From Revolution to Exile: The Transformations of Syrian Women's Political Subjectivity

By

Manal Marouf

Submitted *to*
Central European University
Department of Gender Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Art in Critical Gender Studies

Supervisors
Adriana Qubaiova
Alina-Sandra Cucu

Vienna, Austria
2025

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Vienna,18 August 2025
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Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the transformation of subjectivity among Syrian women activists who participated in the Syrian revolution in 2011 and their emergence as political actors in complex and intertwined contexts of revolution, war, and exile. Previous studies on Syria have focused on women's political participation and their evolving role in the war from an economic and social perspective. However, these studies have overlooked the life experiences that shaped women's perceptions of themselves as political actors. To address this gap, I conducted a series of interviews with 15 Syrian women who participated in peaceful activities during the 2011 revolution and now live in exile across Europe.

The theoretical framework of the thesis consists of three interrelated parts. The first is Sari Hanafi's concept of reflexive individuality. The second is the role of emotions in shaping identity and social relations as discussed by Sara Ahmed and the role of hope in the works of Ben Anderson. The third is the concept of subjectivity, and more specifically, political subjectivity. Together, these frameworks seek to examine how Syrian women construct their selves through experience, thought, emotion, and action and enter into a negotiated relationship with the patriarchal regime in order to change it from within and achieve partial liberation from it.

This study seeks to highlight the voices and experiences of Syrian women activists, particularly during the 2011 revolution. It argues that despite the failure of the peaceful revolution and its democratic aspirations, its impact on the minds and hearts of those who participated in it cannot be ignored.

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Chapter 1 Introduction:

The 2011 revolution in Syria was a profound turning point for the whole Syrian society, not only politically, but also personally, psychologically, socially, and economically. The events turned society upside down. The most profound and most radical transformations occurred for those who participated in the uprising in general, and for women in particular. Despite the limited political representation of Syrian women in the current Syrian government, Syrian women played an essential role in the events of 2011. However, neither their role nor how they experienced the uprising, and its aftermath have received sufficient attention. This thesis focuses on how women who participated in the revolution became political actors. It aims to answer two central questions: First, how did women's political identities form as a result of their participation in the revolution? Moreover, second, how have these identities evolved in the context of war and exile?

Previous studies that examined the relationship between Syrian women and politics after the revolution addressed the issue from a legal or institutional perspective, such as women's political participation, changes in women's economic and social roles, or their participation in the feminist movement. (Albakkor, 2019), (Al-Dalati, 2021), (Alshami, 2018) (Ahmad, 2014), (Hewajeh, 2016), (Hallaq, S et al. 2022), (Khaddaj, 2022) (Ramadan. O. Sheni, 021), (Shaker, 2018, 2021, 2021, 2020, 2022, 2024), (Yousef, 2022), (Pearlman, 2016), (Hallag, S et al. 2022) (Talal, Hossam, 2019), (Rashm Mu'taq, N. & Abu Hamid, 2023), (Yousef, 2022) (Youssef, M. 2022). These studies have overlooked changes in identity and political subjectivity, i.e., how women became political actors, especially in the context of authoritarianism, revolution, armed conflict, and forced displacement in Syrian context .there are many studies about political subjectivity in the Middle east such as (ElSehamy, 2020), (Atta, 2019), (Bülbül, 2019), (Al-Khalili,

2023). These studies have overlooked changes in identity and political subjectivity, i.e., how women became political actors, especially in the context of authoritarianism, revolution, armed conflict, and forced displacement. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the lived experiences of Syrian women participating in the revolution. It will show how being part of the 2011 uprising, followed by the contexts of war and exile, has brought about a profound transformation in women's identity, social relations, and political subjectivity. In order to highlight the mechanisms of these transformations, I explore the trajectories and subjectivation processes of fifteen women who became politically active around the time of the uprising and have continued to develop a heightened political awareness while in the diaspora. This contributes to a different view of political work in Syria.

1.2 Methodology:

This thesis draws on qualitative research on the experiences of Syrian women activists in the revolution and how their political subjectivity developed as a result of that activism and the context of war and exile. I conducted fifteen in-depth interviews with Syrian women activists who participated in the 2011 Syrian revolution and now live in exile in several European countries. All of these activists participated in the revolution through peaceful civil activities. They were forced to leave the country as a result of the Syrian regime's violence and repression, and their fear of arrest and torture.

Exile here is not a legal term; I use it only to indicate that these women were forced to leave Syria due to persecution or fear of arrest. They were legal refugees when they arrived in Europe. "Exile" only refers to their inability to return to Syria due to fear of arrest by the Syrian regime at the time of the interviews.

Interviews serve as a "confession" (Gailani, 2020), allowing individuals to reveal themselves, which may lead to the narrator rediscovering and reshaping themselves and their identity in their interaction with the interviewer (Gailani, 2020, p. 64). I selected the fifteen interviewees using the snowball method, starting from women I knew from Berlin. Snowball is a qualitative sampling method, which means that researchers usually start with a small number of initial contacts who meet the research criteria, then ask participants to recommend other contacts who meet the research criteria, who in turn recommend other participants. "Sampling usually ends once the target sample size or saturation point is reached" (Parker et al., 3, 2019).

Interviews are the best way to get direct access to issues related to personal experience and identity formation. Interviews are also valuable entry points into aspects of the Syrian revolution that have not been documented until now.

The sample, which was selected using a snowball sampling methodology, included women who participated in the Syrian revolution in 2011. I made every effort to include women from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds in Syria, including Arabic, Kurdish, and many ethnicities such as Sonni, Alawi, and Christian. They were living in Syria in 2011 in different areas such as Damascus, Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, and Aleppo. All the women in the sample were forced to leave Syria for fear of persecution and arrest because of their involvement in the 2011 revolution. All of them were granted asylum in exile, which refers to life outside Syria and is not a legal term. Currently, they reside in several countries outside Syria, such as Turkey, Austria, France, Germany, and Britain.

The age groups of the women interviewed ranged from 27 to 70 years old. All of them are middle-class. Except one woman who has a high school diploma, the remaining women have bachelor's degrees or even master's degrees in fields such as English literature, pharmacy, theater studies, childhood studies, finance, economics, Arabic literature, civil engineering, political science, social work, violence within human rights, law, political science and international relations, fine arts, and architecture.

Most of the women in the sample are still engaged in civic activities related to the Syrian public sphere through various civil society organizations, such as a Program officer at an international development company called "Creative for International Development". Director of "Mazaya" Women's Organization in northwestern Syria. Editor at Al-Furats Magazine (specializing in social research on Syria). Journalists working on videos about the lives of people in areas liberated from the Assad regime at the time of the interviews. Project coordinator at the women's organization "Women Now for Development", targeting women in Lebanon, Turkey, and areas liberated from the Assad regime at the time of the interview. Legal investigator at an organization called "Hoqeeqat" (Lawyers). Women's rights activist/trainer for women's empowerment. Trainer on political and gender issues. Official and founder of the "Families for Freedom organization" (which deals with the affairs of Syrian detainees and forcibly disappeared persons), trainer on

human rights and gender issues. Founder and director of the organization "Guardians of Childhood," which cares about children's protection during wartime.

The interviews were conducted in a variety of locations, some in women's homes and others in public places (cafes).

1.3 Theoretical framework

This thesis is based on three interrelated theoretical axes for understanding the experiences of Syrian women during and after the 2011 Syrian revolution, in contexts of authoritarianism, war, and exile: Sari Hanafi's reflexive individuality; subjectivity theory (Blakeman et al., 2008); and affect theory, particularly the work of Sara Ahmed and Ben Anderson on emotions and hope.

Reflexive individuality and negotiation with structures

Sari Hanafi (2012) uses the concept of reflexive individuality to explain the type of subjectivity that emerged after the Arab revolutions. The individuals who participated in the revolutions did not challenge all the systems and social structures that dominate life in Arab countries but instead entered into a negotiated relationship with the patriarchal and tribal system to change it from within and achieve partial liberation from it. They maintain a pragmatic relationship with the existing regimes, which often reinforce shared identities based on common revolutionary values. Applying this concept to the Syrian context, we can see how women activists have continued their work with women on the ground in a patriarchal society that marginalizes and oppresses them, to change it from within.

Subjectivity as a continuous and reflective process

Blackman, Crombie, Hook, Papadopoulos, and Walker (2008) define *subjectivity* as a continuous, lasting process that is never complete. It grows through human experience. It is not static or complete but grows continuously through cultural and social contexts. Individuals develop a sense of subjectivity by reflecting on their experiences and positions in different contexts, but this reflection gives rise to contradictions and differences.

In the case of Syrian women activists, subjection is generated and developed through reflection on their experiences in multiple contexts, from revolution to exile.

Emotion, feeling, and the role of hope

Affect theory, as formulated by Sara Ahmed (2004) and Ben Anderson (2006), offers a critical view of the emotional dimensions of political participation. Ahmed argues that emotions are not internal but occupy space, starting with the body, and contribute to the formation of collective identities. Anderson sees hope as sustained action even in situations of frustration and despair. The Syrian revolution sparked many emotions, from happiness and great hope at the beginning to despair and frustration as the revolution turned violent. Despite these violent shifts, hope persisted among women activists and was a motivator for further activism and work for change. This theoretical framework allows for the study of subjectivity in different contexts such as authoritarianism, revolution, war, and exile. It highlights the complex interaction between negotiation, power, self-reflection, and affect in maintaining women's political role in the context of revolution and diaspora.

Chapter 2 Literature review:

There are literature reviews discussing the relationship between women and politics. My literature reviews deal with the relationship between women and politics in Syria, touching on this relationship in the broader context of the Middle East through topics such as: Middle East studies on Islamic feminism, Islamic feminism in Syria, Economic and social status for Syrian women after the revolution Syrian feminist movement in Syria after the revolution (in exile), Syrian women's political participation.

However, these literary reviews neglect to discuss the identity and political subjectivity of Syrian women that emerged after the 2011 revolution. That is, how women's identity and political subjectivity are shaped through their revolutionary and post-revolutionary experiences, and how this subjectivity is formed through emotional relationships.

My thesis addresses this gap by tracing the voices of Syrian women activists after the 2011 revolution and in exile to show how their identities and political subjectivities were formed as part of how they become political.

2.1 Middle east studies about Islamic feminism:

During the interviews, I found that the activists I spoke to have a deep interest in Syrian feminism and wondered whether there was actually a Syrian feminist movement.

Margot Badran (2005) contributes to our understanding of secular and Islamic feminisms in the Middle East, discussing their formation and development. In her study, Badran examines two forms of feminism in the Middle East: secular feminism and Islamist feminism. Secular feminism originated in the late nineteenth century and emerged in the context of the formation of national identities in the region based on race, religion, class, and nationality. It is based on discourses associated with democracy and nationalism. Islamic feminism, which emerged in the late twentieth century, relies on interpretations of Islam, especially the Qur'an, to achieve gender equality. The Badran study examines secular and Islamist discourse and reveals how they intersect, overlap and interact in the Middle East.

Maro Youssef (2022) highlights the experiences of conservative women activists in Tunisia's democratic transition. Gender scholars have found that both Islamist and conservative movements have limited women's rights during the transition to democracy. Given that the Assad regime was still in power at the time of the interviews, it was impossible to explore these alliances across ideologies in the Syrian case. However, since then and following Assad's fall at the hands of Islamist factions in Syria, rather than embarking on a transition to democracy, the features of Syria's transformation into an Islamist state have begun to emerge. This has been achieved through the restriction of public freedoms, particularly women's freedoms.

Al-Bakour (2019), who highlights the agency of Muslim women in the diaspora. He criticizes neo-liberal feminism for viewing Muslim women as passive, submissive and in need of protection, failing to see cultural differences and the way in which Muslim women use their own cultural norms to make their own choices and take control of their lives, demonstrating that they are capable of action. It shows their ability to act (Albakkor, 2019).

2.2 Islamic feminism in Syria:

In the Syrian context, at the time of the interviews, I found that the division between secular feminism and Islamic feminism does not function as a category of practice (or as a line of division in practice). My thesis focuses on the question of whether there is a Syrian feminist

movement, and what form this movement takes. I found that in the Syrian context, Arab Syrian women work together regardless of their ideological affiliations.

In another interview conducted by Rehab Mona Shaker (2021) with Bayan Rayhan, a rebel from Eastern Ghouta in Damascus and also a feminist journalist and writer, Shaker asks about the Syrian feminist movement. Rayhan answers that feminists existed in Syria before 2011, but they were oppressed by the regime, like the rest of the Syrian people. The outbreak of the revolution enabled the work of feminists to develop. However, activists fighting for women's empowerment inside Syria (in areas outside the control of the Syrian regime) came under the pressure of the Islamist factions. Rayhan emphasizes that Islamic feminism is a controversial topic among Muslim women in Syria, as some of them consider feminism as alien to Islam. Rayhan stressed, however, that Islamic feminism exists because Islam does not favor men over women; instead of equality between men and women, she emphasized the need for justice. In another interview (Shaker 2022), Samira Mubaid, a writer and researcher who has written about the Syrian revolution, says that the issues of women's liberation and environmental issues are related because both are the result of the domination of the patriarchal system. The Syrian American intellectual Nimat Hafez Al-Barzanji (Shaker 2024), who is interested in Islamic affairs, wonders: "Should we interpret the Quran in a feminist way or in a traditional way?" She concludes that we should interpret the Quran in the spirit of the Quran because the Quran interprets itself by itself! Nahed Badawiya, a Syrian politician who participated in the revolution and the author of the feminist book "Out of Isolation," discusses the inseparability between politics and feminism. She examines the partnership between men and women and considers that critical feminism is a need of the entire humanity (Shaker 2022). Gender hierarchy is the oldest and the strongest one known to humanity. In the Syrian case, as Bashar al- Assad inherited power from his father Hafez al-Assad, the reversal of the republic into a hereditary rule can be considered a height of masculinity.)

2.3 Economic and social status for Syrian women after the revolution:

In the case of Syria there are only a few studies focusing on the gender dimension of the Syrian conflict. For example, Talal, M. Saad and Hussam (2019) focus on the changing roles of Syrian women after the 2011 revolution in areas outside regime control. The study concluded that women bear additional economic burdens as a result of the absence of men, whether through involvement in armed combat, arrest, or death. The absence of men has changed women's

economic roles, with many women becoming breadwinners for their families. However, work did

not change their status in the family or their traditional role in raising children and working inside the home.

Which means that women's in-house responsibilities did not change, and that now they had the added responsibility of becoming breadwinners. This means that they were performing both roles at the same time, working at home and outside the home.

The study concluded that after 2011 and the beginning of the conflict in Syria, women engaged in voluntary civilian work such as education, psychological support, and relief work in their local communities, and that women's participation in public life has increased since 2011 in areas outside the control of the Syrian regime (Talal et al, 2019). In contrast to Talal et al, in my research, I try to examine what women did during the revolution and how these activities helped bring about their political and feminist subjectivity.

2.4 Syrian feminist movement in Syria after the revolution (in exile):

Ramadan and Sheni (2021) use an intersectional approach and a feminist theoretical framework to shed light on the emergence and development of women's movements in Syria after 2011. They argue that class, ethnic, religious, racial, ethnic, racialized, and gendered affiliations influence the diversity of these movements. The study argues that the economic and social contexts in which Syrian women activists live create different oppressive patriarchal systems and diverse ways in which women, and their organizations resist these systems (Ramadan and Sheni, 2021).

The book notes the importance of understanding the gendered social, political and economic context of the pre-revolutionary period in order to understand the conflict itself. The study claims that "gender inequalities that existed prior to the conflict played an important role in shaping women's response to and recovery from violence during the conflict" (Ramadan and Sheni, 2021, 7). Ramadan and Sheni also argue that limited female representation in women's movements does not explain the wide participation of Syrian women in the revolution and attempt to examine the reasons for the obstacles that prevented the maturation and development of Syrian women's movements (Ramadan and Sheni, 2021).

