa Hijazi's The Cycle and the discussion we had about the 'Design' process. This painting was 'designed' so the author could find similar ways of encountering/ engaging with the beheading).*



(Puri, Asees. Photograph. To/For Syralism. 2024)

Figure: 111 – Green *(Photograph by author, painting of/on the beheading of Khaled al-Asaad. Think back to Sulafa Hijazi's The Cycle and the discussion we had about the 'Design' process. This painting was 'designed' so the author could find similar ways of encountering/ engaging with the beheading).*



(Puri, Asees. Photograph. To/For Syralism. 2024)

Figure: 112 – Black *(Photograph by author, painting of/on the beheading of Khaled al-Asaad. Think back to Sulafa Hijazi's The Cycle and the discussion we had about the 'Design' process. This painting was 'designed' so the author could find similar ways of encountering/ engaging with the beheading).*



(Puri, Asees. Photograph. To/For Syralism. 2024)

Figure: 113 – Haunting Present-Absences *(Photograph by author, painting of/on the beheading of Khaled al-Asaad. Think back to Sulafa Hijazi's The Cycle and the discussion we had about the 'Design' process. This painting was 'designed' so the author could find similar ways of encountering/ engaging*

(Puri, Asees. Photograph. To/For Syralism. 2024)





Figure: 114 – Shapes/ Shape-ings *(Photograph by author, painting of/on the beheading of Khaled al-Asaad. Think back to Sulafa Hijazi's The Cycle and the discussion we had about the 'Design' process. This painting was 'designed' so the author could find similar ways of encountering/ engaging with the*

(Puri, Asees. Photograph. To/For Syralism. 2024)

Remember the Refrain;
It is surreal because it's processual.
It is surreal because it's embodied.
It is surreal because it is multiple.
It is surreal because it is plural.
It is surreal because it is partially connected.
It is surreal because of the surreality of it all.
Twisting twists// "twisted" twistings.
Remember the Refrain.

That was a mouthful, but Q.E.D.?

JK, we know now that **the photograph is surreal or rather, that it desires that we see Khaled al-Asaad's beheading as surreal (born of "twisted" (Hirsch 2014) relationalities between materials, bodies, affects, aesthetics, and the semiotics of it all).** And that, therefore//this is because, **Khaled al-Asad's beheading here seems to be (1) processual, (2) embodied, (3) multiple, (4) plural and (5) partially connected to other political violences.**

But, to me, perhaps the more interesting question is: **What, then, does the surreality of Khaled al-Asaad's beheading want to tell us? What is it that the surreality of any beheading – or of the place beheadings hold in our world, or of how they seem entangled with our lives – trying to tell us? If we dig into this surreality, and take it as our site of investigation, what does it tell us about the politics of how beheadings stand entangled with our worlds? Or, simply put, *how* does the surreality of this/a beheading affect our socio-political pluriverse?**

For me, the answer takes the form of a singular refrain: through Ruination (the second term, besides 'surreal' that kept finding an echo through the last pages but wasn't yet pulled out). Just look at the lines.

But before we move forward, or rather backwards to the event of Khaled's beheading itself whose off/on-life this photograph participates in, you are right, I need to answer your question: **who, and/or what, the *insert-profanity-of-choice* is Ruination and how is it entangled with Khaled al-Asaad's beheading?**

That/This^ story begins in Tadmur.

Living through (a) Beheading:

Ruin-ing Bodies | Ruin-ing Spaces | Ruin-ing Subjectivities | Exhibition(s) of Ruin-ation

"I am writing to go back to the time, at the rest stop in Virginia, ***when you*** *<the mother of the author>* ***stared, horror-struck at the taxidermy buck hung over the soda machine by the restrooms, its antlers shadowing your face. In the car, you kept shaking your head.***

"I don't understand why they would do that.
Can't they see it's a corpse? A corpse should go away, not get stuck forever like that."

I think now of that buck, ***how you stared into its black glass eyes and saw your reflection, your whole body, warped in that lifeless mirror.***
How it was not the grotesque mounting of a decapitated animal that shook you -
but that the taxidermy embodied a death that won't finish,
a death that keeps dying as we walk past it to relieve ourselves."
- Ocean Vuong, On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous[43] *(Vuong, 2019).*

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[43] I know I have already spoken to you about my appreciation for Vuong's work in earlier in the manuscript, when we discussed his poetry collection: Time is a Mother. *"On Earth We are Briefly Gorgeous"*, the first page of which accommodates this quote, is its elder sibling (Vuong, 2019). In fact, this 'novel' (not sure entirely what genre to imprison it within), is simultaneously Ocean's second child and his first attempt at prose; though if I am allowed, I will say, you can really tell that it is always the poet in him that is writing, even, this prose. **He fractures words in a way that more meaning oozes out of them than we, at least I, would have thought/felt was conceivable.** Back to the book. **The story, I think, can best be categorised as a deeply embodied diegesis of 'Little Dog's' coming-of-age-lived-experiences as a gay, Vietnamese immigrant in the US, written out, by his now-adult-self as one long letter to his fiercely-loving-and- ferociously-violent mother.** There is so much violence in the book, in Little Dog's life, and in Vuong's writing, that it completely - and I mean wholly and thoroughly - shatters you. It took me almost 3 months to finish the book because I could never read more than a few pages at a time. I mean, there is fierce vulnerability and then there is… this… **this raw mangle of trauma, lived-through, remembered, G reconciled with, all written out in words that wrench and maul your whole being, contorting your senses into making sense of the absolute non-sense-ness of being thoroughly, violently, un-made and re-made.** They are also words that, I think and I have really searched, have made-sensible a "history of living" with trauma (both generational and personal), in a way that is madly, and maddeningly, real. His grandmother's sex-work-war-days stories, habits and schizophrenia; his mother's complex post-traumatic-stress-disorder and twisted, toxic - brutal - love; his grandfather's long-lost-ness and the whiteness that was severed from the family with the fall of Saigon and his retreat, his inhumane father's abusive ghost; and his fleeting, but lasting, and always blazing love affair with a 'redneck' who doesn't want to grow up to be a "fag", **all (dis)figure him into being the person he is, today** (at the moment of writing that letter). **And through, in, despite, all this violence, and the scarring that came with it, he also, in these pages,** "on this earth" that he builds, lives through, remembers, and reconciles with "brief" moments where everything and everyone is perfectly, wholly, and absolutely, "gorgeous." Perhaps that is what I love about this book. Vuong somehow manages, surreally, to write two books in one, about two different but engaged surrealisms/ Syrialisms- the first about the surrealism of domestic violence and the second about the surrealism of surviving it.
And again, I have said it before, in a discussion or two, but it is a contrition that stays with me and so it bears repeating: I really wish I had met 'survival' Syrialism - Syrvival - early enough for them to have been included in these pages.
Oh well; yet another story for another time.

Somewhere along the road that connects Damascus to Al-Hasakah – a road that pierces right through the heart of the Syrian desert – lies an oasis that birthed a city, تَدْمُر (Tadmur.) Two mountain belts cradle it from the north and southwest and the water of a small وَاد (wadi), al Qubur (the "Valley of the Tombs"), binds the western hills to the gardens of the oasis. Just south of the Wadi is the Efqa spring. For the past 9000 years (since about 7,500 BCE), since the first Neolithic settlements sprouted around this oasis, this spring has seen the rise and ruin, and rise, and ruin, and rise, and ruin, (and so on) of Tadmur at least 14 times.

The city[44] was the home of Puzur-Ishtar the Tadmorean through the Bronze Age, it was marked as the eastern border of the kingdom of Qatna (founded- 3300 BCE), it was conquered by the Neo-Assyrians (732 BCE), became an urbanised prosperous 'trade-town' through its Hellenistic captures (312-63 BCE), was transformed into an 'autonomous' region within the province of Syria under Roman rule (64 BCE), and with the Roman conquest of Nabataean Petra it became the fulcrum of the trading worlds in the Arabian peninsula of West Asia.

Against the backdrop of the Persian wars, and with the help of an army of Palmyrene and Syrian peasants, the city then bore its own Kingdom (the Palmyrene Kingdom, 261 BCE) and was snatched from the hands of Odaenathus – Vaballathus – Zenobia by the Byzantine. The Rashidun (634 BCE), the Umayyad (~661 BCE), the Abbasid (750 BCE) and the Fatimid (~990) Caliphates rested within its walls. Through the 1000s the city carried, despite two devastating earthquakes (1068 and 1089), lordships of the Seljuk Empire (1070), housed atabegs of the Burid dynasty (1126), and hosted Zendig kings, Ayyubid sultans (1168) and rule by the Al Fadl (1281) clan under the Mamluk Khanates (until 1406). And when the 1500s and the Ottoman came to Syria, the city and its salt deposits found themselves forming their own sanjak (administrative unit in 1535) until they were swallowed by the Zor (sanjak in 1867).

By the time World War I was ending and the British and the French found themselves feuding over the furiously liquid boundaries of their Mandates, the city had seen the Royal Airforce build an airfield in its desert (1918), the French build a military base[45] near its Temple, and the Ottomans retreat from the sanjak. And in the next World War, it fought alongside the Free France and British forces when its Vichy counterpart gave Nazi Germany access to the airfield. In 1946, the city – along with the rest of the world – observed, the independence of the Syrian State and shortly thereafter saw

[44] Each of the photographs presented over the next few pages articulates a certain aspect of the history(-ies) of Palmyra, and/or Tadmur. Their musings have been tied to portions of the paragraphs that detail an unfortunately brief history of the city. But for more information, I encourage you to read, inter alia: (Amnesty International, 2012; Della Ratta, 2018; Halasa et al., 2014; Joanna Paraszczuk, 2015; Kalaycioglu, 2020; Segal, 2015).

[45] And in the process had conducted extensive excavations- excavations that actually led to the creation and segregation of the ruins of 'Palmyra' as being severed from the village of Tadmur and of the elision of the history of Tadmur from that of Palmyra, especially given that the population of the village was 'incentivised' to relocate, uprooting what oral historical entrenchments could have preserved their connections.



Figure: 116 – The Road from Damascus to Al Hasakah, crossing through Palmyra

Figure: 117- The Valley of the Tombs





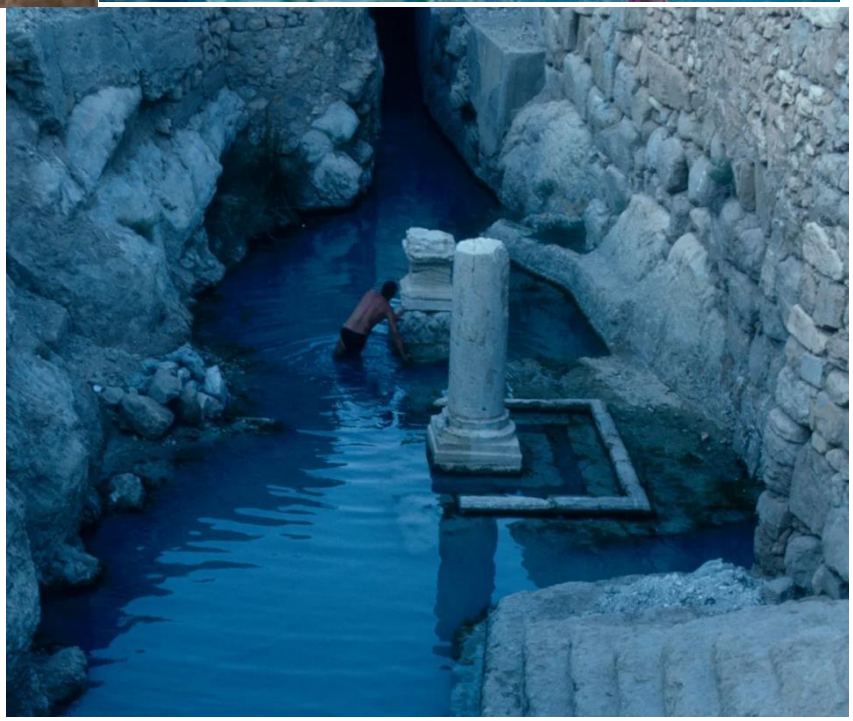
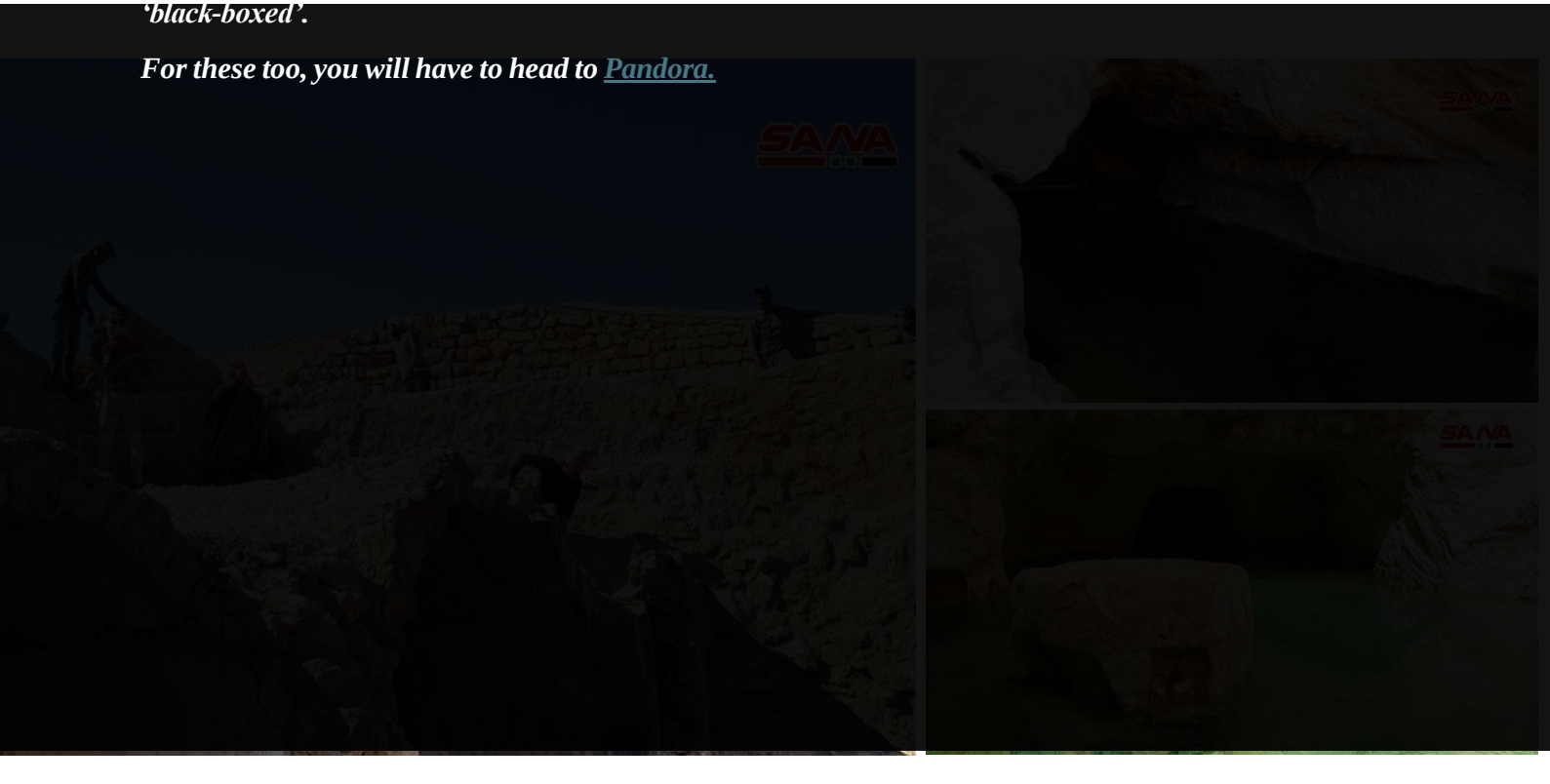



Figure: 118 to 123 - A Collage of the Efqa Spring.

P.S.- as with photographs of/from DAESH, I am trying my best to disrupt my reproduction and recirculation of photographs produced and circulated by the Assadian regime, and as such, those segments of this collage – photographs from the springs' revitalization efforts and reopening have been 'black-boxed'.

For these too, you will have to head to Pandora.



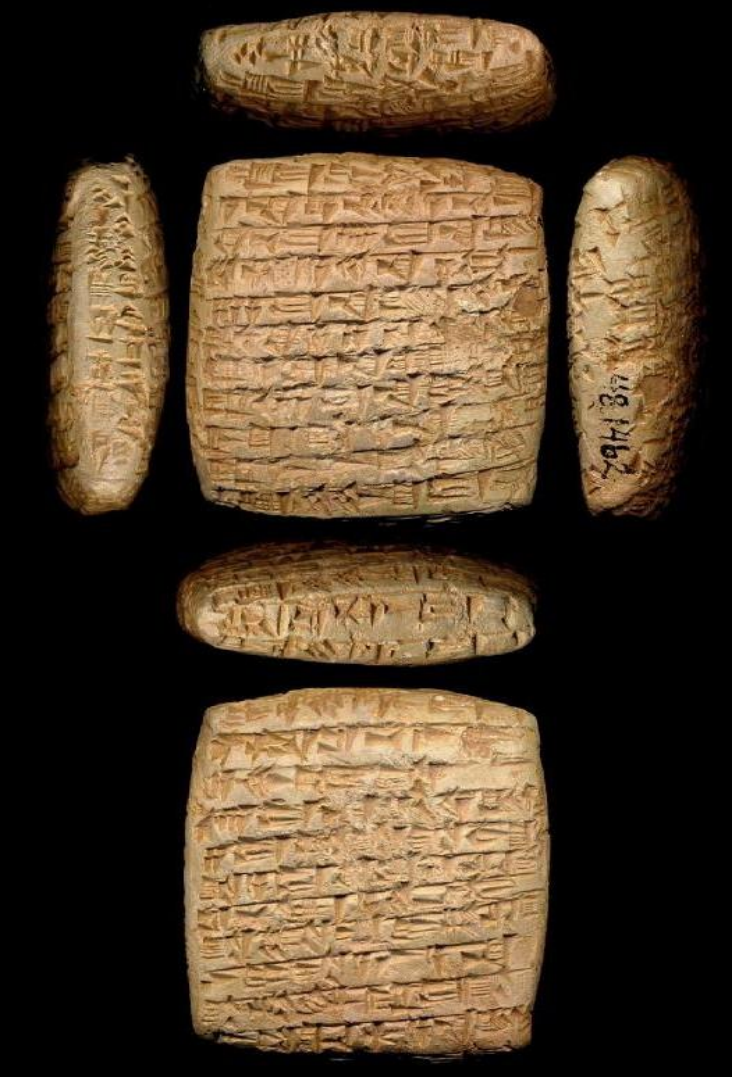






Figure: 124 to 127 - Collage of the historical artefacts and archaeological remnants from the Roman conquest of Nabatean Petra, including some that were exhibited at the museum that Khaled was the director of and on the next page, for Figure: 5 we have a map of tracing the geo-politics between the Romans, the Palmyrenes and the Persians.



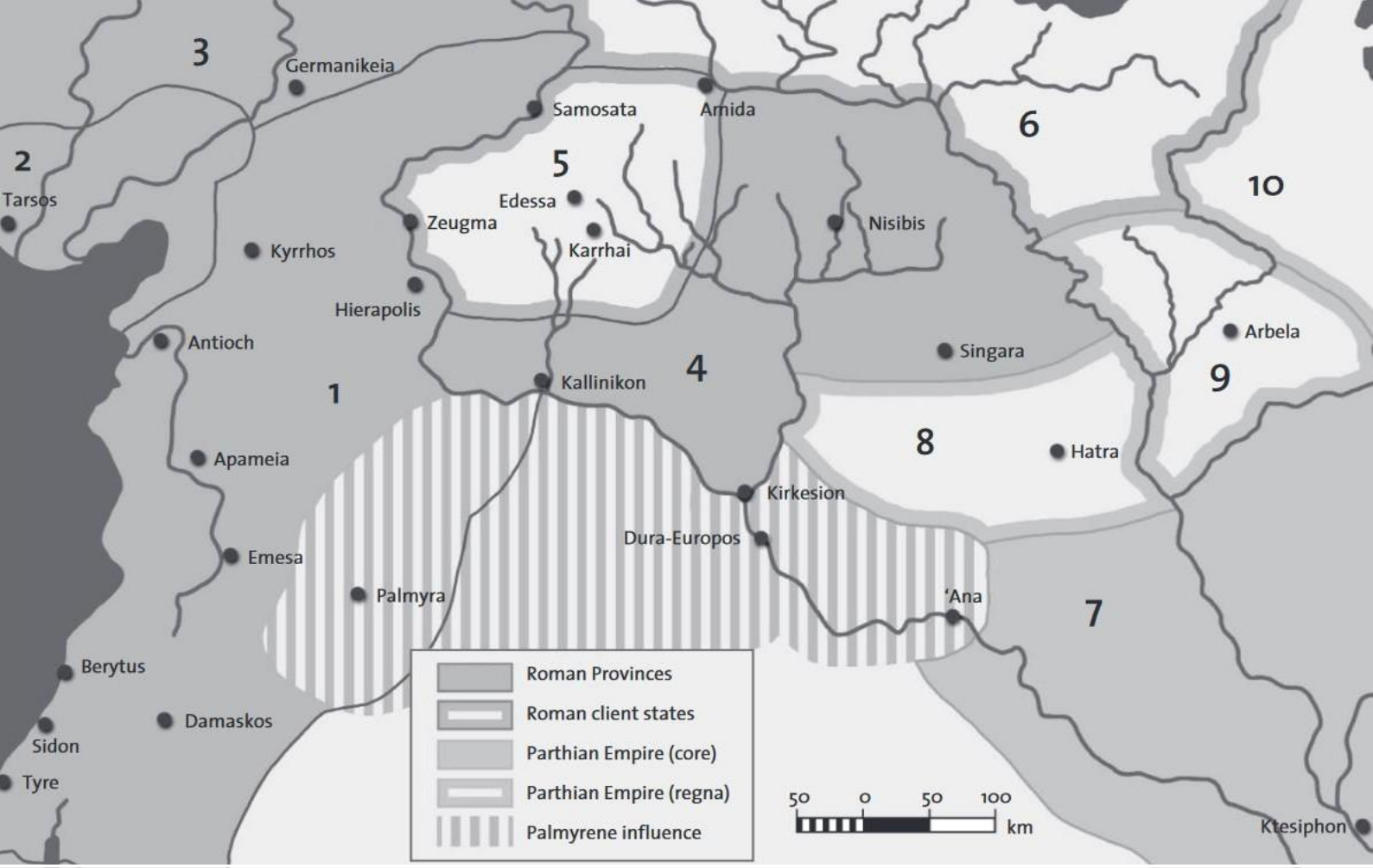
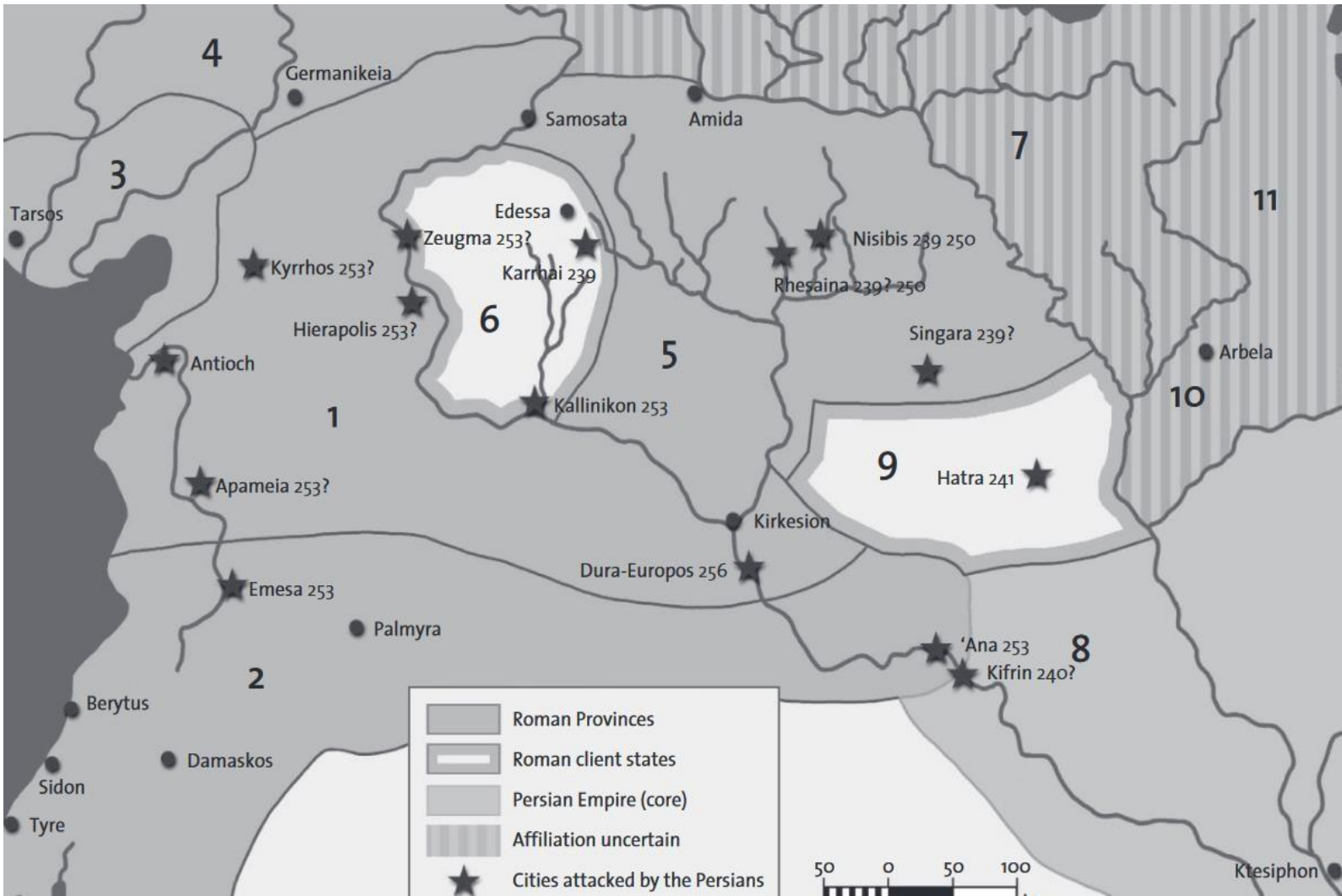