Ramadan and Sheni use an intersectional approach to the study of Syrian feminist movements; we find in the book how women's different identities influenced the formation of these

movements. The authors do not discuss whether the Syrian feminist movement is elitist or not, or

whether it has representation on the ground. This is what Alia Ahmed (2014) tries to cover in her study. Ahmed provides a comparison between women's participation in public life after the Syrian revolution between areas under the control of the Syrian regime and areas outside its control. The study concludes that women's participation in public life increased in both areas despite the obstacles women faced as a result of the war and fighting between the two sides. However, the war and the conflict itself led to a shift in societal concepts, customs and traditions, giving women more space to participate in public life (Ahmed, 2014).

As for the Syrian women's movement and organizations, Ahmed concludes that these organizations remained elitist and did not establish a popular base among Syrian women or an organized Syrian women's movement.

In my thesis, I try to answer the question: Is there a Syrian feminist movement? Based on my findings, my answer is that there is a Syrian feminist movement consisting of two parts: the first part is the organizational Syrian feminist movement. The second part is the unorganized women's movement, or the Syrian women's non-movement, which is carried out by Syrian women through their activities in women's empowerment and rights.

In another study on the impact of violence on women's participation in public life, Sahar Hewajeh (2016) discusses gender-based violence and discrimination, as reflected in Syrian law. The author shows how this violence has escalated in the context of the ongoing Syrian war. He/she reveals how women's political participation in public life increased after the Syrian revolution in 2011, but the transformation of the peaceful movement into armed fighting pushed their presence back and heightened gender-based violence.

Hewajeh emphasizes the importance of changing discriminatory laws against women, and of challenging customs and traditions that limit women's participation in political life, as well as the importance of the international community's support for the liberation and emancipation of Syrian women (Hewajeh, 2016). Deyaa Al-Shami (2018) partially disagrees with this view and argues that the slow development of feminist movements in Syria is due to pressure from the international community rather than the maturity of the conflict and feminist struggle in Syria. Her/his report focuses on the evolution of the participation of Syrian women in the 2011 peaceful movement. It examines the reasons for women's entry into the political arena after 2011, the

emergence of

feminist organizations, as well as their objectives achieved results, and the obstacles faced. Al-Shami discusses the rise of women's participation in oppositional political entities, together with its limits and formalized character, especially in the local councils of the revolution. Al-Shami argues that these women's organizational bodies were formed as a result of international pressure rather than as a result of struggle and the emergence of cultural and societal factors (Al-Shami, 2018).

Previous studies used the intersectional approach to argue that Syrian feminist movements have failed to express the aspirations of Syrian women on the ground. My thesis does enter the debate regarding the existence of a feminist movement in the Syrian case in exile . My focus is also on the actual presence of women in the political events of the 2011 revolution, and how this presence further contributed to the development of their political subjectivity.

In an interview conducted by Yaman al-Dalati (2021) with Rehab Mona Shaker, a Dutch and Syrian feminist and activist, Shaker says that there is a feminist movement that emerged after the revolution and in the circumstances of the war, but she does not know to what extent this movement is effective on the ground due to the circumstances of the war and the growing diaspora, as Syrian feminists can only meet through social media. In another interview conducted by Syrian journalist, writer, and filmmaker Deller Youssef (2022), Shaker says that she has not read a study on the Syrian feminist movement, but through her following of feminist work and her observations, Rehab says that "there was a timid alignment of the Arab feminist movement with the waves of the Western feminist movement, but the shadow of the war has set us back miles" (Youssef, 2022).Shaker argues "that certain features of the Syrian feminist movement overlap with those of the Western feminist movements, but at the same time are distinct from it". In Shaker's view, the feminist movement contains an element of the four waves of the Western feminist movement. There are feminists who demand to change laws and legislation that are unfair to women and at the same time, there are feminists who want to hold men accountable for their privileges and demand full equality between men and women. There are feminists who approach the issue theoretically, there are feminists who demand freedom of the body, there are feminists who demand the freedom of the Islamic feminist movement in the Syrian public sphere as well, and all Syrian feminists use the tools-internet, websites, online Advocacy campaigns - of fourth-wave feminism (Youssef, 2022).

To summarize, there is agreement among some Syrian feminists that in the early twentieth century a Syrian feminist movement was formed. After that, opinions are divided, as some say that this movement continued during the twentieth century and some say that it stopped until the beginning of the revolution, where the opinions agree that with the beginning of the revolution, a feminist movement began and that the revolutionary liberation that occurred was accompanied by women's liberation as well, In most of Syrian areas. It is also assumed that this movement includes elements of the Western generations of feminism, as evidenced by its demands. I believe that this comparison is an attempt by Syrian feminists to understand the Syrian feminist movement by comparing it to the Western feminist movement as evidence of its existence. However, this attempt is unhelpful because of the different contexts, and because it cancels the particularity of the Syrian feminism, a movement growing under an authoritarian regime. This makes organization and public action on rights not possible.

In an interview conducted by Rihab Shaker (2018) with Khawla Dunya, a feminist writer and director of "the Syrian Women's Network" organization in Turkey, Dunya said, in response to the question of the emergence of Syrian feminist organizations after the revolution, that these groups did not emerge after the revolution but as a natural result of many previous attempts that were suppressed and their successes seized from the sixties of the last century until the Syrian revolution in 2011. Dunya adds that it is a feminist movement that is proving its worth and presence strongly and includes many members, and that the circumstances of the revolution and war have brought women out into the public space strongly and are unlikely to stay away from it.

I discuss the history of the feminist movement in Syria, because the political subjectivity of the activists is influenced by these debates and by how they position themselves in this history.

2.5 Syrian women's political participation:

In a study conducted by Nasreen Saleh Abu Hamid and Rashid Mutawakkil (2023), the researchers discuss how Syrian women fought for the right to vote in 1949-1950.

In her book Syrian Women Between the Constitution and Sharia Law (2022), researcher Hazan Khadaj discusses the relationship between the Syrian constitution and women since the end of the Ottoman era and concludes that Syrian constitutions have not been fair to women and have not guaranteed equality between women and men.

In another interview conducted by Shaker (2020) with Lama Qanout, a writer, researcher, and independent politician, Qanout argues that political participation is exclusionary towards women's participation in the revolutionary phase and beyond, that the political forces that emerged after the revolution are patriarchal, and that their alliance with Islamist factions has undermined women's role. Qanout emphasizes the importance of gender analysis in monitoring the structure of male hegemony.

In another study on Syrian women's political participation conducted by Sabah Al-Hallaq (2022), the author explains Syrian women's political participation from the founding of the modern Syrian state to the post-war period, arguing that when the revolution turned into an armed conflict. Weakened and affected women's political participation.

In my research, I do not write about the political participation of Syrian women but rather explain the development of their political subjectivity before, during, and after the revolution.

2.6 Political subjectivity for women in the Middle east:

Revolutions are not only political events; they are also emotional experiences that influence political subjectivity in different ways. In a book/article on women's political activism in Egypt during and after the 2011 uprising, Nermin Allam (2020) highlights the power of hope in mobilizing the Egyptian women and motivating them to continue their work and activism even under the repression following the failure of the revolution.

However, these emotions, especially hope, can turn into something more solid during revolutions. This is what was called "the purity of the revolution" in Egypt, where some activists became guardians of the revolution, (Atta, 2019).

Something similar happened in Syria, where hope for change erupted after the 2011 revolution and motivated women to work and continue their activism despite the conditions of repression inside Syria and exile outside it. This hope and other emotions that emerged with the 2011 revolution enabled women to empower themselves politically. Here, too, revolutionaries became guardians of the revolution's authenticity. Although their commitment to the original values of the revolution— freedom, dignity, justice, and unity of the Syrian people—was admirable, it led to the exclusion and marginalization of many who may have held the same values but did not participate in the revolution or participated only minimally.

Most revolutionary activists were forced to leave the country after the regime intensified its repression of the revolution in Egypt and later in Syria. Mahmoud Al-Sehamy (2020) discusses the experiences of exiled Egyptian political activists in Berlin after the military coup in Egypt in 2013. The thesis examines their subjectivity, emotional struggles, and relationships with their home country during their lives in Berlin.

The author describes the exiled activists in Berlin as "pathological subjects." They suffer from the conditions of exile and homesickness, in addition to their feelings of insecurity and fear of the Egyptian regime. They are torn between their current reality in Berlin and their past lives in Egypt. This is also what happened to Syrian women in exile, whose sense of self and subjectivity began to fragment. However, this allowed new forms of communication and thinking to emerge, especially among Syrian women activists inside and outside Syria. Those who continued their revolutionary activities.

Subjectivity is also created by systems, as explained by Gamze Bülbül (2019), who explores the interaction between the authoritarian hegemony of Turkey's Justice and Development Party and the political subjectivity of its supporters after the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey and the pro-democracy demonstrations that followed. The author argues that the AKP's ability to generate consent and a single narrative among its supporters is crucial to legitimizing repression against its opponents, as it uses the coup attempt to legitimize the elimination of its opponents. He/she explains how subjectivity is a product of personal and life experiences and emotions, but also a product of government discourse and narrative.

In my research, I show that the political subjectivities of Syrian women who participated in the revolution were self-constructed through their emotions and experiences. I examine how Syrian women constructed their political subjectivity in opposition not only to the Assad regime, but also to patriarchal narratives that sought to erase their roles in the revolution.

In her book, waiting for the revolution to end Charlotte al-Khalili (2023), shows that, in the context of Syrian refugees in city of Gaziantep (Turkey), the Syrian Revolution is a continuous process that has lasting impacts on Syrians' identities, social norms, and temporal horizons. She challenges thus the conventional binaries of success and failure. The practices of self-sacrifice, asceticism, and readiness to die for the Revolution gave rise to new forms of personhood and revolutionary subjects.

In my research, I argue that participation in the revolution brought about a transformation at the level of subjectivity and social relations and formed what is called by Syrian people who participated in the revolution the revolutionary community, which includes those who participated in the revolution.

Wendy Pearlman (2016) explores the impact of political fear on Syrians since Assad's rule and during the 2011 uprising. Fear was used during Assad's rule as a tool to control the people. It was a means of silencing dissent and shaping people's behavior through terror and repression. During the 2011 uprising, many Syrians overcame their fear and broke the barrier of silence and fear. They felt empowered to change. With the militarization of the conflict, a new fear has emerged among Syrians. Civilians have adapted to violence and constant danger. In exile, Syrians suffer from a vague fear of uncertainty about the future due to the uncertain fate of their country. Perelman studies the impact of fear on Syrian identity and political subjectivity.

In my research, I aim to study the impact of breaking down the barrier of fear among Syrians who participated in the revolution and how this has positively influenced the formation of identity and subjectivity, relationships, and the revolutionary community.

 As we have seen, literature has treated the relationship between women and politics in Syria from economic and social status for Syrian women after the revolution, Syrian feminist movement in Syria after the revolution (in exile), Syrian women's political participation. perspectives. This thesis goes beyond these lines of investigation to explore how Syrian women experienced the revolution, war, and exile, and how those experiences and emotions shaped their identities and their political and feminist subjectivities. It's the condition of the revolution, war and exile that actually transformed and makes Syrian women possess their political participation in a specific way.

Chapter 3 The trajectory of the Syrian Revolution in 2011

Since the beginning of the revolution in Tunisia in late 2010 and the Egyptian revolution in January 2011, Syrians had been following the events on television. When the two revolutions ended with the resignation of the Tunisian and Egyptian presidents, Syrians felt that political change in Syria was also possible. On March 15, 2011, the first demonstration took place in Damascus in a market called Souk al-Hariqa in response to an attack by a member of the security forces on one of the merchants' sons. The demonstration had a strong, spontaneous character and carried the slogan "The Syrian people will not be humiliated." On the same day, an organized demonstration took place in Damascus opposite the Umayyad Mosque, carrying the slogan "Freedom, freedom." The Syrian regime responded to both demonstrations with arrests and beatings of the protesters.

Two weeks before the demonstration at the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, Syrian security forces arrested schoolchildren who had written anti-regime slogans on the walls of their school, such as "Down with the regime." When parents demanded that the authorities release them, the authorities refused. When they were finally released, they showed signs of torture.

What happened to the children fueled anger among the people of Daraa, and thousands of protesters gathered next to the Umayyad Mosque in Daraa on March 18, 2011. It was the first demonstration that the Syrian intelligence services fired on, resulting in three deaths. This attitude sparked further demonstrations in the city, with protesters demanding accountability for the corrupt, burning pictures of Bashar al- Assad, and smashing a statue of his father. Security and intelligence forces responded by firing on the demonstrators, killing dozens. Each funeral turned into a new demonstration, resulting in more deaths and further protests. Starting on March 25, demonstrations in solidarity with Daraa spread to many Syrian cities, carrying slogans calling for freedom and the overthrow of the Assad regime.

Between late April and late July 2011, most Syrian regions witnessed demonstrations calling for freedom, dignity, and the overthrow of the regime. Hundreds of thousands of protesters took to the streets in each region, and the regime responded by firing on the demonstrators, killing many protesters in each region. Every funeral turned into a new demonstration. Soon, protests became regular; they took place after every Friday prayer and

openly called for the overthrow of the Assad regime and freedom for the Syrian people.

In June, the first revolutionary organization of the revolution was formed under the name "Local Coordination Committees," which issued the first statement of the revolution, which included the demands to abolish the emergency law, release political detainees, and guarantee a democratic political transition in Syria. As a result of the regime's violent crackdown on peaceful protests, June 2011 also saw defections from the regime's army and the formation of the "Free Officers Brigade." On June 7, 2011, the first military clash between regime forces and the Free Officers Brigade took place.

According to Burhan Galeon in his book *Self-destruction* (2019), protests change their peaceful character because of their violent suppression by the regime, including killings, assassinations, and arrests. Soon after the start of the events, young people and women who had been imbued with the principles of peaceful resistance and democracy were imprisoned or had to flee abroad. They belonged to the middle class, which led to the struggle shifting to the countryside and marginalized areas of the cities, which became the cradle of the revolution. According to Ghalyoun, the peaceful approach was futile, so the revolution turned to armed resistance. The revolution turned to arms.

The Free Army was formed by officers who defected from the regime's army and young volunteers. At first, it was self-funded and local, and one of its functions, along with fighting the regime's forces, was to protect demonstrations and peaceful protesters.

However, Galeon emphasized that the emergence of Adnan al-Aroor, a Syrian Salafi sheikh who was living in Riyadh at the time, called for sectarian rhetoric to fight the Alawite regime and the Shiite tide in the region. Thanks to Saudi support, al-Aroor gained popularity among the revolutionary masses, primarily since he provided aid to those affected by the regime's violence. The situation was further exacerbated by the fact that no political opposition group had yet been formed to represent the revolution and its civil and democratic values. At the same time, the emergence of a populist Salafi sheikh was capable of appealing to the emotions of those affected by the regime's violence and providing them with material assistance, making Islamist rhetoric prevalent in the popular movement. During the first months of the revolution, Al-Arour combined the roles of political spokesman, media figure, and defender of the revolution in the eyes of Syrian and Arab public opinion, and he was the most capable of securing its enormous material needs. During the early period of the revolution, he became the most prominent figure in the opposition and the most accepted by broad sectors of it. Although he continued to act as a cleric supporting the people, and the public continued to treat him as such, his scathing criticism

of the political

opposition in all its factions, his mockery of its conferences, and his exposure of its internal divisions on his satellite channels, quickly made him almost the only political leader who addressed the general public, and perhaps some of the middle classes as well, without a veil and in a manner closer to their feelings (Galeon, 2019, p 188).

Worse still, the needs of the Free Army, which, as mentioned, was made up of defecting officers and civilian volunteers, grew, and its funding was initially self-financed by Syrian merchants and civilians, to the extent that Syrian women reportedly sold their Jewelry to help. After that, the needs increased, and local funding was no longer sufficient, so the leaders of the Free Army factions began to seek external funding. Salafi sheikh Adnan al- Aroor managed to collect donations from Gulf countries to support the Free Army, which began to feel loyal to him, especially since the leaders of the Free Army factions followed the same religious ideology as Sheikh al- Aroor. Thus, al-Aroor became the political, religious, and spiritual leader of the Free Army (Galeon, 2019, p. 188).