Figure: 128 & 129- the changing map of Syria



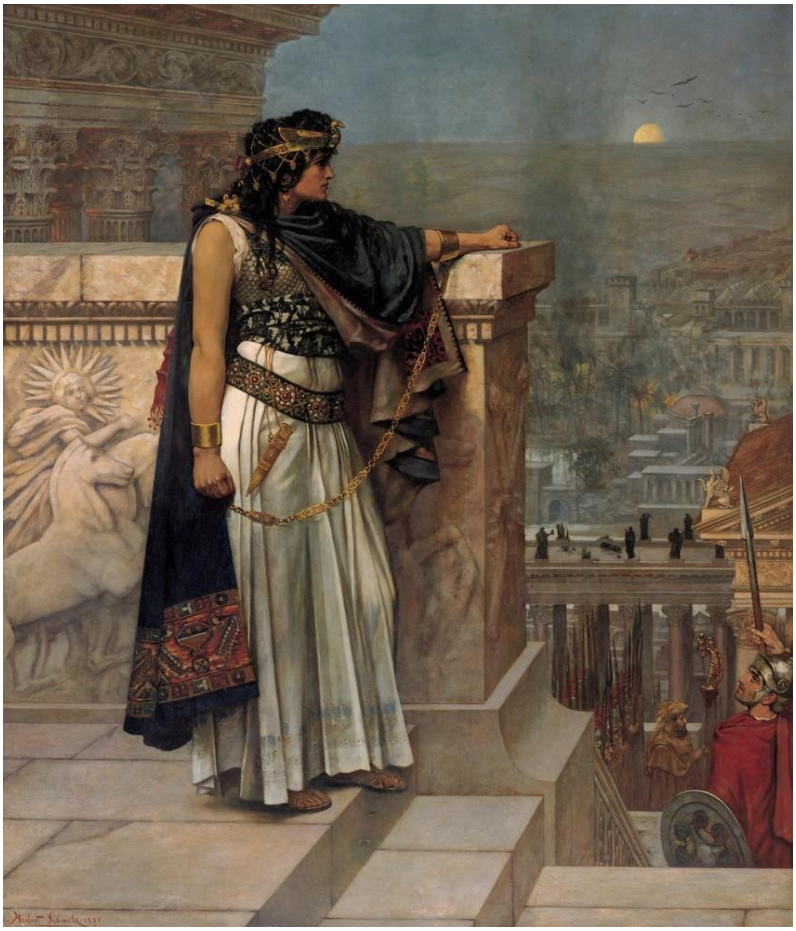




Figure: 130 to 133 - A Collage Attesting to the Historical, Mythical and Mythological Impact of Zenobia's Legacy of Syrian History



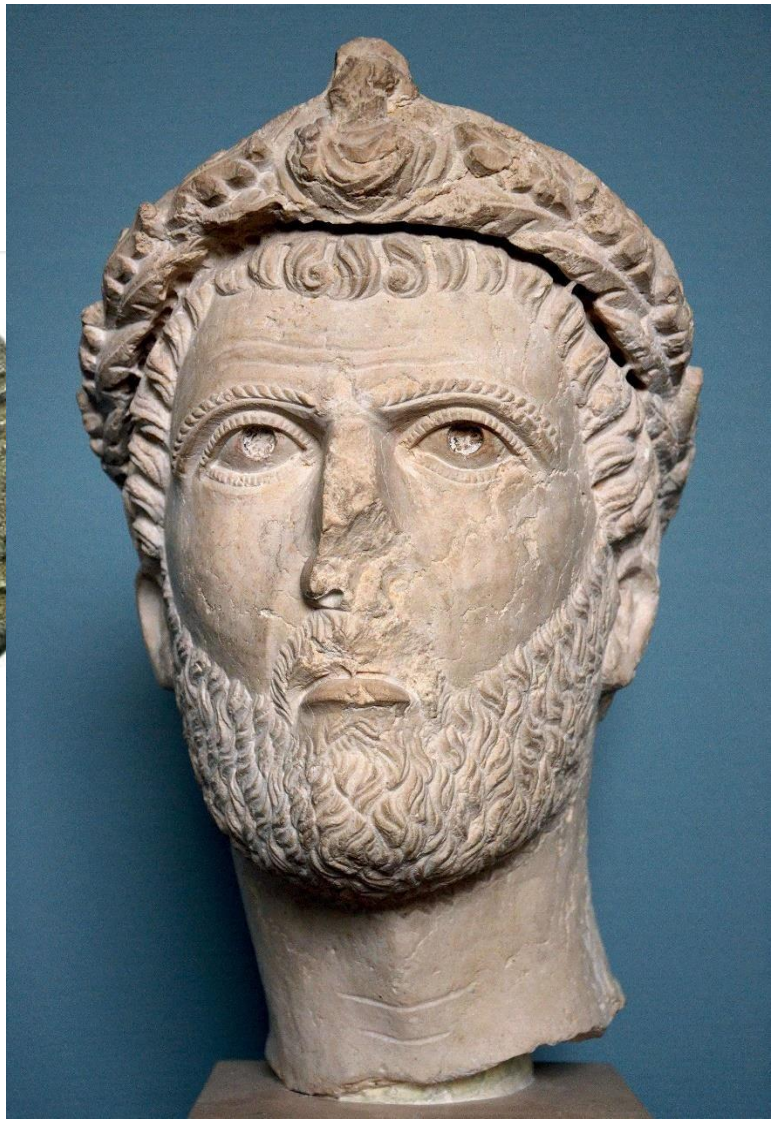




Figure: 134 to 138 - A Collage of the monuments at Palmyra









Figure: 139 to 142 - A Collage of the excavations of Palmyra







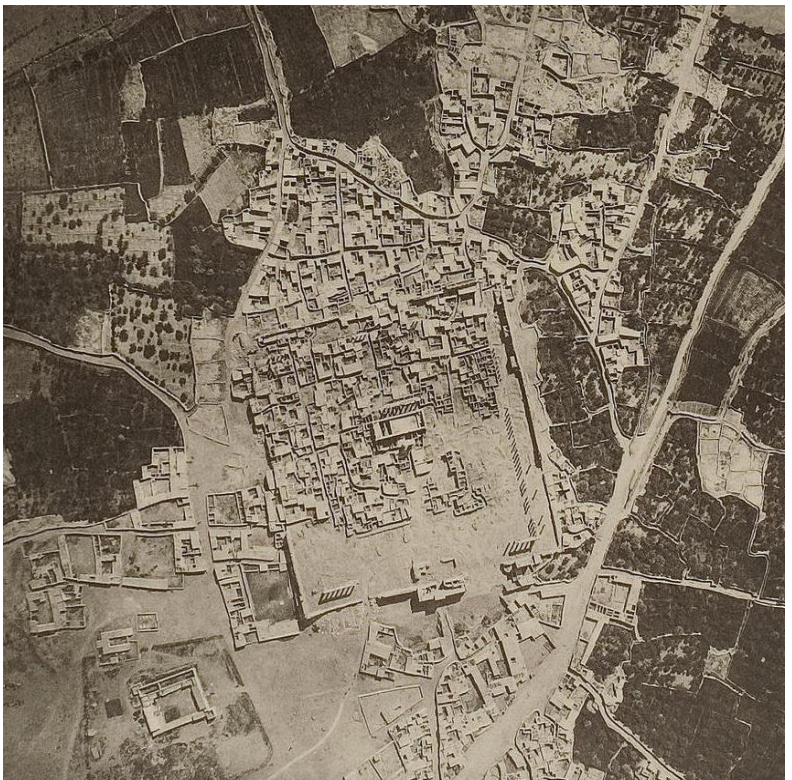


Figure: 143 & 144 - A map of Palmyra's 'open air Museum' and in Figure: 41 we can see two photographs from/of the village of Tadmur.





the country involved in the Arab-Israeli War (1948), a military coup in March 1949 and a 'bloodless' coup later that year, another military coup in 1954, the declaration of martial law in 1956, a partnership with the USSR that bought with it military equipment of all kinds and an antagonistic relationship with Turkey, and an ill-fated marriage with Egypt as the United Arab Republic (1958) with Syria seceding in 1961. Tadmur, and the newly formed Syrian Arab Republic then saw the Ba'ath Party (the Arab Socialist Resurrection Party) and the National Council of Revolutionary Command establish a new government, lose said government (to an intra-party coup in 1966), and the ascension of Hafez al-Assad through another 'bloodless' coup.

Through all of this, the borders of the city morphed and morphed again sometimes melting all the way to the banks of the Euphrates (180 km away) and sometimes crumpling inwards until they returned to the Efqa spring, forming a village. Its buildings, its walls, its monuments, its people, it socio-cultural ecologies, synchronously morphed and morphed again with every rising and every ruination. And with each metamorphosis, more remains were generated, and more entanglements emerged. Fragments of histories, stories, cultures, societies, and ecologies seen as separated by Cartesian notions of temporality and spatiality (by linear time, and two-dimensional space) found visual, material, and affective anchors to latch onto, collapsing onto each other until (every/) a singular physical ruin became the marker of the constant but not consistent processes of ruination that spiralled/ sama-ed around it. Think here of the Temple of Bel that today stands (ruined though with restoration already underway) as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Or rather, think here about the Tadmur prison.

Remember that French military base (~ 1920-1946)? After the transfer of power, the barracks were extended to create a military prison that was – and continues to remain – under the administrative jurisdiction of the military police that answer solely to the Ministry of Defense (as opposed to the Ministry of Justice) and is guarded by the *al-wahdat al-khassa* (the Special Units of the Syrian Military). At that time, it held within its cells "military personnel accused of ordinary criminal offences. (Amensty International, 2001)" A decade and a half later, in the early 1970s, it began to 'receive' – quite literally[46] since the – political prisoners "who were kept in isolation from the

[46] **The moment the prisoners arrived at the gates of Tadmur, a ritualised practice of torture was initiated called the welcome/reception party.** There has been quite a bit of documentation at least within the Syria-'prison' and Syria-'torture' literatures when it comes to the wrench-inducing horrors of its embodied experience, grounded in the testimony of prior detainees.

"The warders pulled us off the bus whipping us mercilessly and brutally until we were all out… the military police searched our clothes and one by one we were put into the tyre [forced to get inside a car tyre]

outside world but mostly for a matter of months" (ibid) and its population dramatically increased around 1979. The very next year, on the 27th of June 1980, Rifaat al-Assad (the brother of the then President, Hafez al-Assad) and the *Sarāyā ad-Difāʿ* (the Defense Companies) descended upon the prison at the peak of dawn, indiscriminately massacring an estimated 600 to 1000 prisoners as a retaliatory assault against the *Jamāʿat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn (*the Society of Muslim Brotherhood's) failed assassination attempt of the then President.

The ruins of the prison, the remains of the prisoners[47] and the memoirs of ruination that they inscribed – smuggled out of prison on cigarette paper[48] – all indicated that the Tadmur Prison had been *"designed to inflict the maximum suffering, humiliation, and fear on prisoners and to keep them under the strictest control by breaking their spirit… Every aspect of life in Tadmur Prison is a dehumanizing experience (ibid)"*. Each one of the seven courtyards and/or the 40-50 dormitories and/or the 39 smaller cells and/or the 16 underground cells were intentionally fabricated to take part in a process of absolute ruination of every individual prisoner- a ruination of subjectivity, body, space, materiality, affects, ideas, beliefs…a ruination of the embodied/lived self… until (and often at the very least to) the point of complete annihilation. Even when the prison was shut down in 2001, these ruinations kept plaguing the city, travelling through the carceral networks of Syria with the transferred

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and each person was beaten between 200 and 400 times on his feet."

.....

"Everyone was in a bad condition, their legs bleeding and covered with wounds, as well as other parts of their bodies. Some of the prisoners died during the reception party."

.....

"Upon our arrival, a prison guards told us 'Hafez al-Assad has forbidden God to enter here. You are all here without God. We are God. We are the ones who will give life to you and take your life away.'

[47] I am thinking here of the mass spread of gangrene that occurred in the prison because the blood of those massacred in 1980, the literal remains of those prisoners, was never cleaned off the prison walls. Their horrific deaths, their ruin, their ruination, differently but repetitively, became entangled with the ruination of the lives and living of the prisoners that lived with/within their remains.

[48] Like the poems written in prison by Faraj Bayrakdar (whom we met in the early pages of this dissertation), who is one of the most powerful poets I have had the opportunity of encountering. His writings fall within a larger ecology of 'incredible' - artistically and as a testament to human resilience and creativity in the face of the unimaginable - prison literature that has rhizome-d out of Tadmur. This literature makes sensible to us that "The Betrayals of Language and Silence" when it comes to crafting a 'history of living' in/through Tadmur are so affective that this living can only be measured in the sounds made by human-named whips, in the materialities of the torture 'experiments', in the affect of friendships struck between inmates and rodents, and/or in the aesthetic of poems written on cigarette wrappers, i.e., in the refrain of ruination and its surreal rhythm - the rhythm of 'Tadmuriyat' (that I understand and roughly translate here as the sama of living in/through Tadmur, the collective atmosphere that is generated by and generative of the embodied experience of its violences and is a 'word'play by Bayrakdar on Suriyaliyat- which I introduced you to earlier as the Arabic word-world for 'surrealism'), one that can only be thought of as a "Symphony of fear".

prisoners, their atrocities inscribed into the very marrow of the prisoners themselves, the socio-political realities they affected and the literature they produced.

And a decade later, in the aftermath of Mohammed Bouazizi setting himself on fire in the streets of Ben Arous[49], when Mouawiya Syasneh and his friends graffitiing a wall in Da'ara (on the 22nd of February, 2011) – painting "freedom", "down with the regime" and "its your turn now doctor" – and **the Tadmur Prison was shortly re-opened (June 15, 2011) to house about 350 prisoners arrested for participation in anti-government demonstrations, these ruinations returned, as if with a vengeance.** Tadmur, ***"the kingdom of death and madness",*** had risen again, and was, again, terrifyingly ruinous. It continued to, constantly if not consistently, hook into a larger ecology of ruin in Syria.

Through most of 2013, the city around the prison – both the town and the historical remains – gathered shrapnel wounds and burns from mortar fires at the hands of the Ba'athist Syrian army and the military branches of the Syrian opposition. Facades were used as shields riddled with bullets, palms gave cover and were raised to the ground, the dried-out spring became a natural trench, the town's government buildings became primary targets, and the Museum and hotels (including the Zenobia Cham Hotel) were used as military bases.

And then came the Palmyra Offensive of May, 2015 (DAESH). Ruin. And that of March, 2016 (Ba'athist Syrian army). Ruin. And that of December, 2016 (DAESH). Ruin. And that of January 2017 (Ba'athist Syrian army). Ruin.

It was clear, at least to me: the remnants of Tadmur, the historical ruins of Palmyra, the wreckage of the French barracks that became the Prison, the airfield in disrepair that became the airport- all the productive detritus of previous but perpetual

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[49] The event that kicked off the series of revolutions that came to be known as the "(First) Arab Spring" // The Arab Spring and Winter // The Arab Awakening // The Arab Uprisings- the fire that was lit by Mohammed Bouazizi// the fire that lit up Mohammed Bouazizi, rhizome-ing across Tunisia and penetrating into Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain. We discussed it in detail at the beginning of the Translator's Note. It was within/from this 'mileu' of uprising, revolt, riot, civil war, and insurgency, of a demand for a complete restructuring of the morphologies of the 'centres of powers' and governments within these 'territories' (the largest scale social/civil movement in the region since the "decolonization" process) - of revolution. There is a lot to be said here and unentangled, simply about the impact of these movements and spaces on the emergence of the Syrian revolution, about their material, spatial, and practice-d relationalities with these other revolutions, but in trying to stay true to both the form of a dissertation (which cannot 'probably' not be infinitely long- though it is 'possible') and the promise that I would stop 'mapping' when I reached terrain that my interlocutors had not stepped on, [and surprisingly, at least to me, the larger context of the Arab Spring rarely came up- a truly heart ripping reality, because it seems, at least from where I am standing, that it means that even the promise of hope has been so far erased in the wake of the Ruination and Cruelty metted out by 'state-actors' (and I mean all of them- the Assadian government, the Free Syrian Army that was once hoping to be an arm of the state-in-exile, other 'governing' non-'state' actors self-declaring as 'states' like DAESH) that the Revolution itself seems like a distant hazy 'childhood' dream, only the 'War' remains] I will not touch upon these other histories of living.

imperial ruinations **that were the very substratum of the pre-Syrian Revolution-Tadmur, in 2011, through those protests and that prison, through that dynamic of resistance-state brutality, became even more ensnaring-ly entangled with the (constant but not consistent)** ***affective politics of Ruination*****.**

Remember the (other) Refrain;

Ruination is a process.

Ruination is embodied.

Ruination is multiple.

Ruination is plural.

Ruination is partially connected.

Ruination is surreal.

Ruination is the politics of this surreality/ Syriality**.**

Ruins/ Ruination/ Ruining Surrealities.

Surreal Ruins/ Ruination/ Ruining.

Remember the Refrains.

Let's head back to the prison and its so-far-'last'[50]-ruination. In the very first Palmyra Offensive, when DAESH (finally) captured Amiriya and made their way to Palmyra (on the 20th of May) – again, into the town and the ruins – they brought with them not just the bombardment of the town or the airstrikes on their anti-aircraft artillery system, but also a wave of mass executions. Though notifications of the exact number of lives that were lost in the days that followed vary, what we can say with certainty is that over 150 people were trawled through the streets and/or dragged to the public square and/or yanked in front of landmarks to be shot in the head or beheaded.

And it was in this milieu of inhumane murderous puritanical purging, between door-to-door searches and summary executions at the Palmyra theatre stage – both of which lay entangled with/through other "fragments of histories, stories, cultures, societies, ecologies" (Stoler, 2008, 2016) **of ruination that Tadmur had been through each of the different imperial formations that lived there- be it the French Mandate, the Assadian Governments I and II, or DAESH – that the Tadmor Prison was disfigured and demolished. And three months later, it was within this exact milieu where Ruination, masked as 'capital punishment'/ 'state-sponsored violence'/ 'justice', has been rhythmically building a ruinous sama, for a little over a century, that Khaled was beheaded.**

It came, as I have mentioned previously, in 4 stages/notes/acts.

[50] As I have mentioned elsewhere, sequencing in this manuscript is never a strict one- no lasts, no firsts, no starts, no ends, no 1,2,3. Especially here, because 'last' is 'only' in terms of its mathematical confinement- Ruination, as I we have seen in the pages above/earlier, is really a morphing, mutating, metastasizing rhizomatic refrain whose affective politics spread within and across assemblages, practices, processes, worldings and universes, in my mind, like the Cordyceps from the Last of Us.

Figures: 144- 157
including, Key Transcriptions from the Palmyra Video:

Verse from the Quran (9:14) which is at the beginning of the video:

Fight them; Allah will punish them by your hands and will disgrace them and give you victory over them and satisfy the breasts of a believing people.

after which the Narrator declares: The soldiers of the Islamic State are still fighting the Alawites and their allies. Islamic State soldiers are punishing them. After every battle you see their bodies thrown on the ground or taken as prisoners. God gave his servants the city of Tadmur and also the checkpoints and companies around it. Alawites prisoners fell in their hands, guilty of torturing Sunni citisens. They had to taste what they did.

A while later, once they have been through the Amphitheatre at Palmyra and are in the streets of Tadmur: The city of Tadmur can't be mentioned without the memory of its prison, in which the Alawite regime committed its crimes. They used to torture prisoners here. Today, after the Islamic State soldiers arrived and purified it from the Alawites soldiers, they turned the last page of history for this prison.

Islamic State soldier: God enabled Islamic State soldiers to free the city of Tadmur from the Alawites. This prison was filled with evil and treachery. Thousands of Muslims were killed and tortured here. Today the prison is what you can see (ruined). We tell the Alawites: With the help of God we shall free the prisoners and destroy your thrones and your prisons in all of the Muslim countries.

I am still begging you, please, "look away".
Inside this one is the detailed description of the "Palmyra Video", released by DAESH- it makes sensible the machinations of their Ruination of Tadmur, the Tadmur Prison and the Mass Executions at the Palmyra Theatre.
And there's still involved.
So, just, please… "look away".
And if for some reason, you don't, then, again, find your way back to that Pandora's box we talked about.
She has these visuals and descriptions too.

Act: X – Ruin-ing (a) Body

~ Tadmur ~

First(?), DAESH seised the building. They annexed the very symbol of disappearance, detention, incarceration, torture – the symbol of absolute "decomposition of matter and mind", of *embodied ruin* – in the Syrian socio-political psyche. They rammed their incandescent black flag into the bust of Hafez al-Assad that stood guard over the entrance to the prison. They graffitied the walls indented by the backs of leaning prisoners, raided the offices- intumesced nodes that *secure*d 'I'ntelligence, 'P'olice, 'Security' apparatuses (the 'little security nothings' through which the refrain of terror and ruin materialized here in the Assadian Imperial Formation), thrust through the cells whose 'acoustic registers' find enunciation only through 'silence or screams', unfurled into the courtyard that had witnessed thousands of executions and stormed the sandy steps leading up to the watchtower of this panopticon. If we stick with the figuration of the 'body politique', DAESH, in/through that seizure of the body of the prison, launched an occupation on the autonomic nervous system of the Syrian body ***twistedly*** impelling it towards different trauma-responses by rendering ruined the talisman inscribed with the nation's collective carceral trauma.

Act: X – Ruin-ing (a) Space

~ Tadmur ~

In the last few pages when I spoke to you about the relationship between Tadmur and Palmyra, I was hoping to have explained how Tadmur's erasure – spatially, materially and narratively – from the 'H'istory of Palmyra made it so that through the French imperial formation it became the invisiblised periphery, through the first Assadian government it became the whole village became synonymous with the prison and the mass grave that was never dug – the shadow of the terror looming so large that there was no visible ground under it anymore, and with the second Assadian Imperial Formation, Tadmur also became a 'theatre' of/ for the martial. DAESH took this forward and ***'twisted'*** it- (i) they snatched Tadmur out of invisibility making it a space that "mattered again" (quite literally since the videos and photographs they launched became the portals thorough which the materialities and spatialities of the prison could be made sensible with quite some intensity, and metaphorically- they had 'the world' talking about Tadmur instead of Palmyra for once) and then completely obliterated it, ruining its matter

Act: X – Ruin-ing (a) Subjectivity

~ Tadmur ~

I feel like in ← those two acts, something I kept returning to was this, at least to me, sense that there DAESH was 'twisted'ly ruining Tadmur, i.e. ***there was a refrain of Ruination already echoing across the streets of Tadmur, impregnating the Prison walls and seeping into the very ground until it reached Palmyra- haunting it there as well. But the rhythm of this ruination was what DAESH "unmade" and "remade" – it exerted its violences precisely to unmake the worlds that had been generated in/through the French Mandate's and the Assadian Governments different Rhythms, rupturing it, borrowing from it, morphing it, mutating it, 'Syrially' engaging with it, to generate a ruinous rhythm of their own:*** one that would be composed of their own response-ability towards the poetic agencies of Syrialism, Ruination and Martial Violence. The hope, I think, was that a worlding would emerge where the 'centers of power' – thus deterritorialised and reterritorialised differently – would find

Act: X – An Exhibition of Ruin(ing/ation)

~ Tadmur ~

I think the same is true for the 'exhibitionism' of it all. ***The 'exhibition' demands/ensures a 'witnessing'*** (a particular figuration of it where its "not only" about the visually-dominated aspect of recording and 'seeing' but a much more embodied, deeply sensory worlding of encountering an event such that the loose-ends of the self/the observer/ the witness become coloured and/or gain the texture of the event/process/ that which is being witnessed, differentially based on the interaction effect of this affect with the agency/affect of the individual themselves) ***that desires subjectification,*** i.e., the exhibition of Ruination itself, of the Ruins generated, of the Remains and the Refuse, of their materialities, spatialities and semiotics by DAESH, demands that the audience encounters their aesthetic productions (for example) of this exhibition in a deeply embodied manner. The videos for instance have special effects, have narration, have music, have sound, have 'surreal' looping's and descriptions that instigate the olfactory, need to be tactile-ly accessed and if you see them long enough, I promise you,

Act: X – Ruin-ing (a) Body

~ Tadmur ~

It seems that some of those who had lost their loved ones to the prison and its torturously ruinous carceral regime felt that "justice has been met at the hands of extremist militants," while for some of the prisoners themselves, "IS demolished a historic symbol that should have stayed, because in every room there were people who were killed," - Ali Aboudehn, a Lebanese man who spent four years there. Or, as Saleh – another survivor of/ from Tadmur – put up on Facebook, he "felt as if his home was destroyed" because "I dreamt that I would visit it someday... This visit would redeem me... it would be a closure... The destruction of a prison that was the symbol of our slavery is the destruction of our freedom... (this ruination was) a huge service to Assad's regime of slavery".