From this point on, the revolution began to lean toward Islamization and embrace the religious rhetoric broadcast by Al- Aroor on his channel from Riyadh. It is true that the choice to take up arms was not the choice of the rebels but was imposed on them as a result of the brutal violence of the Assad regime. However, the funding carried with it foreign agendas, whether Turkish or Gulf, which were based on an Islamist ideology, whether that of the Muslim Brotherhood or Salafism.

Burhan Galeon (2019) agrees that the lack of organization of the armed forces at the beginning was due to the absence of a political body representing the revolution, which allowed extremists to fill the vacuum and take up arms in light of the failure of the National Council, which the political body that was formed to represent the revolution later on, but failed to lead the movement, organize the armed struggle, and find a national ideology to guide it, which paved the way for foreign agendas accompanied by funding and populist Islamic ideology to take on the role of leading the armed struggle.

The Assad regime also played a role in Islamizing the revolution. According to Joseph Daher in his book The Syrian Revolution: Alone Against the World (2015) argues, that the Assad regime manipulated jihadist movements during the Iraq War by encouraging and facilitating the arrival of mujahideen in Iraq, but then arrested those who returned and imprisoned them. In the

first months of the protests, the regime released these jihadists, many of whom formed jihadist factions in Syria. The regime's bombing and violence were directed at the civil movement and civil activists, while allowing jihadist factions to develop within the country. This action allowed them, according to Dahir, to launch a counter-revolution against the civil revolution that began in 2011. According to Galeon, the Syrian revolution transformed from a peaceful civil movement demanding freedom and democracy into an Islamic revolution calling for an Islamic state in Syria. Arms and funding, especially from the Gulf, and the Islamist agendas that came with them, contributed to the Failure of the revolution. However, the populist Islamist discourse, and later the Salafi discourse, was acceptable to the revolutionary community, except for a few leftist revolutionaries. Islamist factions were seen as a continuation of the revolution, as evidenced by the acceptance of the Al-Nusra Front by the revolutionary leadership despite its links to Al-Qaeda, and by the name given to a protest group, "We Are All Al-Nusra Front."

On December 8, 2024, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, formerly Jabhat al-Nusra, which had been ruling the areas liberated from the Syrian regime in the city of Idlib and its surroundings since 2025, allied with other Islamist factions to surround the Assad regime. Syrians experienced the liberation with joy, especially since the fall of the regime came without the expected battles, bloodshed, or massacres. The eyes of Syrians inside and outside the country were turned to the new authority, which promised only a transitional period of rule in Syria. The Victory Conference was held on January 29, 2025, in a closed session of armed Islamist factions, to announce Ahmed al- Shara, leader of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (formerly al-Jolani), as president of Syria without a comprehensive national conference of Syrian national forces. After that, a constitutional declaration in March 2025 set out a five-year transition period in Syria headed by al-Sharaa, with Islam as the state religion. The president would form a supreme committee to select members of the People's Assembly, with the president choosing one-third of the members. The head of state monopolizes the three powers of the presidency, the executive, and the legislature, and is also the supreme commander of the army and armed forces. This constitutional declaration, issued by a committee chosen by the Shura itself, establishes a dictatorial rule in Syria.

The constitutional declaration was followed by massacres on the Syrian coast against unarmed civilians from the Alawite sect, by forces from factions that claimed to have dissolved into the Syrian army. In July 2027, Syrian forces stormed the city of Suwayda, which is inhabited by the Druze sect, and committed massacres against civilians, women, and children. The city remains besieged to this day by the forces of the de facto authority in Syria.

The fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime was supposed to bring victory for the Syrian revolution. However, with Islamists taking control of Syria, democratic and secular core values have lost momentum, marking the probable failure of the revolution as a progressive moment.

Despite the failure of the peaceful progressive revolution of 2011 and its transformation into an Islamic revolution, a large number of activists continued their peaceful work, whether in the media, relief, empowerment, or education. However, one of the most important achievements of the revolution is the personal and social transformations it brought about for those who participated in it. As one of my interviewees said, "The revolution remains in the minds and hearts of those who participated in it."[1]

Chapter 4 The Syrian Revolution as a Transformative Moment in Identity and Social Relations

The Syrian revolution that took place in 2011 was not only a revolution against an authoritarian political regime; it also brought about profound changes in identity and social relations, especially for women. The revolution was a turning point in terms of self-understanding and social belonging. However, I use the concept of "reflexive individualism" (Hnafi, 2012) in this chapter, which refers to those who participated in the Arab revolutions and, as a result, acquired a self-based on negotiation with existing social systems, such as patriarchal and tribal systems, in pursuit of partial liberation from them. Except the relationship with the existing political system, the overthrow of the regime was a fundamental goal in all Arab revolutions.

Protesters in Syria, including women, broke the silence by taking to the streets in demonstrations and demanding the overthrow of the regime, which led, as women described in interviews, to a "new birth." The change that resulted from this action was a radical transformation at the level of identity, self, and social relations.

Sari Hanafi (2012) proposes the concept of *reflexive individualism*, which refers to "a type of individualism that involves the constant negotiation of an actor with the existing social structure in

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[1] I use the term "revolution" in my thesis because my interlocutors used it to refer to the peaceful uprising in Syria in 2011.

order to realize a (partial) emancipation from it." (Hanafi, 2012, p. 53). It is a type of individual that emerged after the Arab revolutions and does not stand completely against previous social systems. Therefore, it is not directly hostile to patriarchal authority, tribes, communities, and political parties. However, it is linked to them through a relationship of negotiation and integration to change them and liberate oneself from them. Therefore, this new reflexive individualism, which includes autonomy first and foremost, can foster a sense of forming a collective identity that unites those who participated in the revolution around shared values.

The testimonies of women interviewed for this thesis reflect this emergence of a reconfigured self. Indeed, the revolution has brought about genuine changes in identity and self-awareness. As my interviews have revealed, for those who became involved in the Revolution, a change began to occur at the level of identity: the way of understanding oneself, the ability to act to change the political and social reality, and one's understanding of one's position as a woman. All women in my interviews expressed this personal transformation and rediscovery of self, a shift in identity.

Asma, who participated in the Syrian revolution in 2011, took part in demonstrations for a period of time. She also helped smuggle humanitarian aid and medical equipment. She distanced herself from Syrian political life and built a routine life for herself in Vienna. Asma Said, "I always say it was a turning point in my life. It is a turning point in my life, a new birth." Asma described her participation in the Revolution as a new birth that changed her psychologically, politically, and socially. She attributes this to having faced death and coming very close to it, which is a significant part of what brought about the change personally for those who participated in the Revolution. "The Revolution gave value to everything. Coming close to death is a very profound moment. Everything had a different meaning for me." Taking part in a revolution is an indication of a profound shift in feelings, perspective, and principles.

Basma, who participated in peaceful demonstrations in 2011. She was also involved in smuggling medical and food supplies to areas controlled by the regime at the time. She is involved in the operation and finance of the "Syria Campaign", an organization that supports the revolution. At the time of the interviews, she was also active in several Syrian feminist organizations in Berlin, where she currently resides. Basma also experienced a moment of change: "On a personal level, it was the beginning of a completely different person; I discovered in myself that I could be a

revolutionary and became an activist". Basma emphasized the depth of the transformation: the person she was before the Revolution is almost unrecognizable to who she is now.

 What Basma describes as a profound and radical transformation in her personality is not contradictory to the concept of "reflective individualism." Breaking with the existing political system and overcoming the fear of it was present in the Syrian revolution, while breaking with other social systems, such as the patriarchal and tribal systems, was partial and aimed at partial liberation from them.

Jafra, who participated in demonstrations and smuggled medical equipment through regime checkpoints. She also Participated in several peaceful creative activities during the revolution.

 She works for IMPACT (Civil Society Research and Development. It has projects in Syria). and lives in Berlin. Jafra believes that participating in the Revolution changed her personality and impacted on her position in life, the world, and society, as well as her perspective on these aspects. "The Revolution was a personal change on a personal level; another thing is that before the Revolution, not only on the political level but also as a human being, how do you see your role in this life? How do you see your role in this world and the society you are part of?' These reflections show that the Revolution did not just inspire protest, but it also sparked introspection and self-reflexivity.

Beyond individual transformation, the Revolution also created a shared framework that brought people together. After experiencing a reawakening of their ideas and values, participants in the Syrian Revolution had to reconsider their role in the world. It was their involvement in the revolution that caused this. The ideals of the revolution, like emphasizing the unity of the Syrian people ("one, one, one, the Syrian people are one" was the first slogan raised in the revolution), as well as dignity ("the Syrian people will not be humiliated"), and justice, were first also adopted by individuals. They embraced them as *personal* principles when they stood up to oppression and demanded freedom, dignity and justice for all. The Syrian Revolution in 2011-2012, when it was still a peaceful movement, has also redefined social relations, with participants forming a new society —the society of the Revolution —which broke down class and ideological divisions, uniting its members. A sense of belonging to this society has resulted in the development of shared ideals.

4.1 The purity of Revolution

Participation in the 2011 revolution in Syria did not only bring about a transformation at the level of the self and identity but also led to a sharp and radical social division between supporters and opponents of the revolution. The revolution broke down social boundaries and norms, especially towards conservative and religious people, as well as the class and ideological boundaries that had previously existed in society. Consequently, the revolution created new boundaries and formed what we can call a revolutionary society, in which individuals must prove their revolutionary beliefs in order to join. The revolution fostered what is known as "revolutionary purity" (Ata, 2019). This term refers to the guardians of the revolution, those who participated in the revolution, who believe in its values, and see it as their duty to protect these values in the face of the enemies of the revolution. This led to support and solidarity among those who participated in the revolution and the exclusion and rejection of those who did not.

In her thesis, Menna Tullah Atta (2019) posits the concept of "revolutionary purity" The term "purity of the revolution" refers to the preservation of revolutionary values and moral principles such as dignity, freedom, and social justice without compromising with the political regime or agendas that are considered corrupt, opportunistic, or contrary to the values of the revolution.

Ata argues that this concept had a significant impact on the trajectory of the revolution in Egypt, as it contributed to decision-making and alliance-building. The concept of "purity of the revolution" shaped the experiences of activists in their personal, public, and political lives before, during, and after the revolution.

The concept of "purity of the revolution" has two sides. The first side is positive, in that those who participated in the revolution feel responsible for preserving the original values of the revolution, namely standing up against injustice and demanding full rights for the Egyptian people. This means standing up to the enemies of the revolution.

The other negative side is that preserving the purity of the revolution may mean excluding all those who did not participate in the revolution and considering them traitors.

The term "revolutionary purity" also applies to the Syrian Revolution, where new social relations have been formed that include those who participated in the Revolution and exclude those who did

not participate or even anyone who criticizes the revolution from the circle of social relations. This information has led to the formation of a society of Revolution, comprising only those who participated in the Revolution and excluding all those who did not participate.

The Revolution is considered a turning point on the social level. Most of the women interviewed discussed breaking away from previous relationships and forming new relationships with individuals who had participated in the Revolution and feeling part of a revolutionary community. As a supreme collective value, the Revolution gave rise to revolutionary values: rejection of dictatorship and subordination, freedom, political change, and the fight against injustice wherever it existed.

 Jafra recalls how the Revolution introduced her to diverse people and perspectives, challenging her previous limited social circle and fostering a sense of belonging.

> "On a personal level, I did not used to talk much with people. I had my friends, and that was it; those were the only people I would talk to. I was not even interested in going out and meeting new people. However, during the Revolution, I saw people who were very different from the mindset of my community and family. I would see conservative people, for example. I remember young men and women from the Midan (a conservative area in Damascus), like young women wearing the hijab and young men who would not look at me when I was there; they would look at the ground because I am a girl, but everyone was sitting with me and working with me. That was very important to me: getting to know different kinds of people. Once, I sat in a carpentry shop with a carpenter, and we shared a cup of tea. He told us about the Kurds and the Arabs, how we are all brothers, and so on. So, I got to know people whom I would never have been able to know if I had stayed in my previous life. That is the biggest thing that has changed in my life."

What Jafra said reflects how the revolution stimulated the creation of a new subjectivity by working to expand the closed communities that existed in Syria before the revolution, especially since conservative and progressive communities were separated and isolated from each other. Preconceived notions and ideas circulated between these two communities with little contact,

communication, or interaction between them. The revolution broke down preconceived notions

between the two communities and allowed individuals from both communities to get to know and interact with each other. Moreover, these individuals have an impact on their communities, causing them to begin interacting with each other.

This interaction strengthened the sense of humanity and ordinary personhood that transcends the previous constraints of society and family. People came together around more inclusive values. The revolution helped reshape personal identity through openness to others who are different and solidarity with them, away from previous preconceptions, forming a broader social consciousness that is more humane, fraternal, and interconnected.

Layla, who participated in the 2011 demonstrations, smuggled food and medical equipment to Homs. She also contributed to coordinating demonstrations and discussing the revolution and its values among the people. She remains active. She is a Project coordinator at the feminist organization "Women Now for Development" in Berlin. That targeting of Syrian women in Lebanon, Turkey, and areas liberated from the Assad regime at the time of the interview. She also has her standard of whom to socialize with or not after the Revolution.

> "The Revolution made me set standards for my life. Before, I had no standards. I did not know what kind of people I wanted to spend time with or discuss things with. I am a very sociable person, and I talk to everyone. After the Revolution, I developed moral standards for the people I wanted to say hello to. The Revolution made a big difference, a huge difference."

What Layla said also shows how revolution is a transformative force in shaping an individual's moral values. Before the revolution, participation in the revolution was a crucial moment of change that prompted those who took part to adopt high moral standards: We can be friends if you share the same views on the revolution and its values of dignity, justice, and unity of the Syrian people. These standards have also influenced social interaction. The emphasis on "setting standards" confirms a shift towards greater self-awareness and a deeper meaning of social life. The phrase "the revolution made a big difference, a huge difference" confirms the revolution's significant impact on the subjectivity, values, and worldview of those who participated in it. Suaad, who also participated in the Syrian demonstrations in 2011, distributed flyers promoting the values of the revolution and the overthrow of the regime. Also wrote articles about the

revolution and the

revolutionary movement in a magazine under a pseudonym. Together with her comrades in the revolution, she formed a group to transfer information to areas liberated from the regime. Suaad remains active in the revolution at the time of the interviews. She is an editor at Al-Furats Magazine (specializing in social research on Syria), a member of many feminist and political Syrian movements in the diaspora. She is also a famous political figure in the revolution. She lives now in France. Suaad began evaluating her social relationships based on the criteria of the Revolution. She said,

> "We no longer associate with people without knowing their political affiliations. We no longer look forward to a country without seeing its political affiliations. What is the position of political figures in Syria? The Revolution has become a lens through which we view the world. However, for me, that is how it is. I want to evaluate everything based on its position on Syria and the Syrian Revolution, and then I will look at other things."

Suaad 's answer reveals a significant shift in her inner perspective. Her view of the world has become intertwined with her political and revolutionary consciousness and, consequently, her stance on the Syrian revolution as an important historical moment of liberation.

Suaad places political and revolutionary stance at the forefront of her criteria for choosing friends and even acquaintances. This indicates a significant development in political subjectivity, where identity and values, and consequently social relations, are shaped by the political and moral vision of the revolution. The revolutionary community considered the position on the revolution to be more moral than political. This position reshapes the view of the self, relationships, and the world as a whole. The Revolution broke down the prejudices of ordinary people, class barriers, and religious affiliations among the participants. It no longer matters if they are from the same class or have the same ideology, spiritual or secular orientation to life; the Syrians need to be friends because they have participated in the Revolution. Revolutionary community is portrayed as a dynamic space of resilience, resistance, and transformation, adapting to new circumstances while maintaining its core values.

The concept of "revolutionary purity" and social alignment that is premised on actively participating in the Revolution has resulted in the formation of a revolutionary society, which is composed of individuals who actively participated in the Revolution.

The moral standard for accepting individuals and judging them became contingent on their degree of participation in the revolution. During the revolution, the purity of the revolution emerged as a powerful tool for reshaping values, identity, and social relations.

The Syrian revolution has been identified as a significant catalyst for change, impacting various aspects of personality, the nature of social relations, and the global perspective, because some of those who participated in the revolution felt it was their duty to take a stand against injustice on a global level. As my interviews show, among some of those participating in the revolution, integrating the political, the personal, and the public into personal identity has been shown to result in a shift from isolationist or traditional perspectives to a growing awareness of social diversity and moral standards, and consequently, political orientation. The revolution has engendered a novel political subjectivity, marked by a shared moral ethos and an expanded sense of social cohesion predicated on common revolutionary values.

As anticipated, the establishment of novel identities, values, and relationships frequently coincides with the dissolution of prior relationships and values. Participation in the revolution formed new relationships after the dissolution of traditional relationships and values, at least in 2011-2012, when the revolution was still peaceful, including in the family, local community, and political spheres.

4.2 The social cleavage caused by the Revolution

As shown above, the Revolution united the participants regardless of social differences and backgrounds. At the same time, however, the Revolution also functioned as a fault line that separated those who participated from those who did not. As a result, the Revolution disrupted previous relationships at many levels. Many women I interviewed said that the Revolution caused cracks in their family, extended family, local community, workplace, or even among their groups of friends. Bodor participated in the demonstrations that broke out in 2011 and organized a demonstration against the Syrian regime in Sweden, where she lives. She also participated in the production of videos about the lives of people in Idlib (the area liberated from the regime since 2015). Bodor's parents separated due to circumstances related to the revolution. Her mother was an activist who smuggled food in the family car. The father objected that she was putting them all in danger, and eventually, the divorce took place. "My mom and dad got divorced (with a laugh);

the dispute started with the revolution." This divorce affected Bodor, but it did not alter her stance on the Revolution, as she now views the divorce as beneficial for the entire family. "Sure, sure, it had a lot of harmful and adverse effects at the beginning of the separation, but honestly, we are all better today".

The split in Bodor's family and the subsequent divorce of her parents due to her mother's revolutionary activities and her father's protest highlight the deep divisions caused by the revolution within families. This reflects how the effects of the revolution extend beyond the political sphere to intimate personal relationships. Bodor's assertion that things are now better between them as a family indicates that the revolution has fostered individual growth and empowerment for those who participated in it.

There were no splits in Layla's small family. However, some relatives expressed that they did not want to work in politics in a large family because they considered that they had resisted tyranny in the past and did not want to pay another price, such as harassment, arrest, or even death.

The stance of Layla's relatives toward the Revolution surprised her, especially since the whole family had been fighting against the regime since the 1980s. Her relatives' attitude affected her relationship with them, resulting in reduced contact.

"My family, I mean the whole family, was active against the Assad regime in the 1980s, but it was surprising that they were not with the Revolution when it started. It was strange and incomprehensible to me because my mother's family and my father's family were not with the Revolution," said Layla.

Manal: Did these people influence your revolutionary activism?

Layla: They influenced my relationship with them, but more than that, they did not".

Layla's response illustrates how the revolution affected personal and family identities, often challenging loyalties, family relationships, and traditional perceptions. Although Lila's nuclear family remained together and united in its stance on the revolution, the attitudes of her extended family and relatives reveal different dynamics. Despite Lila's relatives' struggle against the Assad regime in the 1980s, their fear of paying a high price prevented them from supporting the revolution. This was, incidentally, the position of many who fought against the regime in the

1980s,

especially the leftist forces among them. These people, who were imprisoned and tortured as a result of their struggle, refrained from joining the revolution because they had experienced the brutality of the regime, and they could not believe in its defeat. Their position reveals how collective trauma shapes identities. In this context, trauma is a social and political phenomenon intended to weaken people's sense of collective identity and hinder social progress. (Matthies-Boon, 2018) Although the attitude of Layla's relatives did not affect her revolutionary activity, it did affect her emotionally and relationally.

Ghada who supplied the demonstrations with flags and banners. She was a member of the URP (the media council in Kaf Renbel, a town in northern Syria). The slogans were creative and famous throughout Syria. She also worked to smuggle medical equipment to field hospitals in 2011. She is the founder and director of "Mazaya" (a Women's Organization in northwestern Syria.) She was still active in empowering women in areas liberated from the regime at the time of the interview and she lives in Germany. Gada was rebellious against the conservative society she lived in before the Revolution. She was financially independent, having opened a women's hair salon and driven a car, which was unacceptable in her community. Despite this, Gada and the team of women she worked with, after the revolution, faced criticism and social condemnation.

> "Before the Revolution, I was an economically active and self-sufficient woman, and I had a car, which was frowned upon in my closed society. I was confronting this society before the Revolution. My name was on everyone's lips before the Revolution. Gada opened a salon, wow! We did not have a women's salon before. When I started working, we did not have that culture."

Gada's community condemned her revolutionary activities, as expected for a woman living in a conservative society. She and the women who started working with her in the Revolution were condemned for their activities. Nevertheless, with time and the support of open-minded men, Gada and the women with her overcame this condemnation, and these activities gradually became part of their community.

> "So, when I did activities with women, they condemned it. Can you imagine people on the street seeing six women going down into a basement? Ten women would come from the other side, and I take them down into the basement, and then

schoolgirls would come and take them down into the basement. Imagine the men standing outside. How do you think they felt? What were the women doing down there? Women gathering frightens society and terrifies it. The men think it became a conspiracy, and these women were easy to control. They became part of a particular ideology that focused on these women. Men think that they had to defend the community. We faced numerous confrontations at the beginning and encountered various challenges after becoming involved in the community. However, they recognized our positive impact on them, so they began sending their women to us, and a large group of men also supported us. These men were enlightened and understood that society would develop if women were liberated and gained their rights. They were aware of women's rights before and after the Revolution, so these people supported us and protected us from others. They are influential.

"Every community has influential people. I can approach someone influential in the community, and they can ease the pressure on me, allowing me to face the whole community at once. I need to have other ways to ease the pressure on me," Gada continued.

Gada utilized these influential and supportive individuals to garner community approval for her work on women's empowerment. They held workshops on women's empowerment and rights, teaching women skills such as hairdressing and computer skills.

Ghada's response highlights her personal development. Despite her rebelliousness towards her society and its traditional relationships before the revolution, she was able to resist and bring about change. After the revolution, Gada began working to empower women in her community. This was considered a challenge to the norms and traditions of her conservative society. Gada resorted to strategies that help her in her work and help women to be present in the public sphere. She did this by building alliances with progressive men who believe in women's rights. Her strategy of involving influential individuals reflects a deep understanding of social power dynamics, flexibility, and rationality. Gada's ability to transform social condemnation into a socially acceptable empowerment initiative demonstrates her growth as a conscious individual who is reshaping her social environment without engaging in battles.

Sometimes, divisions occur in the political community. As happened with Guevara, a filmmaker who participated in demonstrations, smuggled medical and relief equipment, and helped train photographers in several cities in Syria. She participated in many peaceful creative activities and remains active in several women's organizations. She contributed to the production of a film about activists in the Syrian revolution in 2011. She lives in Berlin. Guevara's revolutionary activities did not cause a real split in her family. However, her small size community, especially her comrades in the Syrian Communist Party, were loyal to the regime and adopted the narrative that the Revolution was a Western conspiracy and that the demonstrations were nothing more than revolutionary adolescence.

> "My community, which is related to the Communist Party, clashed as well. They were conspiracy theorists, and above all, it meant that we (the party) understand what is going on, and you do not. My father used to call it political adolescence, so I knew it was coming from the party. It could come from Qadri Jamil (Secretary General of the Syrian Communist Party) being angry with me and saying, "I raised you to breathe politics when you were three years old, and now you are a political teenager with those who go to protests!" (Laughter)."

Guevara's response highlights the extent of the divisions that have emerged in Syrian society as a result of the revolution. Guevara's community split within the Syrian Communist Party over the regime's narrative that the revolution was merely a foreign conspiracy and that the demonstrations were political immaturity, claiming that real politics only took place within the party branches and nowhere else. Qadri Jamil and Guevara's father's comment on her revolutionary activity as political adolescence reflects a paternalistic attitude and belittles the scale of the revolution that was taking place in the streets and outside the party offices. It also reflects the disconnect between these parties and the people. In general, Guevara's response shows that revolution not only unifies but also creates divisions and splits in societies.

In the case of friends and loved ones, as was the case with Suaad. There were no splits in Suaad's family due to her revolutionary activity, and the family was with the Revolution. However, Suaad had a boyfriend while she was studying at the university, and this young man favored the regime.

As a result, Suaad ended her relationship with him due to their political alignment, which was painful for her at the time.

> "I was in love with a young man I met when I was in the tenth grade. When the Revolution started, he became a big supporter of the regime. He would attend every demonstration at the university, and they would send the supporters on a march; he would stand with the supporters, while I would stand with the opponents. I felt that something was not right. For an 18-year-old girl and a young man I have known for three years, it was quite heavy for me, but it seemed silly in the face of all the things we went through, which means I did not want to do this, but it does not mean I am not hurt by what happened."

Suaad's story indicates the alignments created by the Revolution, where one's position on the Revolution has become the criterion for choosing one's friends and relationships, creating polarization. Although Suaad's family remained united in its stance on the revolution, its alignment with the revolution caused a rift in her emotional and intimate life.

Suaad's acknowledgement of the pain confirms the emotional impact of this division. The impact of the revolution goes beyond politics and ideology to the social relationships that were torn apart as a result of the revolution. The way people choose their friends and loved ones is now based on their position on the revolution, creating new boundaries and divisions that are sometimes accompanied by pain. Suaad's story shows that the revolution, which led to divisions even in intimate relationships, has also shaped new identities and relationships.

For Suaad and those who participated in the revolution, their stance on the revolution is not ideological or even political, but primarily moral. You are either with revolutionary values such as justice, freedom and dignity, or you are with tyranny and dictatorship; there is no middle ground in this equation.

In one case, the split was in work relations to varying degrees, as was the case with Sabah participating in demonstrations and smuggled medical and relief supplies to besieged areas in 2011. She also worked with the Syrian Women's League (the oldest women's organization in Syria, founded in 1948) and was one of the founders of the Citizens' Association. She contributed

to training and subsequent training activities in the field of gender and citizenship. At the time of

the interviews, she was training women in areas liberated from the regime on concepts of gender and citizenship, also a women's rights activist since the 1980s. The Revolution did not separate Sabah's family and small community because she is a well-known and established opposition figure. However, the Syrian Women's League, which she claims is the oldest Syrian feminist organization founded in 1948, and of which Sabah is one of the founders, split. Sabah refers to the split in the League, indicating that she considers it her community.

"We in the Syrian Women's League have branches in the governorates, and they called the Aleppo branch; most of us were lawyers, judges, doctors and an activist branch, and they said: We were divided, one group went with the Assad regime, one group went with the revolution, and we do not know what to do." This example shows the deep divisions within Syrian society, even among women who share a common goal of advancing women's rights.

"In 2012, my colleague Nawal Yaziji and I travelled to Aleppo by plane to see the situation. The League was divided into two groups: one that supported Assad, having seen how the Brotherhood ruled Egypt and Tunisia, and another that split with the Revolution. We spent four days in daily meetings with everyone and concluded that what unites us is women's rights and that this is the regime we have been fighting against from 1948 to 2012."

The Syrian Women's League, founded in 1948 and comprising educated female activists, has almost split into two camps, one supporting the revolution and the other opposing it. Shared aspirations and goals are undermined by fears generated by the revolution, reflecting the depth of polarization that has occurred within Syrian society as a whole.

The above examples confirm that the revolution disrupts old social harmony, and this does not happen without pain or a sense of division. However, it also provides opportunities for new perspectives, as revolution is a powerful force for change that is divisive and ultimately leads to profound and irreversible changes in the social fabric at multiple levels.

All of these divisions have occurred either because of allegiance to the Revolution or support for the Assad regime or because the family is afraid that their daughter will be arrested in Assad's prisons and raped, which is seen as a social stigma against the family.

The women I interviewed were involved in revolutionary activities in various ways, ranging from public to secret. The above example reflects the level of risk involved in their actions, as well as

the concerns of their families. Some of them, such as Sabah and Lina, who participated in the 2011 demonstrations in Damascus and Homs, also established a network of intellectuals and politicians called Al-Muwatinah Association (Citizenship). One of the founders of the Syrian feminist political movement (a feminist organization that emerged after 2011), Lina, works as a trainer on gender and citizenship issues in areas liberated from the regime at the time of the interviews. She lives in Berlin. Fadwa participated in demonstrations in Damascus and raised political awareness among revolutionary activists. She also founded Families for Freedom, an organization that works on issues related to detainees, forcibly disappeared persons, and their families. Because Sabah, Lina and Fadwa, are well-known politicians in the Syrian opposition and were involved in political work and resistance to the Assad regime before the Revolution, participated openly; Souad, when her family knew, did not mind; Layla was participating with her family and participated openly in her area, but she kept her activity secret from her friends who were not engaged in the Revolution because she is afraid of arrest. While others, such as Jafra, Bodor, Asma, Lama, Salma, and Guevara, hid their participation from their family or local community due to concerns about personal or family safety, they faced family reactions and fears. Many women faced rejection or concern from their families regarding their participation, mainly stemming from fears for their safety. Particularly, the fear of harassment and rape in regime detention facilities and social stigmatization in the community after arrest. The experiences of family members, such as imprisonment or violence, exacerbated these fears.

Chapter 5: Political Subjectivity:

5.1 Political subjectivity before the revolution

This section explores how political Subjectivity developed under the Assad regime's authoritarian rule. Political Subjectivity develops under severe restrictions and ranges between adaptation and resistance in most cases. There is a gap between the Ba'ath regime's declared ideology, such as the values of unity, freedom, and socialism, and the reality of authoritarianism, restrictions on public freedoms, and corruption, which the Assad regime has used as tools to consolidate its rule.

Against this background, political Subjectivity emerges in various forms, ranging from submission and adaptation to resistance and participation in underground political activity. This emergence of political Subjectivity reveals that political Subjectivity is dynamic and capable of transformation in the context of authoritarian political environments. This transformation later led to the outbreak of the 2011 revolution in Syria.

The definition of political Subjectivity, according to Kristine Krause and Katharina Schramm (2011), is "how a single person or a group of actors is brought into a position to stake claims, to have a voice, and to be recognizable by authorities. At the same time, the term points to the political and power-ridden dimension within politics of identity and belonging, encompassing the imaginary as well as the judicial-political dimension of claims to belonging and citizenship." (Krause and Schramm, 2011, p. 115) Political subjectivity also has various aspects: action, process, emotions, or feelings.

In their article "Creating Subjectivity," Blackman, Cromby, Hook, Papadopoulos, and Walkerdine (2008) argue that Subjectivity is historically and culturally constructed. The nature of the subject is a continuous process, not a fixed and stable one. It is a state of ongoing formation and is not yet complete. Instead, it is a continuous state of change and constant development. The subject is formed as a result of the actions of multiple social and cultural forces, so there is no fixed center or essence of the self or subject. This process of subject formation means that the sense of stability and permanence is an illusion and not inherent. Subjectivity is an important tool in analyzing power relations, as it can challenge existing power dynamics or reinforce them. (Blackman et al., 2008, p. 14). The authors emphasized that "the subject could 'hold together' without seeing Subjectivity as simply the total of discourses from birth" (Blackman et al, 2008, p. 17).