Act: X – Ruin-ing (a) Space

~ Tadmur ~

\\ making its ruination matter. (ii) But with them too, they continued the Assadian tradition of intensifying the Tadmur with the prison at least with its 'aesthetic practices' but it "twisted" this relationality, when it came to the 'governance' of the space itself, where it saw the 'village' as an important node in its state infrastructure- especially given that it had captured the town and Palmyra, directly from the Assadian government forces. The organization established an Emir in the village, set up its usual state-apparatus, but more importantly, taking the 'socio' aspect of the 'spatial' seriously (think X), they started a campaign to 'win' the 'hearts and minds' of the villagers- "persuade the townspeople to view it as a literator." Yet, in the same breath, it also conducted "door to door searches" to imprison and torture "government affiliates" and executed upwards of 200 people from the city, and were responsible for a mass exodus of inhabitants that were, as a result of their brutality, fleeing for their lives. (iii) And of course, as we saw on page. X, the space itself, the physicality of the village took literal, physical, damage when its urban architecture was effectively used as a shielding technology in their battle with the Assadian and Russian militaries. ***Again, it was if by ruining a 'part' of the space – through the ruination of the prison – they were hoping to make "Tadmur" itself matter again, only to 'ruin' it again, differently.***

Act: X – Ruin-ing (a) Subjectivity

~ Tadmur ~

affinity and resonance with the organisations desires, this allowing them intensified affectiveness.

Think here for instance, of 'why' the ruination of Tadmur, both the prison, and the form in which the village was 'ruined' took place, within the parameters of DAESH's own worldings. ***For DAESH, it seems that this ruination was an integral part of their 'state-building' project in Tadmur since it desired the 'generation' / 'emergence' of the "Ideal" DAESH-ian subject.*** The ruination of the city and the prison, performed a worlding where, it made clear – through the Palmyra video it uploaded and 'loudspeaker' announcements on 'ground' – that there was no room in this 'new'ly ruined world for (i) governmental support, affinity or even tolerance, (ii) living outside of the parameters inscribed by Salafist Jihadist ideology and (iii) for seeing DAESH as anything but the 'liberators' of the 'Muslims'. They "city of Tadmur", according to DAESH, was being "purified" from the "Alawite soldiers" (soldiers from the Assadian governmental apparatus) and from the "infidel idolators and the criminals." And this purification, this ruination, was DAESH's response-ability towards all 'Muslims' to whom they would "give" "victory" and whose lands they would "save" ("even if you hate us.") Listen to the acoustic register here: infidel, purify, criminal, save, victory. And this register find repetition again, when they talk about the prison: "This prison was filled with evil and treachery" and was therefore, ruined. Evil. Save. Purify. Repeat. Ruin, Unmake, Remake, Repeat. Ruin, Make. DAESH was actively "disciplining" its subjects through the embodied experience of these Ruinations- this acoustic register being only one of the surfaces through which this ruination was exerting its affect.

Act: X – An Exhibition of Ruin(ing/ation)

~ Tadmur ~

you can taste the iron in the blood and calcium in the dirt. For example, with Tadmur itself, there is of course an on-life of the destruction of the prison and DAESH's triumphant 'drive through' in the city, which generates an audience that through this 'witnessing' can potentially be 'subjectivised', but this is also true for the 'on ground' realities that do not necessarily find this extension. Think back to the speakerphone announcements, or the 'driving' through the streets itself, or, the 'audience' that was, quite literally, present (and we catch a brief glimpse of them in the video), at the amphitheater at the time of the mass "execution" on 'invitation' by the Emir, especially given that these 'prisoners' that were to be executed were first driven to the 'prison' and in what can only be described as a ritual, I think, loaded on and off a truck and marched in and out of the cells and through the courtyard before being herded back into the truck and driven from the Prison, through the City, to Palmyra. ***Again, here, the message seems pretty clear, at least to me: there is an "Ideal DAESH-ian citisen" and this is the consequence of breaking the 'laws' that govern that figuration of citisenship. It is "merely" capital punishment- a purification ritual to excise criminality from the society, a task that is well within the mandate, laws, duties, ideals and ideologies of the 'empire'// 'the state'.***

This rhythm, these simultaneously occurring discrete but entangled acts of Ruination, I think, find repletion in Khaled al-Asaad's beheading as well.

Let's return to the photograph for a minute, or at least my description of it, because I still recommend looking away. The photograph does not speak of Khaled's beheading- at least not the specificities of where it took place, and how and by whom. Instead, as I mentioned earlier, it shows us its immediate aftermath- where the body was exhibited, and how and by whom. But/ Though it does not speak of these things, it does scream about them, I think. At least at me and so, I did some digging. A small collection of consanguine photographs that I was able to track down, and the two (unverified/unverifiable) 'local' accounts I could find about the specificities of where and how the decapitation itself took place revealed that Khaled's beheading was carried out in a museum square - the same museum square where he worked for over 40 years of his life.

I am struggling to put words to the sheer callousness, the *cruelty*, this... of making a space that was so familiar (presumably) to him, the place where parts of his life routinely unfolded, making that place the space of his literal ruination. I can barely even imagine, and honestly dare not, the sheer pain, the agony, that this twisting of meanings, this violation, must have caused him, everyone in his life and everyone his life touched. Every time I think of him, of this, I am left overwhelmingly numb. I feel rage, not anger; sorrow not sadness; exhaustion, not fatigue; and I did not even know him. I barely know of him. If I, as a passive 'witness' a hundred degrees removed feel... *this*... I cannot even begin to grasp how the reality of his death, of his murder, affected anyone and anything within the rubble.

What I can (barely) do, as Syrialism and I have done through this manuscript so far, is theorise about the stories the visual artefacts that captured/ framed/make sensible Khaled's 'execution' tell us about how ruination found reproduction, rhythmically, through the ruins of his body, the ruination of the space where this beheading took place, and where his body was subsequently exhibited and the seemingly intended impact it had on those that witnessed the beheading- physically or virtually.

Let's begin with Khaled's body itself. I have spoken of its ruin at length earlier and am going to choose not to confer more attention on the indignities of his death, instead, I am going to ask you to focus on the placard I had mentioned was hung around his neck after his execution[51]. Much like the narration of the Palmyra Video, or the other sensory inscriptions

[51] We can estimate that the placard wasn't present there prior to his brutal decapitation because even if we zoom in to photograph - I insist and repeat, "do not try this at home" - up to its 'not-deteriorated zoom limit' which happens to be 172.8x, i.e., until the moment the pixels begin to no longer be 'pixel boxes', there is no evidence of blood along its edges.

(the acoustic, the visual, the tactile that we discussed in the previous page vis-à-vis the ruination of Tadmur) this placard gives a justification and simultaneously becomes **a physical/sensory/sensible marker for this justification of why the physical body of al-Asaad is deemed intervenable, deemed ruinable- and deemed ruinable in a very particular way i.e. that of death by (spectacular) decapitation**[52]. It clearly states: ***"apostate, participant of incident conferences, director of idolatry and visiting heretic Iran".*** Here, the notion of undesirability, of the 'criminal', of the 'infidel' (especially given DAESH's relationship to takfir), is tethered to the physical body of the person being beheaded- it is as if the physical body of the individual embodies the social imaginary of an undesirability itself and this 'criminal' body is simultaneously socially produced in a manner where state-intervention in the form of necropolitical power is justified, precisely through its association with undesirability… It is as if through the literal, violent purging of Khaled, 'the criminal', idolatry – the crime – itself is seen to be chipped away at.

Especially if it is "witnessed", or at least, that's the sense I get by digging into the specifics of where the body was decapitated, where it was exhibited and the onlife it generated for itself. For instance, **besides/beyond the cruelty of decapitating him in the museum square, think about the physical morphology of the space itself: It is as if the symbolic topography**[53] **of the square itself is twisted by the enactment**- on

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[52] In a way, I think, this placard is very much **like Sontag's conceptualisation of a "caption"** to a photograph. She argues that "all photographs wait to be explained or falsified by their captions. During the fighting between Serbs and Croats at the beginning of the recent Balkan wars, the same photographs of children killed in the shelling of a village were passed around at both Serb and Croat propaganda briefings. Alter the caption: alter the use of these deaths." And that is the power of the placard here as well- depending on the audience's reaction it either allows for the photograph to be explained or falsified, but in either case it is instructive- it actively participates in the production of the reality we access through the photograph; and in the production of socio-political reality 'on the ground'.

[53] Let's lean on Lefebvre here for a moment to explore this dynamic further. In the Production of Space, Lefebrve shows us that space is a complex social product grounded in a three-part dialectic between the practices and perceptions of the everyday (le perçu), the differing representations of said space (le conçu) and the spatial imaginaries of that particular time (le vécu). In this view, space is not only socially produced, but itself produces/ affects social realities. At the traffic light, the museum square and the Roman pillars of the ruins in Tadmur (where the body was subsequently, and ultimately, hung) we find spaces, sites, that are socially constructed around the principle of socialization through heightened visibility (at the very least). These spaces specifically (perhaps more so than other spaces, objects and technologies) use sensory regimes as a governing tool of sorts- everyone on the road has to look at the traffic light and this act of looking in tandem with what it shows - their semiotic dialogue - dictates the flows of traffic. Similarly, everyone has to collect in the museum square to access entry to the museum i.e. to be taught what the rules governing that space are through posters of do's and don'ts, to be taught what the messaging is that the institution is unfurling through advertisements about collections current and past; everyone also sees the pillars when they visit the ruins because they demarcate space, defining where the theatre separates from the landscape around it. These spaces were intended to produce

the one hand, it remains unchanged because the square is indeed a space designed for crowds to conglomerate i.e. a space that acts as a precursor to moments of intense visibility (is where we put up posters, and infomercials, etc.); on the other hand, it is typically a space devoid of extreme physical violence. And the same is true for where his body was 'exhibited', at the traffic lights at an intersection in the village. **The refrain of Ruination, here too (as we saw in Tadmur), seems to grasp onto the logics, materialities, spatialities and semiotics of sensory governance in these spaces, and twisting them – surreally 'affecting' them with/through such violence and violation that their relationalities are unmade and remade – generates/ acts upon its desire of generating 'new' subjectivities: those that would emerge from, inhabit and reproduce the affective politics of its 'new' rhythm**.

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certain subjectivities- the vehicle operator/pedestrian, the history student and(/or) the tourist, again at the very least.

This process of socialization through spatially oriented sensory governance, I think, is what makes possible the emergence of a beheading in these spaces. After all, beheadings demand, as we discussed earlier, a deeply embodied 'witnessing' experience, especially if we think of them as instantiations of capital punishment.

Essentially, I am thinking that the logic of governance remains constant-ish in these spaces, then, but the form shifts i.e. though the relationality between socialization, space and sensory governance remains roughly the same, it finds repetition, the form in which it is materialised shifts drastically, becoming different and twisting this entanglement. It is a double movement of sorts - the limits of what constitutes desirable and undesirable are redrawn through this enactment, but the enactment itself was made possible through a continuation of certain logics that precede the enactment itself.

Now that we have that out of the way, you are right in wondering, "okay, beheadings are syrially about ruination. But what the *insert-profanity-of-choice* does that even mean?!", So,

Meet Ruination.
(Pronouns: They, them)
(Age: As old as the idea of imperialism)
(Familial Status: Grandparent to Syrialism)
(Identifying features: Guillotine heels, Grenade hair-ties)
(Last known address: Tadmur)

I first met Ruination in a cracked-spined book that Professor Spyer brought to class sometime in 2017. It was a course on the "*Archives of the Everyday*" and there were only 5 of us in the room. At first, it took me by surprise, if not shock. It was my first semester, and I had already begun becoming painfully, and pitifully, aware that I was "not in Kansas anymore" - which is something I have since come to learn, through errors I deeply regret, was a feeling that was not unique to my lived experience at IHEID; it bewitched and maddened most of my peers as well. But I was still surprised… I had assumed there would be more of us, though as time passed, I was grateful (in a way) that that wasn't the case. Because being with just the five meant that on days like the day I met Ruination, we could simply huddle together around Prof. S, like her desk was our very own blazing but also a cosy campfire and we could read, (actively-like Nancy and her friends smoking out/ encountering/ a challenging clue for a new mystery that needed solving), the Walcott poem from which it (all) began.