The way we perceive ourselves is shaped by how we think and analyze our position in cultural, social, or personal contexts. We become who we are through the process of thinking about our place, others, and the world. This process of reflection shapes our perspectives and our unique experiences. It is this process (thinking and reflection) that gives us a sense of self, but it also reveals the differences and contradictions within ourselves. "Subjectivities that are created by one's reflexivity of one's positionality. As Luhmann said: "The basic paradox of reflection is that it wants unity and generates difference" (Blackman et al., 2008, p. 14).

Before analyzing how political Subjectivity plays out in this context, it is important to provide some basic facts about the political situation in Syria under the past regime's governance. On March 8, 1963, the Ba'ath Party came to power through a military coup carried out by the armed wing of the party, which was a group of officers from rural minority backgrounds. They imposed emergency law throughout the country, which lasted for the next 61 years, and the Ba'ath Party became the ruling party of the state and society. In 1970, Hafez al-Assad staged a coup within the Ba'ath Party itself and took power, establishing a dictatorial regime that lasted till the fall of the Assad regime in 2024. He formed the so-called National Progressive Front, whose aim was to bring political parties under the umbrella of Ba'ath Party rule in order to marginalize them, eliminate their political role, and end political conflict in Syria. Membership in the Ba'ath Party became a prerequisite for studying, obtaining employment, or advancing in any aspect of political life (Agami, 2013, p. 51; Shahood, 2017, p. 15). The struggle against the totalitarian Ba'athist regime and the dictatorship that was beginning to take shape became a clandestine struggle, as was the case with the Communist Labor Party, which was banned in Syria and whose members were all persecuted and arrested.

Seventy-year-old Fadwa tells us her story and describes how her political activity developed from the age of fourteen until her arrest for participating in the Communist Labor Party, which was banned in Syria.

"Before Hafez al-Assad came to power, I was a member of the Ba'ath Party—when it was a truly respectable party." At that time, the Ba'ath Party did not yet have complete control over all aspects of the state, despite having declared a state of emergency. There were other political parties in Syria. Fadwa saw it as a progressive party demanding rights for workers and peasants, so she joined it, believing in its socialist message.

Hafez al-Assad's 1970 coup against the Ba'ath regime, which he called a "corrective movement" to restore the party's legitimacy, stripped other parties of their legitimacy and imposed his version as the only official truth in the country. Fadwa protested against Hafez al-Assad's coup with her schoolmates, considering it a military coup and not a corrective movement: "We protested... because it was a coup, not a movement." This protest reflects the conflict that took place at the time, as many rejected the coup and Hafez al-Assad's manipulation of the truth about what

happened. Subjectivity is not static and passive, shaped by the authorities and power relations as they see fit, but can be a site of conflict. In the case of Fadwa, the conflict was between her beliefs in justice and freedom and the existence of a totalitarian regime that claimed to embrace these values in order to consolidate its power.

Fadwa's political experience embodies political Subjectivity as defined by Krauss and Sharam (2011). It is the process by which individuals demand political rights and gain a political voice. To gain recognition in the public sphere, her early membership in the Ba'ath Party reflects her alignment with her understanding of social justice. Fadwa's change of position toward the Ba'ath Party with the rise of Hafez al-Assad to power illustrates the dynamic and incomplete nature of political identity, as described by Blackman (2008). Fadwa exercised her political Subjectivity as both a process and a practice, combining action, thought, and emotion. Her willingness to challenge the Assad regime by joining a party that was banned in Syria reveals how Subjectivity can persist and transform under authoritarian regimes.

Fadwa continued her story: "After that, I left the Ba'ath Party. I stopped my activities within the party and began to pursue my intellectual interests... There were parties involved in political work, but secretly. Then I began to realize which parties I could join." Fadwa's withdrawal from the party after it turned into a dictatorship and her decision to join secret parties that were fighting against the Ba'ath Party reflect the Ba'ath Party's control over political life in Syria at the time and its imposition of its ideology as the only truth in the country. Fadwa's withdrawal shows how subjectivity continued to grow and develop even under authoritarian regimes through experience and reflection.

Fadwa continued her story, which reflects the development of political identities in Syria during the Ba'ath Party's authoritarian rule, saying: "It was well known that there were no public political activities in Syria except for the Ba'ath Party and the Front. We were not part of that movement, so the work was very secret."

"When we needed to distribute a newspaper or other party materials, we did so discreetly... During that period, there was a sense of patriotism and love for the country. We saw wrongdoing, corruption, and bribery.

We were constantly fighting against these corrupt people who were supported by the Ba'ath authorities." The imposition of a repressive authoritarian regime drove political work underground. This underground work was a place for political self-development and resistance rather than the adaptation that occurred as a result of the near freeze of political life in Syria under Ba'ath rule.

Fadwa's role was to coordinate with young people from other parties, even though these parties had joined the Progressive Front but were still trying to resist the Ba'ath Party's control and narrative, which was beginning to take root in the country. Fadwa continued to communicate with these young people and tried to work with them, reflecting her political development as she became more assertive and effective in her search for collective action to resist the Ba'ath Party's authority and monopoly on truth. For Fadwa, Subjectivity was shaped by the constraints of Ba'athist repression and the openness created by communication between parties. Her truths and identities were not fixed. However, they were formed in a constant negotiation between resisting the regime's monopoly on truth and finding ways to work collectively within that same regime. For Fadwa, her Subjectivity was shaped by her belief that the Assad regime commits oppression to consolidate its rule and then opens up to parties and young people who embrace the same principles of justice and freedom. Her political Subjectivity was formed through ongoing negotiations between resistance to the Assad regime and finding ways to work collectively under the repressive conditions in the country. Fadwa's growing awareness and the complexity of her role reflect that Subjectivity is an evolving process that never stops growing, always negotiating changing truths and identities.

Fadwa's political development may reflect the political life in Syria after the Ba'ath Party came to power. Fadwa's belief in the Ba'ath Party and her affiliation with it reflect the minority background of the party, as Fadwa was an Alawite girl from the countryside of Latakia. She left the Ba'ath Party after Hafez al-Assad's coup and the clarification of his intentions to establish a dictatorship. This situation reflects how the Ba'ath Party, led by Hafez al-Assad attempted to establish itself as the sole legitimate political organization and the sole holder of the truth, which

was achieved by

promoting the idea that membership in the Ba'ath Party equaled good citizenship. The party linked membership to social advancement, making membership a basic requirement for education, employment, and official political participation. However, punishing opponents of the Ba'ath Party, paradoxically, produced a more active resistance.

A similar kind of development can be observed in Manar's case. Manar was born in the 1980s. She was twelve years old in the 1990s, when the Ba'ath Party had completely taken control of public and political life in Syria. Linking it to daily life, making membership a requirement, and instilling its values in everyday and public life, primarily through the education system. Manar recalls that when she was 12 years old, they distributed Ba'ath Party membership forms at her school. "I remember they gave us Baath Party membership cards in seventh grade, even though we did not understand anything at the time..."

The Ba'ath Party's targeting of children demonstrates its attempt to shape individuals according to its official ideology. Joining the Ba'ath Party was not a matter of conviction but rather a means of mobilizing, subjugating, and reshaping the masses by its alleged values of unity, freedom, socialism, and the ideology of the Ba'ath Party until they became part of the social fabric on a theoretical level. In reality, spreading corruption was the policy of the Ba'ath Party and the Assad regime in consolidating their power.

Manar's father told her that joining the Ba'ath Party would bring her benefits such as better grades in school, and she complied. However, with maturity, experience, and reflection, Manar was able to develop a resistance to the official regime. Manar said, "Later, I became more aware, read more, and gained a deeper understanding." She finally decided to withdraw from the Ba'ath Party. Through reflection, Manar discovered that there was no point in remaining in the party to achieve political and social change, and that it was merely a means of domesticating young people, stripping them of their ability to think freely and teaching them to submit to the party and its ideas.

When Manar decided to withdraw, she discovered that there was no protocol for withdrawing from the Ba'ath Party. "There are no formal procedures for withdrawal, only for joining." The absence of a protocol for withdrawal reflects the fact that they did not want the population to consider it as an option. Moreover, no one dares to think differently. The regime has become

something that must be managed and cannot be abandoned. You are forced to join in order to get an education, but you

cannot withdraw. Manar decided to announce her withdrawal to the officials in public, and they were all surprised. "They did not understand what that meant. They were all stunned!" This reveals the rigidity of the regime and its inability to imagine any opposition or resistance to it. Manar's transition from passive adaptation, acceptance, and submission to rejection and resistance through experience and reflection shows how systems produce their truth, which shapes and limits the self but cannot eliminate it or stop its development, even under totalitarian regimes.

The Ba'ath regime linked education and membership, forcing those who did not want to belong to any party to join the Ba'ath Party and pay its membership fees in order to obtain a student ID card during their university studies. Bodor also explains, "I paid the fees because they would not give me a student ID card." Linking the Ba'ath Party to obtaining a student card in the case of Bodor shows that the Party forced people to get membership if they wanted to do things in life.

Basma emphasized the sense of helplessness that was widespread in Syria during the Assad regime, saying, "Before the revolution, I did not feel anything, I had no sense of belonging." Basma's answer reflects the feelings that prevailed during the Assad regime. A sense of hopelessness and worthlessness dominated people's lives. The sense of belonging was limited, and there was minimal political identification. Basma continued, "Like many others, I was convinced that Assad would remain in power forever. I felt that we were incapable of change." These feelings of helplessness and disaffiliation affected people's sense of belonging to their country. Basma said, "I had no role in political or even social life. I felt excluded." This reflects Basma's feeling that she had no voice and that she was unrecognizable as a political actor. These feelings of despair, frustration, helplessness, and the belief that change was impossible shaped a subjectivity based on silence and exclusion.

 Fadwa's political journey and the situation of Manar and Bodor reflect how Subjectivity is a dynamic process that evolves and changes with experience and the passage of time. The three characters' political subjectivities evolved as they realized, through reflection and experience, that political participation in a dictatorial regime was futile and would not bring about real change, as Luhmann expressed: "Basic paradox reflection: that it wants unity and generates difference" (Blackman, 2008, p. 14). With the process of thinking, a person's Subjectivity becomes more complex as they become aware of the contradictions between public policy and personal beliefs.

In general, feelings of frustration and despair prevailed among all people before the 2011 revolution. Souad describes how, despite her young age (she was not yet 17), she felt and understood that real change in the country was unlikely. "I knew that our country was not doing well. For example, I sometimes participated in volunteer activities with the Red Crescent, although not officially, as I was under 18. I also participated in campaigns with an association for education and literacy. I had a strong feeling that the country was not doing well, as there was a lot of poverty, ignorance and problems. I did not feel that this was the place I wanted to grow up in, but I was not politically aware, and to be honest, I had no desire to attend a party or anything like that. Through her volunteer work with the Red Crescent, Souad was able to assess the extent of the social problems in the country. However, the country's political stalemate did not encourage Souad to become politically involved in addressing these social problems. Her feelings of frustration and helplessness, along with her belief that "nothing works in this country," were deep and overwhelming. The early realization that the country was suffering from numerous and deep-rooted problems was crucial to the formation of her early political Subjectivity, which she shared with many other Syrians, a subjectivity built around helplessness, frustration, and despair. Political participation in a system where "nothing works" seemed futile and unlikely to lead to real change. This situation explains how the Assad regime's determination to suppress political action was reflected in the political consciousness of individuals who became disillusioned, frustrated, and powerless, not only in the Suaad case but throughout the country.

Sabah and Guevara, who were members of the Syrian Communist Party (a party of the Progressive Front, as mentioned earlier), eventually realized the ineffectiveness of working within the Syrian Communist Party and left it. Guevara described the moment of political awakening when she decided to leave the party: "My whole family was in the Syrian Communist Party, and I was always involved until 2007, when I stopped. Because they did not answer any of my questions, I tried to ask them. In 2007, I had a moment of awakening about what political work meant and what changing the existing way of life entailed. I began to see more and more that it was just numbing." I realized that the joining of the Communist Party and the parties of the Popular Front, in general, was nothing but deception and a narcotic and that working with them would not lead to the fundamental change she believed in and longed for. Political work is suppressed in a dictatorial country. It is, therefore, futile, except in the case of secret work and struggle. This secret work was carried out both by Fadwa and by Lina and resulted in their arrest

for belonging to the Communist

Labour Party. The moment of separation from the Syrian Communist Party for both Guevara and Sabah, which Guevara described as a "moment of awakening," illustrates how Subjectivity is a vital and evolving process that continued to be shaped and reshaped as a result of its relationship with discourses and experiences, even those that are unsuccessful such as their experiences with the Syrian communist party. These attempts to find answers push the subjective to evolve and embark on new experiences. The experiences of my interviewees reflect the political climate in Syria prior to the 2011 revolution under the Ba'athist regime. They describe how their political awareness developed during their lives under authoritarian rule. They also show how personal experiences and observations can lead to political awakening and a desire for change; likewise, how does Subjectivity challenge the system of truth and its discourse in its constant pursuit of development, where citizens often begin as obedient subjects of the system, but as a result of thought and experience, their Subjectivity develops to resist these regimes, especially dictatorships, in order to produce their discourses and their truth, which manifested itself in their participation in the 2011 revolution. Through the experiences of my interviewees, such as Fadwa, Manar, Bodoor, and others, this section explains that political Subjectivity in Syria before the 2011 revolution was constrained and defined by the truth produced by the Ba'ath Party after it seized power. The party's control over daily discourse and life developments led some to distance themselves while pushing others to participate in the underground resistance, where political work in the country also took place. This illustrates that Subjectivity is an evolving and ongoing process, not a complete or static entity. Through reflection and experience, many individuals developed a sense of self despite the oppressive conditions. They developed critical thinking and forms of awareness. Sometimes, their resistance even went beyond passive acceptance of the facts imposed by the Ba'ath Party. Consequently, the occasional clash with the authorities and the constant contradiction between the reality of life and the truth that the authorities tried to impose led to the development of political Subjectivity among many, which later resulted in the outbreak of the 2011 revolution in Syria.

5.2 Political Subjectivity during the revolution

We have seen how the Ba'ath regime established itself before the 2011 revolution and controlled political life in Syria through repression and intimidation. The revolution exposed many of the methods of repression and silencing of voices that people had previously accepted. It also

revealed the possibility of new selves and new possibilities for their development, challenging

previous boundaries and values. As we have seen, Subjectivity is not static, but rather an evolving and renewing process shaped by encounters with social structures, discourses, and the very process of thinking. This is what the Syrian revolution has done: it has sparked the emergence of new selves and new forms of political existence. Being exposed to different contexts, from historical ruptures, violence, and being in a diaspora, are very powerful engines for subjectivation that is generated and developed through reflection on their experiences in multiple contexts, from authoritarianism to revolution, war, and exile.

For women who resisted the regime and were arrested, such as Fadwa and Lina, or those who were trying to find a way to become politically involved, such as Guevara and Salma, the revolution was a moment of fulfilment of a long-awaited dream. It was a shift from self-reflection, as in the case of Guevara, and underground work, as in the case of Fadwa and Lina, to open resistance and hope for political change in Syria. Fadwa and Lina's response shows how the revolution represents the realization of a long-standing ambition for political change rooted in a history of opposition to the Assad regime. Fadwa said, "It was a dream from the time they took over Assad's family; it was our dream that change would happen, and we envisioned what we were working on, meaning the party (the Labor League) in the 1980s when the slogan to topple the regime was to topple the regime that ruined the house of those who succeeded us." Guevara, who has been immersed in politics from a young age, was not surprised by the revolution as other people were, because she had been waiting for the moment of real change. Guevara said, "A lot. It was a moment of hope. I mean, if I go back to the feeling of 2011, I am surprised that the world immediately asked what this is. I did not ask, so that is where my surprise comes from! Why isn't this the moment when something can change? I am a girl who has been talking about change since the day I was born, so for me, it was the moment. "Lina expresses ", I had a feeling that finally my life would not be wasted; everything I had fought for was now in front of my eyes. My husband died in 2008; I even remember writing on Facebook at the time, 'Why did you die?" You did not see the moment.'

Salma's refusal to join the Ba'athist regime, despite her leadership ambitions, shows her resistance to the old regime and her desire for freedom and self-determination. She said: "I had a dream to become a leader in the teachers' union, but I did not want to join the Ba'ath Party. Mona's desire to become the head of the teachers' union without joining the Ba'ath Party highlights her rejection

of the regime's control and her desire to defend the rights of teachers without fear of revenge."

For

the four women, the revolution was a long-awaited moment, and a dream come true. It was the realization of political dreams they had long thought about and worked for. They had become deeply political beings, which gave them a sense of purpose and belonging.

For some women, the revolution was a moment of political awakening and the beginning of their political identity and Subjectivity. Asma said, "I always say it is a turning point in my life, a new birth. I consider my personality before the Syrian revolution to be one thing and after it to be another, on all psychological, political, and social levels." Women moved from passivity to active participation in the political process and self-assertion. They participated in protests, activism, and other forms of political work.

It also contributed to understanding the nature of oppression, tyranny and colonialism, which led to the deepening of women's political concepts and subjectivities. And a deep understanding of the nature of the Assad regime. "For me, I was raised from scratch, not only on the political level but also, of course, on the political level, in terms of understanding what external colonization is, what internal authoritarianism is, what it means that the regime is a dictatorship and why it is a dictatorship, and all this talk," said Lama, who explicitly said that the revolution "raised" her politically, leading to a new understanding of complex political concepts. She began to analyse the political system and its direct impact on her life.

Basma also describes the change in her identity, from someone who was not involved in public life or politics, to someone who now sees herself as a political activist and revolutionary. "It was the beginning of a whole new person. I discovered that I was a revolutionary and became an activist, so everything started with the revolution." Basma highlights the transformative power of the revolution in turning her into a political activist and the beginning of her political Subjectivity.

Some women describe the revolution as a "golden opportunity" to challenge, for the first time, the intertwined constraints of the state and patriarchal control over public discourse and women's voices." Sabah said: "I was saying and am still saying that this is a golden opportunity for women in Syria because the revolution is bringing about change, so we were hoping that this change would include women." Women became fully aware of the restrictions on freedoms and rights under the Assad regime and developed a desire to challenge this oppression.

As Blackman suggests, thought and reflection not only breed unity, but also differentiation and contradiction. Women's narratives reveal deep personal reflections. Many women have broken the silence and found their political voice. The revolution gave women the opportunity to express their political views and reject injustice, often for the first time. "It was like there was a silencer, and then we had a voice, and then we had a soul," said Manar, expressing the feeling of liberation and empowerment that came with finding a political voice after years of living in a kingdom of silence.

Women began to link their personal experiences of oppression and injustice to broader political issues, realizing that their struggle was part of a larger power structure. Gada explains:

"The Syrian revolution, Manal, means to me that the Syrian revolution is the lens through which we see all the flaws in our society at once, flaws that society was blind to, and I am referring here to half of the population, women, and women in general. This lens is the lens through which we see the flaws of this society. It is the need to break the restrictions imposed on us, not the restrictions of a tyrannical regime, but the restrictions of a patriarchal system that has produced a series of restrictions on women, restrictions that have reached the roots of social education in our homes and our genes; I felt that they had become part of our genes, restrictions."

The revolution expanded women's opportunities to challenge traditional gender norms and expectations, while demanding women's right to participate in political activities. Subjectivity serves as a platform for experimentation and creativity, challenging and rewriting truths. By linking their personal experiences to a broader political reality, women challenged the facts imposed by the regime. This gave rise to new discourses and possibilities for action, and thus new facts. As a result, their Subjectivity shifted from a negative state in most cases to a positive one.

The Syrian revolution was a revolution against the control imposed by the Assad regime, which dominated private and public life, especially for women. Women moved, both individually and collectively, from a state of negative adaptation and internalization to a state of activism and positivity.

5.3 Activities of Syrian women at the beginning of the revolution

Syrian women have played a wide range of roles, from direct participation in the protests at the beginning of the revolution to organizing these protests, to providing relief support services when the revolution turned armed, engaging in media activity at all stages, and participating in political awareness and political processes at all stages.

Jafra, who participated in the 2011 revolution. She participated in demonstrations and smuggled medical equipment through regime checkpoints in Damascus and Homs under the air bombing (another city in Syria). She also participated in coordinating revolutionary activities with the "Days of Freedom Movement" (a group that coordinated revolutionary activities). For example, they did graffiti, they made stickers against the Assad regime, they painted fountains red, and put stickers on them that said, "Damn you, Hafez," and "Syria wants freedom." They had a campaign for the detainees in the early days; they would block cars. They would put chains around them to look like they were under arrest, and they would write, "When you free your car, think of your brother who is under arrest.

Lama, who participated in demonstrations in the cities of Idlib and Aleppo, and when she was forced to leave for Beirut for fear of arrest, collaborated with her friends online to make videos about people who had been arrested, including those who were known to have been arrested and forcibly disappeared from Aleppo University in particular. She tried to secure medicine from Beirut to Syria. In 2016, she worked as a volunteer with an organization called "Jisr," an organization based in Beirut that focuses on providing academic support to students in primary school, as well as middle and high school. When she went to France, she started working with the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression. (a Syrian human rights center specializing in documenting violations). I stayed with them for about five years, then moved to Berlin. She moved between many different groups, all related to the Syrian context, from different perspectives. In 2023, she started working with a "Hokokyat" (Lawyers) organization. Currently, they are working on a project, which is related to the siege of the Damascus countryside and starvation as a weapon of war, specifically in Yarmouk (a Palestinian refugee camp in Damascus that was besieged by the regime).

Manar participated in the 2011 demonstrations in Damascus and its suburbs. However, at the end of 2011, with the armed uprising, the demonstrations almost stopped. At the beginning of April 2011, there was a group called "The Peaceful Revolution Movement." It consisted of young men and women from inside and outside Syria who believed in peaceful action for change. They launched peaceful civil initiatives, including attempts to organize themselves into units, such as an awareness office. Manar, who participated in several offices and later became a member of the movement's board of directors in 2015-2016. Their activities were awareness initiatives, coordination of demonstrations, and symbolic actions such as painting the fountains red, making, and throwing balloons with the word "freedom" written on them at the presidential palace. The dignity strike, and they also worked on an initiative called "Tal al-Anbaa" (News platform), which was a platform for reporting news about the revolution and other events. Manar was a correspondent for them in Daraya (a town in the Damascus countryside).

There was also an initiative called "Colors," which brought together different people with different perspectives on what was happening and encouraged dialogue between them. They used colors like blue to represent themselves without revealing their identities, but their political affiliations were clear.

With the start of the arrests in Daraya, Manar became very interested in documenting the detainees in the town. She joined the initiative and developed the center, which became accredited by organizations working on documentation, such as the Syrian Violations Documentation Centre (PDC) and Human Rights Watch. They connected the families of the detainees to lawyers. They were a link between the people who were released and the families who had children in detention and were asking about them. In addition to documenting the arrests, they later began documenting the cases of martyrs and kidnapped people. Manar used a fake name, a man's name. Because, in a conservative society, people will not tell a woman what will happen to them if they are arrested. She created an account under the name "Kamel Abdulsalam," which became a well-known name among detainees' issues. She worked on this for three years. Then, a project started to protect children, which was one of the programs of the Syrian peaceful movement. It later developed into a civil society organization called "Guardians of Childhood." She was part of the founding team. She set up an office for them in Douma(an area in the countryside of Damascus that was liberated from the regime between 2012 and 2018),

as well as a documentation project to document children who were killed in the Syrian revolution. The hashtag was SPEAK UP FOR SYRIAN CHILDREN.

Lina participated in the 2011 demonstrations in Damascus and Homs and also established a network of intellectuals and politicians called Al-Muwatinah (Citizenship). One of the founders of the Syrian feminist political movement (a feminist organization that emerged after 2011), Lina, works as a trainer on gender and citizenship issues in areas liberated from the regime at the time of the interviews.

Fadwa participated in demonstrations in Damascus and political awareness-raising among revolutionary activists. She also founded Families for Freedom, an organization that works on issues related to detainees, forcibly disappeared persons, and their families.

Guevara, a filmmaker who participated in demonstrations, smuggled medical and relief equipment, and helped train photographers in several cities in Syria, then contacted them to several news agencies. She also distributed information about the revolution to the people and wrote revolutionary slogans on the walls in Damascus. Also participated in the "Days of Freedom" and carried out activities such as asking residents of a particular area to turn off their lights at the same time. She pointed lasers at the presidential palace, which confused regime forces who thought they were under attack in 2011. She remains active in several women's organizations and contributed to the production of a film about activists in the Syrian revolution in 2011.

Asma, who participated in the Syrian revolution in 2011, participated in demonstrations for a while. However, she stopped participating in demonstrations because of the segregation between women and men that occurred at that time. She also helped smuggle humanitarian relief work, particularly smuggling medical equipment across checkpoints to the city of Homos when it was under air bombing, which was extremely dangerous. She was exiled to Vienna and continued to work in relief work in areas liberated from the Assad regime. However, she completely distanced herself from political life at the time of the interviews. She built a routine life for herself in Vienna because she did not feel the same intensity that she used to feel during the 2011 revolution.

Basma, who participated in peaceful demonstrations in 2011. She was also involved in smuggling medical and food supplies to areas controlled by the regime at the time.

Layla, who participated in the 2011 demonstrations, smuggled food and medical equipment to Homs. She also contributed to coordinating demonstrations and discussing the revolution and its values among the people.

Suaad, who also participated in the Syrian demonstrations in 2011, along with a group of friends, distributed flyers promoting the values of the revolution and the overthrow of the regime. Also wrote articles about the revolution and the revolutionary movement in a magazine under a pseudonym. Together with her comrades in the revolution, she formed a group to transfer information to areas liberated from the regime.

Bodor participated in the demonstrations that broke out in 2011 and organized a demonstration against the Syrian regime in Sweden, where she lives. She also participated in the production of videos about the lives of people in Idlib (the area liberated from the regime since 2015).

Ghada who supplied the demonstrations with flags and banners. She was a member of the URP (the media council in Kaf Renbel, a town in northern Syria). The slogans were creative and famous throughout Syria. She also worked to smuggle medical equipment to field hospitals in 2011. She is the founder and director of "Mazaya" (a Women's Organization in northwestern Syria.)

Sabah, who participated in demonstrations and smuggled medical, and relief supplies to besieged areas in 2011. She also worked with the Syrian Women's Association (the oldest feminist organization in Syria, founded in 1948) to carry out a solidarity campaign with Homs, which was under siege by the regime. The aid packages were gender-specific and contained everything women needed. She also worked to protect women and conducted training sessions for revolutionary activists on citizenship, gender, and the constitution. She contributed to the establishment of the Citizens' Association (an organization whose goal is to promote and spread a culture of democracy and citizenship among revolutionaries). She contributed to the writing of guides on citizenship and human rights, citizenship and gender, citizenship and education, and citizenship, and secular and democratic education.

Lina, who participated in the 2011 demonstrations in Damascus and Homs, also established a network of intellectuals and politicians called Al-Muwatinah Association (Citizenship). One of the founders of the Syrian feminist political movement (a feminist organization that emerged after 2011).

Salma, who is from Raqqa (a city in northern Syria that later became the headquarters of ISIS), participated in protests and read political statements in homes. She spray-painted revolutionary slogans on walls. On the anniversary of the revolution, she and others wrote revolutionary slogans on sweets and threw them at large gatherings of people. Salma organized and coordinated the demonstrations from her home, and during the coordination meetings, political discussions took place about the future of the country after the fall of the regime. In 2013, when Raqqa was liberated from the regime's control, Salma ran for the local council to administer the city and was the only woman candidate. She also worked with a group of young men and women to organize a revolutionary charity exhibition, bringing together activists, common people, and civil society groups. called "For You." Salma opened her home as a field hospital to treat people wounded by the regime's violence against the demonstrations. At the time of the interviews.

Tala, who is an architect, worked in Damascus on a campaign during Ramadan, distributing aid, breakfast, and suhoor(dinner). It was called "Ramadan Sukba." also worked on "the clan emergency campaign" during the earthquake. At the same time, she worked on an initiative in response to the earthquake, which was mainly focused on architecture and included designing proposals for rapid temporary housing. Also, she worked with Al-Hol camp (a camp in northeastern Syria that houses ISIS families) and with returnees from Al-Hol camp, especially children. She worked for two and a half years to reintegrate them into society. She once worked on designing mobile classrooms for informal camps in northeastern Syria. The children were taking lessons in tents, so they helped to build something like prefabricated rooms, which were much better from a health and psychological standpoint. In the time of the interviews, Tala was living in Berlin and working as Program officer at an international development company called "Creative for International Development." (Imagine stable neighborhoods, communities, and regions capable of developing effective institutions to provide for the needs of their residents, enabling them to overcome difficulties and live in peace and security) which has project in Syria especially northeast Syria.

A significant number of women also prioritized the needs of marginalized groups, including women, children, detainees, and the displaced. In response to the evolving context of the revolution, these women adapted their strategies, transitioning from peaceful protest to the provision of aid and the documentation of human rights abuses as the conflict escalated. However, it should be noted that these actions often entailed considerable personal risks, including arrest, physical violence, and displacement. Women underscored the significance of education and awareness-raising, emphasizing the need for both political activism and the promotion of values such as citizenship and human rights.

Syrian women participated in various roles in the Syrian revolution in all its stages. They faced regime violence, arrest, torture, armed factions, and restrictions on civilian work carried out by armed factions. Consequently, Syrian women were not only victims of the violent conflict that occurred during the stages of the revolution, but they were also active participants and played important roles in the Syrian conflict.

5.4 Women's Feelings in the Revolution

Even though revolutionary activity was fraught with risks such as threats or even murder, arrest, torture and possibly rape, which would have consequences related to social stigma, several women said that they did not feel fear during their revolutionary activity, such as Sabah, who said that she did not feel fear except because of the security summonses, She felt happy while working as a relief worker, as well as Salma, who expressed that she did not feel afraid but felt ecstatic, and Lina, who did not feel afraid, only cautious not to be arrested again. When she started being asked a lot by the security officers, she decided to leave. Asma did not feel afraid, perhaps because she was not arrested and did not lose anyone when she was in Syria. After leaving Syria, she became afraid, especially when her boyfriend was arrested. The mere thought of being arrested scared her, and she refused to travel to Syria before the fall of the regime. She also said she felt a sense of joy. Basma did not feel afraid either, and there were means and techniques to protect the demonstrations. She felt a sense of solidarity with other protesters, who shared the same goal, and this gave her a sense of security. She also felt adrenaline and energy, defying the

authorities and overcoming her fear

Manar also did not feel afraid at the beginning of the revolution and during the demonstrations, not even during her arrest. She was happy to accompany her husband and her friends to the interrogation branch and said it was like a picnic. During the interrogation at the security branch, she did not feel afraid and felt like she was challenging the interrogators. When they raided her house, she was angrier rather than scared. However, Manar felt scared when they took her to a solitary cell. Souad did not feel afraid; she was sometimes frightened by the idea of detention, but that did not make her more cautious. At university, she talked about the revolution openly. She was reckless and not careful. Now she feels that she was naive at the time. Her male friends had this mentality that it was their duty to protect her because she was a girl and she was their honor, so they would ask her not to do certain activities, but she would defy them and do everything. She felt angry once when bullets started being fired at the demonstrations, and the young men asked her to run away, while they stayed behind, as this was a technique to protect women from arrest.