A green lawn, broken by low walls of stone,
Dipped to the rivulet, and pacing, I thought next
Of men like Hawkins, Walter Raleigh, Drake,
Ancestral murderers and poets, more perplexed
In memory now by every ulcerous crime.
The world's green age then was a rotting lime
Whose stench became the charnel galleon's text?
The rot remains with us, the men are gone.
But, as dead ash is lifted in the wind
That fans the blackening ember of the mind,
My eyes burned from the ashen prose of Donne.
—Derek Walcott, "Ruins of a Great House," Collected Poems 1948–1984



(Puri & Saupin. Comic Strip. To/For Syralism. March, 2024)

We discussed extensively what we thought of the poem, of what reminded us – more broadly – of rot and empire, of what we thought of reading and writing a history that would give room to these rots, of how we could build archives that were mind-full and care-full and confrontational of their presence, and of what Stoler meant when she said that this poem was a "searing eulogy to empire and its aftermath as an 'ulcerous crime'" and that it "captures something that seems to elude colonial histories of the present again and again. [because] His verbs shift between multiple tenses." We poured over (especially the first few pages) of the introduction she had written, untiringly, measuring her soldering words that demanded that we critically re-imagine our figurations of empire, coloniality, ruin, debris, time, space, and their relationalities. She repeated, repeatedly, "***These crimes have been named and indicted across the globe, but the eating away of less visible elements of soil and soul more often has not.***" // That we must think of her propositions here as a "... provocative challenge to name the toxic corrosions and violent accruals of colonial aftermaths, the durable forms in which they bear on the material environment and on people's minds." // And focus on the ***"... the uneven temporal sedimentations in which imperial formations leave their marks."*** // By ensuring that we, consistently and constantly, ***"...ask how empire's ruins contour and carve through the psychic and material space in which people live and what compounded layers of imperial debris do to them"*** (Stoler, 2008).

I thought could almost hear her screaming through the pages, "Look for/at the ruins. Follow the ruination. The Rot Remains."

What I found most interesting, about this conceptualisation of ruins and ruination, was that for Stoler and the other writers in the book series and beyond who have engaged with this particular 'figuration' of the concept, ruination was a continuous corrosive process that might have emerged in this current form with the birth of the Empire but was still on-going. It moved away from the understanding of 'ruins' as archaeological sites embodying the memory of a mystified, mythologised past, that was conferred deep privilege, and seen as a celebration of cultural heritage and/ or as power-players almost exclusively in/through the nation/community building aspect of their agency (operationalised in tandem with intentionally violent blindness towards the histories that were being erased through the inscription of 'H'istory onto the semiotic of these buildings). Think here of the Acropolis, or Angkor Wat, or Machu Pichu or Khajuraho. Or of Petra (where the village around it, at least in my driving-through-of-it is a whole different world than the archaeological site itself, echoing what I have learnt/sensed/heard of) or Palmyra- and how the erasure of its "not only"s, for instance, affected Tadmur (Kalaycioglu, 2020).

Instead, this 'figuration' of ruin and ruination shifted focus from these nostalgia-masked-and-thus-obscured-power-moves to making sensible ruinations of, and through, landscapes, infrastructures, (micro)ecologies, social-psyches, sensory regimes- through the social, political, material, corporeal, affective and the aesthetic. (See where I am going with this? Have we all memorised this list by now?) Thus, in Stoler et. al.'s universe, **ruination was both a "state and a process" – the process through which severe impairment is caused onto a 'subject' and the condition itself of then being ruined (a noun and a verb) – and a deeply multiple and embodied one at that**.

And these ruins, seen as such, as "petrified life" spoke to and of both the "fragility of power" and the incessant reproduction of the "imperial" conditions simultaneously… speak of collective historical claims, "history told through a spirited voice" and as places from where both, the "conditional subjunctive" futures and new possibilities emerge, i.e., **these ruins, their ruination, work with and within a register of plurality, seeking partial connections to worlds as ruinous as others as regenerative.**

And so from where I was/am standing, I was quite taken by these authors' conceptualization of ruination because it was a deeply **'surreal' (re-)"figuration".**

I am embarrassed to admit though, that despite their warnings – Stoler's and Prof. S's – for the longest time, I forgot all about Ruination. Even when I found Khaled, and his head, I couldn't see Ruination lurking in its contours. I didn't recognise their work, the flash of their guillotine heels, reflected in the executioner's blade, because all I had in this photograph was the 'head'- the sword's presence was obvious but it wasn't present. My peripheral vision just wasn't able to stalk their smiling-silhouette swerving around the corners of Tadmur's corridors, either, as I sprinted down that rabbit hole. I tracked down more pictures. More videos. More explosions. More execution s. More carceral. Look for yourself (in the pages to follow). I am not sure why, but I still couldn't snare and secure their grenade-littering shadow. I, just, couldn't corner them in this 'becoming' of a beheading/ in the becoming of this beheading.

It was only months, if not years (if I haven't stressed this enough, let me repeat, time has been a surreal dimension in writing out this dissertation- it all took simultaneously one blink and three decades), later when I had finally descended/ascended/wound up (choose the directionality that pleases you) at that level of analysis where echoes become tactile, where you are able to map repetitions, refrains, in any given practice with "deliberate disregard" for the boundaries and borders (Austin, 2017) of its individual instantiations – i.e., when you arrive at the state/space from where your immersion/ analysis allows you to clearly sense the refrains

that warp the given "small world" (ibid) into its current shape – only then, did I begin to see glimpses of Ruination.

I had reached that space where and when you have attained the most-twisted of distances with the 'subject of inquiry' such that you are far enough and deep enough for all the different instantiations of any practice – in my case beheadings – to speak to you all at once as deeply individual yet deeply connected units.

And they were all, differently and differentially, but repeating-ly, trying to get me to see that Ruination had visited them, repeatedly.

There might have been some whiskey and nicotine involved in getting to that^ space-time-reverie-moment, but the point still stands: **The "small world" (Austin, 2017) of beheadings and the affective politics of Ruination were intimately entangled.**

It seemed that sometimes Ruination spoke of/to beheading with in the vocabulary of 'progress' and 'expansion' that burrowed itself in our socio-political worlds in/through the production of urban ruins (a mechanism introduced to us as we walk through Detroit with Grandin, sensed and made sensible in/through the small world of beheadings through the inscriptions on the Narmer Palette or the Great Hierakonpolis Palette[54] or in/through the decapitation of *Taira no Masakado* whose rebellious head continues to haunt many sites in and around Tokyo[55]); sometimes it made itself sensible through an 'acoustic register' (as Hunt sounds in through her ethnographic work on rape in the Congo and as we heard in the roaring crackle of *Indra* (इन्द्र)[56] thunder as it struck off *Namuci* (नमुचि), the *Ausra's* head and/or

[54] One of the oldest depictions of a beheading that I could find was on the Narmer Palette or the Great Hierakonpolis Palette. On this viridescent predynastic (/proto-dynastic) 63-centimetre-tall siltstone shieldlike ceremonial palette some of the earliest hieroglyphics were found. Though the recto side is equally mesmeric, the verso side is where the decapitated bodies are buried. This site is divided (as it typically is) into 4 'registers' (loose translation: section), each whispering their own story, forming a myth through their chorus - argued, in this case, by some to be the myth of how King Narmer unified Upper and Lower Egypt (Heagy, 2013; Suelzle, 2006). In the second register, a mace-wielding King Narmer occupies the length of the left-hand side, standing God-like in proportion to the rest of the scene, wearing the Red Crown of Lower Egypt. Before his steely eyes, there is a procession unfolding in his name: four bearers bearing vexilloids march towards (or above?) ten beheaded bodies. The bodies are lying in two parallel lines - five incomplete stick figures neighbouring five more - with their heads, much like Khaled's, placed at their feet. These bodies, these heads, are presumably of those who lost their lives in Narmer's conquest of different cities. **Here too, I saw (1) an executioner ruin these bodies, these heads, these individual lives, and saw a particular treatment meted out to these ruined bodies- one that created (2) a (ruined) social-space-fabric through (3) an exhibition of these ruins itself. I saw how (4) subjectivities were ruined and (re)created and (re)produced in the wake of this ruination.**
It was surreal… how different this palette looked from the photograph of Khaled's beheading, and yet how similar it felt. And this was true for all the other examples I am presenting to you here.
[55] (Miller, 2010)
[56] (Dange, 1991)

in/through the scream that emblematised the (in)famous beheading of Medusa- brutally murdered by Perseus and perpetually petrified – herself, posthumously – midscream, on Athena's shield and/or in the silent squalling of the beheaded heads of 'Cephalophore'[57] saints that they carried with them).

Sometimes Ruination came as a 'guest' to visit a space that was intensely private and 'ruined' it, transfiguring its debris to create a 'public' (as we saw in the collection of photographs from Gaza that Azoulay introduces us to and in/through the trope of the Arthurian beheading games[58]). Sometimes ruination came to beheadings as an intensely agentic entanglement, entangled with spatial-affective-political-state-building (as we saw in/through the unearthed stories of *Coyolxāuhqui* whose brother decapitated her after defeating her in battle[59], or those of the beheading of *Mímir* that led to Odin pickling his head[60]), i.e., sometimes Ruination came from the "edges" of then existing empires, speaking of events/ process of insurgency that sought to reconfigure the political formations of those times, and their spatial resonances, where 'ruins' took both 'positive' and 'negative' valances, shifting with shifts in perception and perspective (something we learn as Gordillo teaches us about subaltern perspectives when it comes to "voids" like the Gran Chaco and the Korengal Valley), and sometimes ruination came as an event/ process of material transformation or 'recycling', bringing with it a shift in local imaginaries and the relationalities of the political and affective states (something we learnt from Rao's investigation of Jetprole).

And the list goes on. In mapping these visitations of Ruination then, two things became evident, at least to me. First, despite/ regardless of the differences in iterations and contextual instantiations, it was clear, that whenever, Ruination visited beheadings it was always accompanied by some or the other Imperial Formation. In fact, I would venture that depending on the context and examples in question, building on and away from Stoler et. al., Ruination was always accompanied by White-Supremacist-Imperial-Colonial-Patriarchal Formations, i.e., Ruination was an intensely political, Syrial and deeply embodied process.

And second, that in each of these (re)tellings, these stories/ examples, I was confronted with – not just the politics of ruination but also – a sense of lingering- the bodies, the heads of those that were so viciously and violently killed continued to live, to roam, to haunt… to "affect". Their actual, physical, embodied ruination seemed to be actively participating in the (re)creation of an ever so slightly altered worlding- their ruins and the very act of their

[57] (Tracy & Massey, 2012)
[58] (Tolkien et al., 1967)
[59] (Peterson & Terraciano, 2019)
[60] (Lindow, 2001)

ruination had undeniable affective agency[61]. *Coyolxāuhqui's* ruined head became the moon, *Mímir's* was eternally preserved as a pickle, *Namuci's* stalked Indra around the universe and *Taira no Masakado's* ruined head found its way to the capital and his spirit said to haunt Tokyo to this day. The blood that gushed out of Medusa's neck birthed her two sons and her ruined head, or rather her eyes, continued to hold its formidable fossilizing powers. Both, the ruined body and the head of the Green Knight, walked away from the game at Arthur's court having sealed Sir Gawain's fate; and Felix and Regula, heads and ruination in hand[62], continue to stand tall over Zurich (just 277.6 kilometres from where I sit writing about them) as its patron saints.

Death here, too, did not deter the living. *Surreal.*

And in seeing Ruination like this, as a deeply embodied Syrial affective politics that animated the lifeworld's of beheadings, and vice versa, I had effectively, returned full circle, to Stoler's figuration of the concept in Wallcot's poem, reimagining how it would operate and become operational within the DeleuzeGuattarian worldings.

From where I was standing, it was clear then, at least to me, 'beheading' had always been ruinous, and 'Ruination' had always felt an affinity for beheadings, and continued to remain deeply entangled.

But, as I went through the first few iterations of drafting this chapter, I was almost unanimously faced with a question that had me pause and map a 'second' history of living for/ through beheadings, to "check" if in these kinds of beheadings too, Ruination was always present: the question of the difference between 'fictional'/ 'mythological' beheadings and ruin,

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[61] These stories and their visualities made it clear (at least to me) that these heads, these bodies… these bodily remains… were not only (almost passive) sites upon which the ruins of ritual killings were carried out rendering them little more than porters of inscriptions for whichever different socialisation circuits they were geared towards producing and/or reproducing. Rather, they also expressed agency in their own right, posthumously. These bodies are (rightfully, I think) vengeful. They haunt their assailants. They demand that the world does not forget the cruelties they faced and in doing so force us to re-examine what we deem justifiable and the 'Evil'-ness that our violences are geared towards and the 'Evil'-ness they beget. They retain their power and perhaps most importantly, they actively disrupt the very socializations they are used to operationalise. They make sure that in/through their hauntings we can see how every beheading is a markedly complex process in/through which stand implicated actants, logics, affects, aesthetics and socio-political dynamics that we can easily miss if we keep averting our eyes… if we keep looking away- dynamics such as that of 'ruination'
These beheaded ruins then were echoing the observations and arguments made by Stoler at al. in/ through their reconceptualisation of 'ruination' as both a state and a process that participates in the reproduction of White-Supremacist-Imperial-Colonial-Patriarchal Formations, which seek to "incite or bring great and irretrievable disaster upon, to destroy agency, to reduce to a state of poverty, to demoralise completely" (Soanes & Stevenson, 2004)**, finding renewed vitality in these ruinous violences.**

[62] (Bonner, 1986)

and beheadings in the 'real' world. Now I have spoken at length earlier about how this distinction does not stand in the DelezueGuattarian worlding of this dissertation – it is all equally, and differently, 'actual' and 'virtual' and it is all, always 'real'[63] – but the spirit of the argument, I thought, demanded care-full investigation. And so, I started looking into other beheadings[64], further populating this "small world" (Austin, 2017).