Some women did reflect more deeply on their feelings of fear or lack thereof. Guevara, who felt fear and expressed that those who did not feel fear were not consciously aware of the wish. She added that adrenaline helped her work and movement through the city, especially when crossing checkpoints to smuggle relief supplies, situations from which she has frightening memories. Jafra also confirms that she felt fear, especially since the price could be that she would die in the demonstration. However, she insisted on participating because the amount of injustice under the Assad regime was unbearable. Lyla felt afraid, but part of her fear was for her family and for her boyfriend, who evaded army service. Lama felt scared, and this feeling affected her participation in the movement, as she felt that she was finally doing something important in her life. Tala, who lived in Deir Ezzor before ISIS entered the city, felt fear at a checkpoint when she had to travel to Damascus for an operation. She was working for an American company that was on the regime's terrorist list because it created the White Helmets. (The White Helmets, an organization known in areas outside the control of the Assad regime. It is a civil organization working in the field of civil defense and was funded by the US government). Perhaps Guevara's explanation is reasonable, as those who do not think about the consequences do not feel fear. However, facing death in this way and releasing adrenaline may give a feeling of pleasure and happiness. However, these women certainly put their lives at risk by participating in the revolution in its various activities, challenging the regime and its brutality and peaceful means.

 The Syrian revolution was not merely a political transformation and rupture, but a turning point in the way people, and women in particular, understood themselves as political subjects. Through their answers and , we see how political Subjectivity is shaped by experience, emotion, action, and thought. The revolution undermined the Assad regime's monopoly on truth. Through their activities in the revolution, women were able to reshape their political selves and demand a place for themselves in the political sphere.

What is unique about women's experiences is that feelings of fear and happiness, danger and hope, oppression and resistance shaped them. Women were not passive in the face of events but contributed to shaping them through their work and activism.

Chapter 6 Hope as motivation for activism and change in the Syrian revolution of 2011 (Political subjectivity in exile)

With the outbreak of the Syrian revolution in 2011, a range of emotions emerged, including great hope and enthusiasm for political change in the country. Deep happiness was also part of these emotions. As the peaceful revolution evolved into an armed conflict and then into an Islamic revolution, the prevailing emotions shifted to frustration and despair. Despite the spread of these emotions, hope for the revolution's ultimate success did not fade. In this section , using Sara Ahmed (2004) about the emotion and Ben Anderson work (2006) about the hope I argue that these intense emotions were instrumental in shaping identities, individuals, and relationships and were the reason for the continuation of revolutionary activity despite the despair and frustration which also contribute to stronger hope that prevailed at the time of my interviews.

By applying the work of Ahmed and Anderson, an understanding of political participation that goes beyond rational choice can be achieved. Emotions, especially hope, are the reason for the continuation of political struggle under challenging circumstances, such as the transition to an armed Islamic revolution and the global recycling of the Assad regime. These emotions, especially hope, constitute a subjective experience and a collective force that sustains the spirit of the revolution and inspires the continuation of the struggle for democratic political change in Syria.

6.1 Affect theory and emotions:

According to affect theory, emotions play a crucial role in shaping individual and collective identities, as well as how individuals perceive themselves and others. In her works, *Collective Emotions* (2004) and *The Affective Economy* (2004), Sara Ahmed argues that emotions are not merely private experiences but also socially constructed and politically charged. Emotions play a crucial role in shaping individual and collective identities, as well as how individuals perceive themselves and others:

> "That emotions play a crucial role in the 'surfacing' of individual and collective bodies. Such an argument challenges the assumption that emotions are a private matter, that they belong solely to

individuals, and that they originate within and then extend outward towards others.

It suggests that emotions are not simply 'within' or 'without', but that they define the contours of the multiple worlds that are inhabited by different subjects" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 25).

According to Ahmed, Emotions are not something private and personal that exists inside us. Emotions help shape our personal identities and social worlds. They do not move from inside a person to the outside but rather contribute to the fabric that connects people and helps shape identities and social relationships. They influence who we let in and who we exclude, and how we communicate with the social world around us, which includes bodies. These relationships and emotions, as Ben Anderson puts it in his study "Becoming and being hopeful" (2006), operate between and through time, space, and bodies. These emotions and affects play an important role in bringing bodies together, forging relationships between individuals, and shaping self-identity (Anderson, 2006, 736).

More specifically, focusing on hope, Anderson argues that it is an emotional phenomenon with a transformative role in human experiences and relationships. Hope is a relation between positive relationships and interactions. It encourages action and resilience, helping individuals persevere despite challenges. It is a dynamic state that influences how bodies move and are energized in social and emotional interactions, helping to create diverse spaces for action (Anderson, 2006, p. 744).

According to affect theory, emotions, including hope, circulate in the spaces between subjects and are unstable in the self. They are relational, produced as a result of social relationships and interactions, and serve as tools for social interaction, resistance, and transformation, contributing to the formation of the different worlds in which people live. Hope energizes individuals, motivates them to work towards the future, and creates opportunities for action and change.

The answers of my interviewees demonstrate how emotions, particularly hope, serve as motivators for political action and social activism. Despite the specificity of each woman's experience who participated in the revolution and was interviewed, they all share a sense of hope, initial enthusiasm, and a dream of change that began to materialize in Syria, which had suffered from an extended tyranny since the 1960s. Before the revolution, life in Syria was constrained, and Assad's slogan 'forever' suggested that change was impossible and that tyranny was the country's destiny. Most of the women interviewed expressed that the hope for change began in

Syria at the beginning of the

2011 revolution. However, many of them were not involved in public affairs and had no interest in Syrian politics. Still, the revolution represented a moment of awakening for many of them on both a personal and political level, as they participated with all their energy and through all available peaceful means during the early stages of the Syrian revolution.

Building on the theory of affect, as developed by Ahmed (2004) and Anderson (2006), is productive when analyzing the interviews. There are many reasons why revolutionary women continued their activism despite the frustration and despair that accompanied the course of the revolution and the difficult conditions women faced in exile. Among these reasons, hope was central to women's continuation. Although the political scene in Syria at the time of the interviews was bleak, with the Assad regime being recycled around the world, the 2011 revolution or uprising was still very much alive in the lives of the women I met. In this Section, the power of this influence came from the intensity of the emotional experience of the women who participated in the 2011 uprising, which created an extensive reservoir of emotion.

6.2 Hope:

My interviewees described the revolution as marking the beginning of the dream of freedom for Syria, "a moment of hope," as Guevara, who participated in the peaceful revolution in 2011 and remained active in the revolution at the time of the interviews, said.

For other women whose political awakening began with the start of the revolution, hope was related to the possibility of radical change, and to the horizon of building a democratic system in Syria rapidly. Asma said, "There was a great sense of hope. We would say two months, and we would bring down the regime... If there were not so much hope, we would not have done anything."

Basmah and Manar Asma, who also participated in the peaceful revolution in 2011, remained active in the revolution at the time of the interviews. Confirm their unparalleled enthusiasm at the beginning of the revolution for the democratic change that would take place in Syria at the beginning of the revolution: "My feeling at the beginning of the revolution was very impulsive, impulsive in a good way... I will continue to do what I can." "In the beginning, there was unprecedented enthusiasm, great enthusiasm and great hope that there would be a great

transformation and change in Syria to democracy, a state of citizenship and human rights," Manar

said. The enthusiasm and revolutionary spirit Basmah and Manar spoke of were important emotions that occurred at the beginning of the revolution, and, according to Ahmed's work, emotion contributed to the formation of identities, individuals, relationships, and revolutionary society. They were motivated to continue and work for the revolution.

My interviewees described the revolution as a hope and a dream that was beginning to come true. It emerges from shared experiences, especially bodily ones. As Ahmed explains, emotions are not isolated; they help shape relationships and identities by circulating through spaces, topics, and, especially, bodies for these women, whose political awakening began with the start of the revolution.

Salma, who participated in the peaceful revolution in 2011 and still does activist work, described the revolution as a dream of change. We waited for it a long time. "The revolution was the beginning of the dream that Syria would change; circumstances would change, our choices and our lives would change. There was hope that the meetings and the political readings we were doing in secret would become public." Salma's answer refers to the political struggles, especially the covert ones, that successive generations in Syria have faced since the Ba'ath Party regime took power in the 1960s. The revolution exposed the Secret struggles, secret meetings, and discussions that had been taking place under the Assad regime, involving large sectors of the Syrian people, marking the beginning of the revolution.

Fadwa, Lina, and Sabah are well-known opposition figures in Syria since the 1980s. They emphasize that the struggle against Assad, which began in various underground parties, including the underground Communist Labor Party, and the dream of political change in Syria became a reality in Syria after the revolution began. Fadwa: "Now this is reality; this has been a dream since the Assad family seized power; this was our dream that change must happen." Lina: "When it started, my feelings were different from what it is now. I had a feeling that my life was not wasted." Sabah: "At the beginning of the revolution, there was tremendous hope." Fadwa, Lina, and Sabah's expressions of hope and the dreams they have dreamed and worked for during their long resistance and struggle against the Syrian regime show how these strong positive emotions, such as hope, dream fulfilment, and self-actualization, are fundamental in working for social and political change

and are the basis for building relationships, as I mentioned earlier based on Ahmed and Anderson argument.

6.3 Happiness

One of the powerful emotions that emerged with the 2011 revolution was happiness, which helped connect participants in the revolution with each other. Asma emphasised the importance of happiness while participating in the revolution. She said, "The intense feeling made me happy. I experienced true happiness for the first time and realized its value. I realized the value of giving and the values we read about in novels, which were put to the test during the revolution. Giving, happiness, love... I lived through the revolution, and I was lucky, perhaps because I came close to death. Asma's response to finding "true happiness" through her participation in the revolution resonates with Sara Ahmed's work on happiness. In her book, The Promise of Happiness, Ahmed (2020) argues that happiness is not an internal feeling but rather a concept shaped by social and historical contexts. Asma's sense of happiness comes from her participation in collective work and her commitment to values such as giving, happiness, and love, which are emphasized in revolutionary work. Asma's sense of these values was heightened by her near-death experience, which made her feel part of something bigger than herself. Ahmed describes happiness as a promise that orients individuals toward shared goals, experiences, and expectations, suggesting that happiness will follow. For Asma, this promise was fulfilled through living the values of giving and love, which brought her happiness. Her happiness was based on the expectation that these revolutionary values would lead to a better future. Asma felt frustrated and disappointed when the revolution failed, and the political regime in Syria did not fall as she had expected. "I am currently desperate, and shortly, I expect nothing at all. This situation reflects the current state of despair and the decline in global interest in Syria." Asma's answer is consistent with Ahmed's argument that feelings of disappointment may follow feelings of happiness as a result of the failure to achieve expected goals (Ahmed, 2020, p. 29).

Ahmed also argues that happiness is a social phenomenon. It fosters strong bonds between individuals who share similar interests. It excludes people who do not share a particular orientation and, therefore, do not hold the same values or share the same experiences (2020, p 38). Asma's happiness led to the creation of strong bonds between her and others who participated in the

revolution. "My friends before the revolution are different from those after the revolution... The bond between us is powerful. At first, it was a great deal of fun, and something was compelling that connected us; now that has been reflected in the love, revolution, and intense feelings we have for the movement. Each of us represented the revolution. This feeling was reflected in the level of participation among us, which was always high. There were no fake words, feelings, or laughter. Even drinking together was the best thing we could do. I remember every word that was said and every laugh I felt." Shafin's happiness was not just an internal emotion. It was a unique social and cultural experience for her, guided by the revolutionary values of love and giving. This happiness, which created deep bonds between her and those who participated in the revolution, continued to this day despite the distance and the fact that they are all in different places.

6.4 From hope to despair

With the revolution turning into armed Islamic factions and the Assad regime continuing to rule despite the scale of the protests against it, feelings of frustration and despair began to emerge among the revolutionary community. Most of those who participated in the revolution expected it to last only a short time and for the regime to fall within months, as had happened in Egypt and Tunisia, or for there to be foreign intervention, as had occurred in Libya. The revolutions in neighboring Arab countries had a significant impact on the outbreak of the revolution in Syria. However, when these expectations did not materialize, in contrast to the Hope, happiness, dreams, and excitement that characterized the beginning of the revolution, feelings of disappointment and despair set in. Lama who has worked in several Syrian human rights centers, such as "the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression" which is a human rights center that documents violations committed by the Assad regime, and she worked for the organization "Human Rights Women," which works to raise visibility of women and self-identifying women, as well as women's issues. In areas of Syria that were liberated from the Assad regime at the time of the interviews. said: "The revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya were very motivating factors; we have to acknowledge that, so when we look at the news, my heart feels eager." Bodor, who has produced documentaries about the lives of people in areas liberated from the regime at the time of the interviews, talks about her high emotional state during her participation in the first demonstrations in Syria, where she cried out of emotion and disbelief at what was happening. "During the demonstrations, tears streamed down my face, and I did not understand why... I was

proud, I was not afraid, everything was happening." She emphasized the impact of the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions on her participation in the Syrian revolution. "I remember once I was outside the house, and my father was watching something on television during the Egyptian Revolution. I said to him, 'Dad, imagine if this happened to us.' My father replied, 'No one knows. God willing, but I hope our turn comes, like our brothers. We are jealous of each other. It had to happen.'" Sabah emphasized, "And I was expecting it to end quickly because we saw what happened in Tunisia and Egypt, or external interference like what happened in Libya, and there is a huge movement in the Syrian street, which means millions of people are taking to the streets and demanding change."

Unfortunately, the Tunisian, Egyptian, or even Libyan scenario did not occur in Syria, as the regime's violence was unexpected by those who participated in the revolution. The regime continued to rule and did not fall within months. The regime's continued rule pushed the peaceful protests to turn into an armed conflict. With the escalation of the regime's violence and the trend toward Islamization of some revolutionary armed factions, many of those who started the revolution became frustrated and depressed, and despair began to creep into their hearts. The role of the revolution and the peaceful activities with which it began declined due to the spread of armed conflict and the control of Islamic factions.

After the revolution turned into an armed conflict and all the women I interviewed were forced to migrate out of Syria, these women shared feelings of frustration and disappointment with how things turned out in Syria. In exile, the women also shared feelings of frustration, estrangement and loss of meaning after being scattered in many countries. As Guevara said: "I feel frustrated now because everything was so painful. It all started in 2011, and now it is a series of tragedies that are very personal and very painful. I feel sad, frustrated, and depressed". In a similar vein, Jafra explains: "Hope weakens a lot, but I do not want to say it disappears because, in the end, I want to keep hoping that things will change on a global level, that people will change, and that some things will change. Some things will never change, but even the political landscape will ultimately shift. I do not necessarily have to be around to see that change, but hope will never disappear".

Guevara and Jafra's answers, who both became exiles in Berlin, Germany, indicate that hope still exists and persists despite all the circumstances Syria has gone through, and despite the Assad

regime's repression and violence against the revolution. Hope for change still drives them and demonstrates the tremendous energy and passion that erupted with the 2011 revolution in Syria. This hope for change in the future, or what Anderson calls "not yet," continued to be a source of emotional strength from which Guevara draws strength and energy to act.

Similarly, Basma describes how she kept being involved in the revolution and resisted feelings of despair and disappointment: "Currently, I still have the same hope for the Syrian revolution. I do what I can, I talk about it all the time, and I pass it on to future generations. In the context of my work, she works with the Syria Campaign, an organization that supports families and all matters related to Syrian detainees in Assad's prisons, a large part of it is continuing to talk about Syria because I am still connected to the revolution, just like in 2011". Layla who works with women now for development, which is a feminist organization working to empower Syrian women in areas of Syria liberated from the regime, Lebanon and turkey, at the time of the interviews, discusses the incredible energy that erupted among the revolutionary people at the beginning of the revolutionary movement, as well as the numerous meetings and political discussions that started to take place. "I mean, my feeling was that there was an amount of energy that did not make sense, that there were ideas and things that needed to be done, that needed to be talked about and discussed." Basma and Layla emphasize the importance of continuing to work for change despite the numerous difficulties. Preserving the spirit of the revolution and passing it on to future generations is a form of resistance against tyranny and injustice. Basma's belief in hope stems from her revolutionary experience in 2011 and how this experience has shaped her emotional reservoir, which remains unfinished.