I learnt, for instance, that in Imperial Rome and Dynastic China, the 'routine' death penalty seems to be beheadings "for ordinary, serious crimes committed by ordinary and sometimes distinguished people"[65] in almost an honourable fashion – or rather the method of punishment itself was seen as 'honourable' even if the crime/criminal was not[66]. And that in Muromachi Japan, the 'criminal' first faced the 'victim', was then tied to a pillar and finally beheaded. This beheading was typically a precursor to *'death by slaying'* (i.e., the body of the culprit was used for 'testing' new swords), gokumon (skewering the head) or hikimawashi (paraded around on horseback)[67]. I learnt that until the Statute Law (Repeals) Act of 1973, beheadings were widely used by the British Empire either with a focus on the displaying of beheaded heads (and other body-parts on pikes etc.)[68] or conducted posthumously once drawing and quartering was out of the picture[69]. And/Or of course, the shadow of the guillotine

[63] About two months before I wrote the first draft of this chapter, (October 16th, 2020), I woke up to the news of a beheading in a suburb in Paris- Samuel Paty, a history teacher at a middle school (Collège Bois-d'Aulne) in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine had been killed and decapitated. Pictures of Charlie Hebdo's cartoons, an 18-year-old immigrant of Chechen descent, a complex mesh of self-and-other-ing practices and a cleaver were involved. Roughly 5,834 kilometres away, at nearly the same time (October 13th, 2020), another beheading became visible- Medusa with the Head of Perseus. Luciano Garbati's seven-foot tall bronze sculpture – depicting Medusa with a sword in one hand and Perseus's head in the other – was planted across the street from the New York County Criminal Courthouse (the now (in)famous space of Harvey Weinstein's trial).
I was already swimming in news articles of beheadings from Syria, Mexico, Azerbaijan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Brazil over the last 5 years, Caravaggio's paintings, DAESH's photographs, stories about Felix and Regula, episodes of The Boys and Teenage Bounty Hunters and pacing between Nabokov and Kafka in an attempt to write something, anything, barely comprehensible about beheadings when I stumbled (on/) into these two realities. Together. I know that they are in no way comparable of course, – I cannot in good conscience compare the visceral corporeal loss of Mr. Paty's life to that of a mythical boy's bronze head; nor can I equate the radical upending of a pervasive ancient myth at the hands of Medusa to the, unfortunately, tragic (re)instantiation of radicalization – but there is something that, to me, at that moment, partially connected their worlds- something about being able to see these beheadings, next to each other, made the surreality of it all… more Syrial and had me convinced that there was a repetition, a refrain, a sama- I didn't know what the shape of this relationality was, but there was something 'partially connecting' these two very differently but deeply surreal experiences of a beheading.
[64] Beheading that was more within the realm of 'capital punishment' and not 'just' mythical/ritualistic violence.
[65] Moore, "Cruel and Unusual Punishment in the Roman Empire and Dynastic China."
[66] Roberson and Das, An Introduction to Comparative Legal Models of Criminal Justice.
[67] Schmidt, Capital Punishment in Japan.
[68] Brown, The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery.
[69] Webb, Execution: A History of Capital Punishment in Britain.

looms large. From 1791 to 1981, beheading by guillotine was the only legal means of execution in France[70] and travelled to all of its colonies[71]. In Nazi Germany, beheading using the guillotine was also ordained as the official means of execution for civilians[72]. And I am sure you know that contemporarily beheadings remain/are a part of the repertoire of justice in Saudi Arabia and 54 other countries.

In/through this 'capital punishment' diagram, beheadings, I think, are again sensed and made sensible, as surreal embodied processes that multiple and plural, but/and also partially connected to other 'methods'[73] through which retributive-justicee-as-public-executions are performed. For example, in the US capital punishment instead takes the shape of electrocution or the lethal injection (the same as China and Vietnam). In Bangladesh, Botswana, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, South Sudan and Syria it is performed through hanging. Shootings, as even further militarization of the everyday, are carried out in China, Iran, North Korea, Oman, Qatar, Somalia, Taiwan and Yemen. And just as we saw with the opening up of the chromatic vocabularies of the photograph of Khaled's beheading I am convinced that here too we can trace chromatic, material, corporeal, infrastructural, sensory, aesthetic, norm/narrative and/or conceptual differences and repetitions that allow us to sense, and made sensible, how Ruination drives through these practices as well, enveloping them all in a sama of its politics (but that's a whole other paper, which if I ever get around to writing, will be another story for another day, so I am going to quickly move on, but leave you with one thought- I dug my heels into the capital punishment 'diagram' among all others not just because of DAESH's claims at statehood, legalities and their implications for beheadings within that worlding, but also because to me, it seemed like the one multiverse where the relationship between Syrialism's grandparents, that I alluded to earlier – i.e., between Ruination and White-Supremacist-Imperialist-Capitalist-Patriarchy was most vibrantly sensible).

Content with having 'proven', at least to myself, that the surreal process of beheadings in/ through each of its iteration, through difference and repetition, always seemed to be deeply surreally entangled with surreal politics of Ruination, I thought I would 'simply' now 'apply' this 'theory'/ 'argument' to Khaled's photograph and 'prove' that his beheading, too, found resonance within/through this politics. And that's where I got stuck. Well 'just look at the photograph' through the 'lens' of the 'concept' seemed a little thin as an argument, and I

[70] Smith, "Narrating the Guillotine: Punishment Technology as Myth and Symbol."
[71] Camus, Reflections on the Guillotine.
[72] Just a quick note here: In/ through all these examples the relationship between beheadings and capital punishment seems so intimate that the former's differentially spread abolishment as a practice seems to have coincided with that of the latter, as does its differentially continued presence.
[73] When adding note about Guillotine, add use of 'methods' and scientific connotations

couldn't find a way to visually drag you with me into that 'twisted-space-time-reverie-moment' where all the beheadings from Syria, and elsewhere, 'fracturing' time, and 'transversing' space, were all speaking to me all together, and beg 'I promise, if you just sense it like this, it makes sense!', so I was…. a little at a loss.

And so, I thought, let's look for more beheadings (because that is exactly what my splintering mind needed- more time spent reading about/through, and starting at, the intricate details of even more decapitations and making sure I was tapping into every surface/dimension of embodiment that it could be sensed and made sense through. Just kidding). And followed the same "formula" as surrealism/Syrialism itself- I turned to the visual-arts to see if I could 'encounter' how beheadings had been made sense of on canvas. And then perhaps even more than before, the intensity of beheading's stickiness became sensible to me. I literally, began to see them everywhere- I saw them participate in paintings (think of Caravaggio's Gentileschi's, Mantegna's and Klimt's Judith-s and her beheading of Holofernes, for instance, or van der Weyden's and Caravaggio's scenes of the execution of St. John), model for statues (think here of Luciano Garbati's seven-foot tall bronze sculpture Medusa with the Head of Perseus and Cellini's Perseus with the Head of Medusa- the statue it traces a twisted ancestry from), are cast in films (from Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade to the Day of the Dead) and perform on Netflix and/or Amizon Prime (in episodes of Teenage Bounty Hunters and/or The Boys, for example). I saw them engage with our worlds in/through the simplest of gestures- a metaphorical slice across one's own throat through the pointed end of an unfolded fist i.e. a non-verbal cue for "cut it out".

And, they were always accompanied by Ruination.



(Puri, Asees. Collage. To/For Syralism. March, 2024)

















I know I have hinted at it before, but it bears repeating that this is not to say that all these beheadings are in any way, shape or form the same or even remotely 'similar'/ 'comparable'/ 'same'. These instances/iterations are each of them unique in their morphologies, their politics, their situatedness and their aesthetics. Even the semiotic worlds that they each emerge within/ through and that they each invoke and reproduce are different[74]: "While severed heads always speak, they say different things in different cultures (Janes, 2005)."

But what finds repetition – what makes this politics of Ruination sensible – is, I think, a *rhythm* (Deleuze, 1994) that comes in four notes/acts. In each iteration of a beheading, in each of these assemblages mentioned above, when we try and map the refrain of Ruination we find that there is a rhythm to it: a body is ruined in a ruined space, birthing subjectivities rooted in and confined by this ruination and the ruinous exhibition of it all. Or, a space is ruined by a ruined body, birthing an exhibition that is rooted in and confined by this ruination-making room for the emergence of ruinous subjectivities. Or… you get the point. Regardless of how we perceive, sense, and make sensible the morphology of this assemblage, the rhythm repeats: Body. Ruin. Space. Ruin. Exhibition. Ruin. Subjectivity. Ruin. Ruin. Body. Ruin. Space. Ruin. Exhibition. Ruin. Subjectivity.

And that is how, I am hoping to have staged an encounter between Ruination and us (in the previous pages)- **by mapping this rhythm in/through the beheading of Khaled and teasing out its affective politics.**

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[74] Besides the diagrams of capital punishment and ritualistic violence that I have mentioned before, think here for example of how the 10 decapitated bodies etched onto the Narmer palette, the head of Coyolxauhqui that her brother rolled down Coatepec ("Serpent Mountain"), or of the My Lai massacre where soldiers from US Marine corps beheaded Vietnamese revolutionaries participate in 'beheadings' as a "martial violence" inflicted/ inscribed on the body of the 'other' the 'self' is at war with, often silencing the ignominious mutilated head & body thereafter.
Sometimes they appear as "precarious prelude to martyrdom", exhibiting a certain empyrean (both supernatural and/or sacred- think of Felix and Regula's disembodiment or think of how intimately beheading and seppuku interact and of Taira no Masakad's haunt(/ed)ing head).
And sometimes they are "spectacular entertainment" (reminiscent of Arthurian beheading games) either reifying or subverting – often both (though differentially so) – prevalent power structures (think back to the Medusa beheading Perseus statue, and the episode of Teenage Bounty Hunters that I mentioned on page.
Sometimes they are "not only" anchors of governance for "State" actors (think of Saudi Arabia, Yemen or Qatar) but extend the same(?) privileges(?) to "non-State" actors that are mimic-ing/becoming/ desiring to become states (think of Tehrek-e-Taliban, Kamuina Nsapu, DAESH and others.)
And these are, again, as with all other things DeleuzeGuattarian, non-discrete, non-exclusive classifications, such that any given beheading, is typically, "Everything Everywhere All at Once", only some diagrams are more intensely sensed than others.

Phew. Okay. That was a long breath. So, let's recap:

What the *insert- profanity-of-choice* did "Syriaism" exactly make sensible, for us, about the beheading of Khaled al-Assad?

Khaled al-Assad's beheading is Syrial.

It is surreal because it's processual.
It is surreal because it's embodied.
It is surreal because it is multiple.
It is surreal because it is plural.
It is surreal because it is partially connected.

And it is partially connected to (i) other Syrial beheadings that inhabit a Syrial "small world".

And it is partially connected to (ii) other Syrial ritualistc/ state-sponsored/martial and/or other violent "small worlds".

This partial connection takes the shape of a "refrain" of "Ruination".

Ruination is Syrial.

Ruination is a process.
Ruination is embodied.
Ruination is multiple.
Ruination is plural.
Ruination is partially connected.
Ruination is Syrial.

And this refrain of Ruination (i) finds itself constantly, if not consistently, deeply entangled with the Imperial Formations (or rather with White-Supremacist-Imperialist-Capitalist-Patriarchy's assemblages). And (ii) it has a rhythm of its own.

The Syrial Rhythm of Ruination comes in four notes/acts: Body. Ruin. Space. Ruin. Subjectivity. Ruin. Exhibition. Ruin.

And this Rhythm is what makes this refrain generative of 'imperial' power and 'control'- a martial-'theory/story'// a story of martial injury sensed and made sensible, through a 'translation' of the 'embodied experience' of the 'martial', across three little Syrias that takes seriously the "Syriality" (i.e. the processuality, embodiedness, multiplicity plurality and partial connectivities) **of this violence**// this violent assemblage// these violence assemblages and **the milieus from/within which they emerge.**

And through this chapter then, Syrialism asks for a 'critical re-imagination' of the very "figuration" of a beheading as a deeply Syrial process/assemblage – as a rhizomatic pluriverse in and of itself – within which this chapter has only 'mapped' but a small territory, and Syrialism and I are both curious to see where it's lines of flight might possibly lead.

Syrial Postludes

A(n-'other')

Dedication

This dissertation is for you.
And it sure as hellfire is for me.

I had to go full *insert profanity of choice* Divyakaruni/ Miller[1]
on the lives and worlds of everyone I speak to and of in – and through – this book
(and perhaps also on myself).

This book is for them.
All of them. Any of them.
Including you.
And me.

[1] (Divakaruni, 2009; Miller, 2019)

Figure: 147
(Puri & Saupin. Syrialist Last Supper. Commic Strip. To/For Syrialism. March 13, 2024)

An Epilogue:
Living through an Experiment in Syr-vival /
Living Through a Syr-vival-ist Experiment

Okay, so, we have experimented with/ across stages: 1 and 2,
and somehow found a way to at least try/ experiment at "translating"
'war experience' into 'war knowledge'
so we can take seriously the Syriality of the social-meida-ly mediated lived experience
of the injury in/from the Syrian Revolution, working through and with, the affective
aesthetic politics of it all, while also trying to 'critically reimagine' what 'war', 'martial',
'violence', 'beheadings', 'lived experience', 'syrialism'
and so on can be conceptualized as.
Now, what?
I think, now, we should (re)turn to IR itself,
to its injuries and violences // its stories of/ about injuries and violences
and instead of 'concluding' our experiment,
in staying true to the ethico-onto-epistomologies employed and operationalized here,
'open up' further lines of inquiry...
other/ tangential/ further/ partially-connected 'lines of flight'?

We, as people and as IR scholars, (re)figure the 'international' – and encounter it – through "multiple" (Mol 2002) spatial "figurations" (Haraway 1985, Weber 2016). These figurations underpin the different, and differential, theoretical-infrastructures within the discipline. The political entanglements that are traced, the actors that come to matter, the sites that are explored- it all varies within and between these infrastructures depending on (among other things) *how the international is spatially conceived*. For instance, the spatial imaginary of an '*arena*' is different from that of a '*network*' which is different than that of '*society*', and each of these figurations is generative of its own politics and (especially) its own epistemic violences.

I think, this is the final battleground- the mass grave of our "not only"s lies beneath its ruins. **What would it mean then to Syrially think of IR?** To encounter it through Syrialism rather than encountering Syrialism within it's territory? What would it mean if we critically reimagined both (i) the morphology of the IR's 'space' and (ii) how we map it, i.e., how we can open up a discussion about how to Syrially perform// perform research in // IR? What if we 'designed' our entanglement and engagement with IR differently, well, Syrially?

Think with me for a moment here. What would 'IR' look like if we, for example, borrowed from three of the more Syrial thinkers I can think of and use some of their Iconic Conceptual Figurations as alternatives (not in the 'only' "or" manner, but rather in the "and/or" one) – **three *'surreal' spatial reimaginations* – of the 'International': that of a "mela" (Bulleh Shah), or a "carnival" (Mikhail Bakhtin), and/or an "exquisite corpse" (Marysia Zalewski).** These *critical re-imaginations* would be 'designed' to find a way out 'White-Supremicist-Imperialist-Capitalist-Patriatchy's' control over the substrata of our understandings of the 'martial' and of the 'international' it operates within/ generates. Instead they could be calibrated to focus, with varying degrees, on the 'entanglements', 'bumpiness', 'turbulence', 'durability', 'frictions', and 'intensity' (Lisle 2021) of (postmodern?) socio-political relations, their sensory and affective dimensions, and the "waywardness" of it all (Hartman 2019). **Through them, we could try to take seriously the "politics of ontology for unmaking the colonial universe, cultivating the pluriverse, and crafting a decolonial science" (Blaney & Tickner 2017), or rather, of crafting a post-colonial, feminist figuration of the *International*- one where we can write, think, live in and through an "International Relations as if People Mattered" where, the "International gets personal" enough for "writing to save us" (Masters et. al. 2024).**

Or, we could focus on the Syrvival of it all. As Khaled did in his, "After the Last Supper". That, I think, could be our next/ our final battleground: mapping out an(other) experiment that could tackle questions like, 'What does surviving war *feel* like? What does survival *do* to a person's senses and sensibilities? How does one practically perform actual *resilience* through human bodies, within which socio-political landscapes, through which materialities and technologies, amid which processes, all in the face of actual martial injury? **How do these mangled bodies, themselves, sense and make sense of this survival? How do they give expression to this war-experience:** to living through – and with – mushroom farming in basements for food, tunnel-playgrounds and schools, overturned buses being sniper-resistant tarps, bombed-out craters being neighbourhood swimming pools… to experiencing violence with such brutal intimacy across every mode of being (be it corporeal, sensory, aesthetic, affective, material, semiotic, social, and/or spacio-temporal) and surviving it? **And what can we learn about war, i.e., what kind of war-knowledges can we generate, if we begin our war-stories from within these articulations of embodied experiences of surviving the martial?**

And the list could go on. There are perhaps as many tangents/ loose threads/ lines of flight/ roads not taken in this text as there are thesis-ed arguments themselves.



Figures: 148 & 149
(Barakeh, Khaled. After the Last Supper. Multi-media Art Installation. Design of Necessity. Khaled Barakeh Website. May, 2022)



But that is why these stories – stories of where to go next now that this experiment is wrapped-up-ish – are best left for another time, when they can be given the space, time, energy, and care they deserve. For now, let's focus on a quick recap and review of what this experiment has given us so far.

We began with an Abstract that acted as a roadmap of sorts, informing us – warning us, especially when we take the Disclaimer into account – about the drives, roads and boundaries of this experiment. **It outlined how this manuscript would be an experiment in "empirical philosophy" (Mol, 2010) across two stages.** In/ Across/ Through Stage: 1, we – Omar Imam, Khaled Barakeh, Ayham Jabr, Sulafa Hijazi, Malu Halasa and Zaher Omareen, Syrian artist-activists whose martial experiences and worldings form the (literal?) lifeblood of/for this project, and I – were hoping to show you what truly, embodied-ly, 'living' in/ through violence feels like… to show you how this **martial violence can be sensed and made sense of, arguing, that it could (at least potentially) be translated as being 'Syrial', i.e., that the lived experience of martial violence could (at least potentially) be translated as being processual, embodied, multiple, plural and partially connected (constantly but not consistently) to other violence-worldings.**

In/ Across/ Through Stage: 2 we – you, our artist-activists and I – would test the hypothesis that this Syriality could be translated as an "ethico-onto-epistem-ology" (Barad, 2007) that could (potentially) allow us to generate (from the war-experience mentioned above) a form of war-knowledge that could (at least potentially) capture the (i) complex processuality of "war's incessant becoming" (Bousquet et al., 2020) and (ii) "pull the bodies and experiences of war out of the entombments created by (IR) theories… into the open as crucial elements of war" (Sylvester, 2012) by/to bring into focus the (iii) the actual machinations of the "enactment of injury" – "war's primary task" (Scarry, 1987) – and it's (iv) lived experience, by witnessing, vulnerably (Behar, 2022), the 'on-*life*' (Della Ratta, 2018) of Khaled al-Assad's beheading in Palmyra-Tadmur, together.

And I think, to some degree, we were able to do what we set out to. But, I also think, we failed. A lot, and often.

Through the *Prologue*, the *Dedication* and the *'Translator's Note'* I have tried to outline, delimit and establish the scopes, conditions, drives and desires of this dissertation be it empirically or theoretically. **From/ Within/ Through those chapters we have learnt that the 'on/-'life of martial in the Syrian context forms our universe of cases, the 'lived experience' of 'injury' became our subject/ object of study, the aesthetic lexicon produced when injured bodies themselves self-determined what this**

martial experience felt like was our research site, and this affective community (demarcated by self-determination through Syriality) became our researched population. (T/)Here we also learned that '**Translation' itself was the ethico-onto-methdology for this dissertation,** because **the sole desire of this text was/is "speculation"** (Lisle, 2021), i.e., the text is a description; a performance, or as mentioned in the abstract itself, an anthology of epistolary stories, journal entries, (un)reliable narrations and in/ through that an exercise, or rather an experiment, in critical re-imagination and world building. The arguments presented here, the artist-activists works and lived experiences, our collaborative concept-work, the story itself, as it was made clear in/ through these chapters, none of them were in any way, shape or form an 'explanation' for/ of martial violence, or a 'theory' about 'political violence' in Syria, or even a manual/ framework/ map for conducting Syrial research, or for working with relational ontologies when it comes to violence, and the martial. **Through these chapters, and the '*Theoretical Notes*'/ Syrial Interludes that accompanied them, I think, or at least hope, that we were able to see that this text is 'designed' to be ('only'/ 'simply'/ 'merely') a portal to experiencing martial violence, intimately, as a "dimension of living"** (Nordstrom & Robben, 1995).

Through, *'Encountering Syrialism', 'Living Through Syrialism'* and *'Translating to/ for Syrialism'* – the three chapters that formed the section titled Syrial Surfaces – we mapped our travels from some **on-/ off-line encounters with "Silence"**, and then with an **un-named refrain** of sorts that kept cropping up whenever questions/ answers about the descriptions of the lived experience of the martial did, **to, finally, encountering Syrlaism through the works our artist-activists.** We then tried to delimit, without strictly defining, what this Syrialism means or rather, which doing-s it refers to and what it does, to our socio-political worldings and our understandings of the martial. In this, first, moment of translation, we identified, without violently pinning down, five facets of this descriptor – of Syrialism – and showed how it renders a given instantiation of martial violence processual, embodied, multiple, plural and partially connected to other instantiations of (martial or other) violences. (T/)Here we realized, that **Syrialism (i) was a "working concept"** (Stoler, 2016) **about the texture of the lived experience of war and its violences but "not only", (ii) operated as a "device"-ive methodology** (Aradau & Huysmans, 2014)**, or rather an "ethico-onto-epistem-ology"** (Barad, 2007) **but "not only" and (iii) desired to be a "*machine*"** (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, 2009)**.**

Through, *'Introduction to (a) Beheading', 'Living through (a) Beheading'*, and *'Translating to/for (a) Beheading'* – the three chapters that formed the section titled Syrial Sites – we encountered the on-life of Mr. Khaled al-Asad's beheading to see how this beheading (and often others, littered and listed throughout those pages) could (at least

potentially) be (i) **Syrialy sensed and made sensible** teasing out the granular details of the *'doing'* of injury here, **such that (ii) the martial politics of this beheading could be seen as being Syrial-ly entangled with the martial melee in the Syrian context** and we could attempt to grasp (iii) how it Syrial-ly affects our socio-political worldings, and (iv) **trace hiccupped Syrial "*refrains*"** (Deleuze, 1994) **of the sensibilities, aesthetics, politics and affects mapped there – of this beheading's Syrial rhythms – across both, the "small world"** (Austin, 2017) **of beheadings at large, and through other partially connected** (Strathern, 2005) **violent worlds.**

From/ Within/ Through these chapters we created/ encountered a second moment of translation: one where we could translate grounded Syrial war-knowing and war-knowledge into Syrial war-knowledge about beheadings. (T/)Here we learnt that "critically reimagining" (Mhurchú & Shindo, 2016) a martial violence through Syrialism – i.e., writing about different martial violences by Syrialy reimagining them from within 'injury' – did indeed make room for us to "a different kind of war-story" (Nordstrom, 1997) than the ones that came before it: an affective kind. **In the case of Khaled al-Assad's beheading this took the shape of a war-story about an affective politics of "ruination"** (Stoler, 2008).

And, as I have mentioned before throughout this text, **because this is an experiment, I failed. Repeatedly.**

Think here of the very catalysing desire for this experiment, for example: to make sense of the 'meaning-less-ness' of political violence that was framed to poetically as the making-sense of war's injuring and injuries. I failed, succeeding only in making the martial somehow sensible. Barely. Even there, I tried to make the lived experience of these injuries sensible by working from within the intimacies of self-declaration: of working from within my interlocutors' own works, words, and experiences and mine. And fail, succeeding only in translating fragmented articulations of these embodied experiences, as if a whole or an un-mediated version of these translations would even be possible. And I tried to make this lived experience sensible by designing this text to closely imitate the rhythms and refrains of this Syrial experience of violence, without, at least I am hoping, conceding much ethical ground. And I failed often taking the disorienting/ alienizing affect for the reader too far, losing complete sense of any critical – and crucial – distance, succeeding only in hazily – and hastily – reproducing the overwhelming affect of a reality "twisted" (Hirsch, 2014) through violence's world-"unmaking" (Scarry, 1987) and 'remaking' rhythms. Again, barely. And in trying to make the very moments of *surviving* such injuries sensible, and to make sense of them, from within the survivors' own worldings– my way of honouring them by "staying with the trouble" (Haraway, 2016) of taking them 'seriously' – I failed, I would argue most egregiously, unwittingly but irrefutably, at not leaving any room to truly honour their *resilience*, succeeding

only in letting the concluding pages of this text stand in solidarity with them there by only 'introducing' Syrvivial. Barely.

There are not small/ insignificant/ minute shortcomings. They are failures that speak to the core ethical, ontological and epistemological substrata of this manuscript. So, I have done my best to address them throughout the text, **to "name them and sit with them" (Lopes et al., 2021), to truly wrestle with them** as best I could, and I am hoping that if you – for I am down for the count, needless to say producing this has me at least as exhausted as reading it has you – ever choose/ decide to map an experiment of your own and/or chart alternative pathways that could have led elsewhere from a node or two not explored here, that you will learn from my failings, systematically wrestle with yours, and through it all, as I – at the very least tried to do – **always keep room "for more (/other Syrial) stories" (ibid).**

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