While Manar, who was one of the founders of the organization "Guardians of Childhood," which works to protect children in war zones in Turkey and Syrian areas liberated from the regime at the time of the interviews. Expressing her desire to return to Syria, she explains how the values of the revolution and working according to those values are a cause greater than any nation or nationality; in her view, it is a cause for all of humanity. Despite her despair, Manar continued to believe that the revolution had a transformative role, as it has become part of the identity of those who participated in it. Although the revolution turned into armed conflict and peaceful civil action has diminished, Manar does not regret her participation. Manar said: "My feeling after 14 years is that I am trying to return, or at least I am convinced that my message is humanitarian and

not linked to a particular nationality or country." Manar's desire to return to Syria reflects a strong desire and hope that still exists for change and the triumph of the revolutionary values of the 2011 uprising. This answer demonstrates the powerful hope that erupted in 2011 and the deeply rooted values of solidarity and compassion for all causes of oppression around the world. Despite the tragedies that the Syrian people have suffered as a result of the Assad regime's violence, Manar does not regret the revolution or her participation in it. Instead, she believes that the revolution has become embodied by the people who took part in it. This belief highlights the significance of emotions in shaping identity, selfhood, relationships, and communities.

Despite all the frustration and despair, Sabah, who is a Women's rights activist/women's empowerment trainer, has been a member of the Syrian Women's League, the oldest women's organization in Syria, founded in 1948. She is also a trainer at the Citizenship Association, which aims to correct misconceptions about citizenship, particularly in the literature and methodology of the regime, and still believes that the revolution will ultimately prevail. Sabah emphasized: "From a scientific and historical perspective, revolutions succeed in the long run, even if they take a long time. I am on Facebook, and I say on my page that hope rules us, as Saadallah Wannous (a Syrian writer) said. Perhaps I will not live to see it on a personal level, and perhaps my daughter will not live to see it, but I believe that future generations will live to see democratic change in Syria."

Despite all the tragedies that have occurred since the 2011 revolution in Syria, Lina, who is a Trainer on gender issues in the areas liberated from the Syrian regime at the time of the interviews, and a founding member of the Syrian Political Feminist Movement, said she does not regret participating in the revolution. Lina: "I know what I feel, but I cannot say it like Munther Al-Masri(Syrian writer) said in 2016, 'I wish it had not happened." I cannot say it because of the circumstances that led to it, but unfortunately, we paid a heavy price and did not reap the rewards." Lina emphasized that despite everything that happened after the revolution, including killings, forced disappearances, and displacement, the revolution was a historical inevitability resulting from the accumulation of feelings of injustice among the people.

In Sabah and Lina's words, Hope, sadness, and frustration are all present. However, their continued work to achieve the Hope of revolution reflects the importance of these emotions collectively as a motivator for individual and collective action.

Despite the negative feelings the women experienced during the interviews, the hope for change and the victory of the revolution still lingered for many of them, prompting them to maintain their preoccupation with Syrian public affairs and political work among their priorities. In contrast, some women stopped caring about Syrian affairs and instead established a routine life in exile. James M. Jasper contends in his research on emotions in social movements that various and even conflicting feelings are involved; these emotions function like batteries, needing both negative and positive poles to energize action (2011, p. 9). Focusing on emotions and feelings provides a reasonable explanation for why political activism persists and how it continued, even when its results seem limited and despite the high risks involved in the current political situation in Syria. In other words, focusing on emotions helps explain what drives us when the actual structure obscures reforms and discourages us due to disappointment.

Focusing on emotions, as enabled by affect theory, helps us understand why women continue to engage in political activity despite all the circumstances and despite the Syrian regime's continued hold on power more than 13 years after the revolution against it began in Syria.

In short, the political work of these women is connected to the political Subjectivity that was formed through the 2011 revolution in Syria. Feelings of hope, happiness, frustration, and despair played a fundamental role in shaping their political Subjectivity. In their understanding of themselves as political actors and in their commitment to activism and working for change. According to Ahmed, these emotions are not merely internal states but contribute to the formation of personal identities and social relationships. They are social and political forces that shape the worlds in which these women live. As Anderson argues, hope or " not yet " sustains action and activism in the face of frustration and uncertainty. For the women interviewed, hope for change is a motivation to work, remain active, and resist a frustrating reality even in exile. Although the political outcome of the revolution was still uncertain at the time of the interviews. However, the emotional legacy embodied in the identities and social relationships of these women ensures the

continuation of their spirit. It shapes their activism and may even shape the political future for which they are fighting.

Chapter 7 Is there a Syrian feminist movement? (Feminist subjectivity in exile)

Introduction

In this section, I ask what shape the current Syrian feminist movement takes. Whether we can talk about a 'Syrian feminist movement' at all, I argue that the Syrian feminist movement is not a singular, unified movement, but a diverse collection of strategies shaped by women both in Syria and within the diaspora. Also, I show that the Syrian feminist movement must be understood as distinct from Western-framed feminist movements. The Syrian movement instead takes shape through the different interactions of feminist and non-feminist activists who have worked to empower women and extract rights for them within the conditions of the war (since 2011) and the nascent diaspora in Europe. This section draws on several Syrian activists who participated in the Syrian revolution of 2011 to understand their perspective. Using analytical tools and concepts from Tsing Bayat and Scott, this section primarily examines two prominent faces of this movement: transnational organizations that aim to secure rights for Syrian women, and the activities of women who fall outside of organizations (and who often do not even identify as feminist), but whose strategies are crucial in carrying out every day, small acts of resistance. The section argues that the organizational Syrian movements, together with non-organized Syrian women, may be a precursor to a popular feminist movement in Syria as a whole.

Most of the women I interviewed said that there was no talk of feminism when they were living in Syria and that serious discussion about feminism and women's rights began after they fled into exile. Salma said of her relationship with feminism in Syria: "It was my reading. There were no discussions about feminism in the city." Laila confirms: "The word 'feminism' or talk about feminism did not exist at that time." Laila, who lives in Berlin, continued: "My feminist awareness began when I lived in Berlin. In Syria, the words I used were general human rights terms." The talk about feminism and women's rights began among Syrians in exile, as these discussions and issues were not part of their lives in Syria. Even with the outbreak of the 2011 revolution, there was a popular slogan circulating among revolutionary activists: "Now is not the

time to talk about women's rights," meaning that the priority in 2011 was to overthrow the regime and then address other issues. Salma laughed and said, "This slogan still exists today. We have experiences in neighboring countries where women participated in the revolutionary work, and when the revolutions succeeded, they were excluded from the political scene." Lina emphasized, "Because of this slogan, I decided to become a feminist. Rights are not divided and must be worked on together."

Concern for women's rights and the debate surrounding them were almost absent from the Syrian scene, even after the revolution began in 2011. Syrian feminist discussions began among Syrian women after they fled into exile. This does not mean that there was no feminist movement in Syria, but it was limited to the elite, and very few people were interested in women's issues in Syria. Women's rights were seen as a luxury rather than a matter of rights. We can therefore say that the feminist subjectivity of Syrian women crystallized, for the most part, in exile.

An important consideration is to study the history and development of Syrian feminism, tracing its origins, evolution, and unique characteristics. In addition, Middle Eastern understandings of feminism. There are different answers and understandings of these issues among Syrian activists. Sabah Al-Hallaq, who preferred to be named in the research, is a long-time Syrian feminist, a Member of the Syrian Women's League, which she claims is the oldest Syrian feminist organization, founded in 1948. In the interview I conducted with her, Al-Halaq said that the Syrian feminist movement is old and that we are now witnessing the fourth wave of it.AL- Hallaq continued:

> There are no organizers for this movement, but in a feminist workshop, we concluded that the waves of feminism in Syria are similar to the waves of feminism in Europe. However, due to the lack of democracy in Syria, there are no licenses for organizations. The first generation were feminists who did not demand equality, but worked in the field of education, labor and literacy, even if with stereotypical images of women. Then, the Syrian Women's League for the Protection of Childhood and Motherhood was established at the end of the 1970s, and we began working from a gender perspective across all of Syria. In the 1990s, feminist groups began to operate as well, and we, including myself, were considered the third generation of feminism in Syria. After 2011, young

women began to carry this idea systematically, and they are the fourth generation.

According to Sabah Hallak's observations, one of the forms of the Syrian feminist movement was linked to the establishment of the Syrian Women's League in 1948, representing four generations and characterized by distinct waves that paralleled to some extent the trajectory seen in Europe, but were primarily shaped by the local socio-political context. The first wave focused on practical empowerment and contributions to education and labor, without explicitly challenging gender roles. This established foundational work in improving the status of women, albeit constrained by traditional roles. As the movement progressed in the 1970s, shifting towards an anti-regime stance, it shifted towards a gender perspective and expanded efforts to address issues across Syria. The emergence of secular feminist groups in the 1990s indicates a growing awareness and desire to address systemic issues of gender relations. The recent wave that emerged after 2011 - the beginning of the revolution - is led by a young generation that addresses gender relations and equality systematically. Sabah Hallak considers it the fourth generation of Syrian feminists.

In another interview that I conducted with Nour Salameh, a 42-year-old feminist and activist in the Syrian revolution, Nour said that there is no real Syrian feminist movement in an organized sense, but we have waves like all global feminist movements; we could be in the first wave, or we could be in the second wave. For her, the first wave started at the beginning of the 20th century. It was related to women's participation in public life and politics, marking the beginning of the Syrian feminist movement. After that, there were feminists among us, but we cannot call it a movement, according to her. With the beginning of the revolution in 2011, we moved to the second wave because the revolutionary liberation brought with it the liberation of women as well, and feminist groups developed in exile because safety conditions were achieved, so we started talking about queer issues, and we became louder about individual, physical and sexual freedoms. Although many Western scholars have challenges the concept of waves (CITE), the comparison that both Hallak and Salameh propose between the wave structures and the trajectory of the feminist movement in Syria, give a sense of stability, strength, and a kind of vision to Syrian feminists, mainly because modern Syrian women's and feminist history is oral primarily history, which entails that the Syrian feminist history has not been codified.

In my reading, the history of the Syrian feminist movement can be divided into two sections. The first is a movement that emerged after the 2011 revolution with the emergence of

development organizations in areas liberated from the Assad regime in Idlib and northwestern Aleppo. The second is an unorganized network of Syrian feminists and ordinary women who refuse to identify themselves as feminists but are actively working for the recognition of women's rights in Syria.

7.1   Attempts to define the Syrian feminist movement from the perspective of feminist activists:

Prior to 2011, feminist activists in Syria were engaged in advocating for women's rights, such as equal rights in laws and the constitution; however, the prevailing conditions of severe repression prevented the formation of a conventional movement. However, following 2011, a proliferation of organizational movements, both within Syria and in exile, has enabled the establishment of a movement for the liberation of Syrian women. This development has been further catalysed by the liberation of certain regions from the Assad regime's control and the presence of female activists in exile. I could not identify any definition of Syrian feminism in the scholarly literature. There is also no scholarly literature that identifies a specific feminist *movement* with founders, rules, objectives, working mechanisms, and affiliated members on the ground. In a study conducted by Ramadan and Sheni (2021), the authors mentioned that "Refocusing attention on social change bottom-up rather than top-down change" (Ramadan and Sheni, 2021, 5). They define use emic definitions of the activists interviewed, who stated that an "organized movement" is "a group of women activists, with a vision, goal, and mission that they work according to." Others said that it is "premature to talk about an organized movement in Syria, as there are initiatives, institutions, and organizations to which women belong." Others did not focus on whether movements" are organized or not, but defined movements as those that meet the criteria of "looking at society and politics from a women's perspective" (Ramadan & Sheni, 2021, p. 19).

In an interview I conducted with Fadwa Mahmoud, a 70-year-old political activist and one of the founders of Families for Freedom, an organization concerned with claiming detainees and forcibly disappeared persons since the start of the Syrian revolution in 2011. Fadwa said, "In 2016, we created a feminist human rights movement, Families for Freedom Movement (FFM)". FFM is all women, led and organized by women. Fadwa defines her organization as feminist only because its founders and volunteers are all women. I think defining an organization as feminist only because it is all women is a limited definition. We can say that it is a womanist organization,

but we cannot

say that it is feminist because it is not concerned with gender relations and the differences in power between gender

A famous political activist, Lina Wafai, 65 years old, was arrested in the 1980s because she was affiliated with the opposition Communist Labor Party in Syria. At the beginning of the revolution, Lina refused several invitations to feminist work and always said, "No, I work in politics!" or she would say, "I am a political activist, and you are feminist activists; maybe we can meet someday and cooperate!". In Lina's definition, feminism is a civil society movement that is non-political. Lina continued: "From 2012 onwards, the role of women began to diminish, and the political formations that emerged did not take women into account, and most women turned to relief work, especially after the militarization. I felt that political struggle was not enough, because it alone would not solve the issue". Lina became a (self-identified) feminist only when the role of women in the revolution diminished after militarization. She also considered the roles in which women participated at the time, such as aid workers, to be apolitical, even though aid workers during the Syrian revolution were arrested by the regime and referred to the terrorism court. In Lina's opinion, political action is only direct political action on the constitution, legislation, or the government.

Lina then started reading about the independence revolutions that took place in the 1940s and 1950s and noticed how women were intensely involved in those revolutions. However, when those revolutions succeeded, women were excluded from political work and returned to their traditional roles. When Lina decided that political work alone is not enough and must be linked to "feminist work". She said: "I felt that feminism should have a role here in the Syrian revolution". In 2017, the Syrian Political Feminist Movement was formed, and Lina was invited to the founding conference. Lina said: "I was very excited, and I felt that my dream was to have a political struggle and a feminist struggle at the same time with each other, not a political or feminist struggle. It finally came true".

Lina became convinced of feminist work when it became linked to direct political work in the feminist political movement's program, working on direct political issues: "We dealt with the constitution, elections, reconstruction, transitional government, and all topics that may be politically important on the Syrian scene, decentralization, women and the constitution, the form of government, the active participation of women in political and public life, and women's political participation includes many topics such as religion and the state," she said. Lina's

experience shows

that by integrating feminist goals with political changes, the movement can more effectively push for women's rights and influence major decisions that affect everyone in society. However, by emphasizing only the immediate political aspects, other aspects of life, such as economic, social, cultural, and political aspects of daily life, are seen as non-political and do not make a difference in the lives of people, especially women.

Lina's movement has 150 members and the conditions for membership are a belief in the feminist and political principles of the movement. However, the work includes all Syrian women regardless of their belief in the principles of the movement, Lina explains: "Belonging to the movement is conditional on feminist understanding and convictions, but the work is for all women regardless." Lina concludes, "The daily and the personal are also political." There are two categories of work in the movement: those who belong to the movement and those who are targeted to work with it by the first category. While having a specific ideology may help the movement's cohesion and effectiveness and may ensure its continuity, it also excludes people who do not believe in the same principles, which may make the movement elitist and not reflect the issues of all women on the ground. However, opening the door to work with all women, regardless of their beliefs, may allow the movement to expand and engage with women's issues more and connect politics with everyday life again, and may help everyday women become politically empowered.

7.2 Syrian organizational feminist movement:

Through my research, I found that many Syrian feminist organizations are based in Europe, whose cadres worked in areas liberated from the Assad regime before December 2024 The fall of the Assad regime in Syria: Women Now for Development, Justice and Empowerment, Syrian Women's Network, Feminist Lobby, Feminist Political Movement, Women for Development, Impact, Syrian Women Journalists Network, Nisswa Association, Syrian Feminist Platform, and Independent. These organizations are all licensed in Europe because licensing for organizations in Europe is free. Their administrative offices are in Turkey, and they work with women on the ground in Idlib and eastern Aleppo (areas outside the control of the Al-Assad regime since 2015 until the change of the regime in 2024).

One example I want to talk about is the organization "Women Now for Development" which was founded in 2018 by the Syrian activist and writer Samar Yazbek. The organization is licensed in Paris, with offices in other cities in France, in Berlin and Turkey, and with members operating in Idlib, East Aleppo, Lebanon, and Eastern Ghouta in the Damascus countryside.[2]. Its goal, as Yazbek explains, is to "invent the political from the heart of violence and war." Their aims include fostering a society governed by democracy, freedom, and justice – a society where women have a meaningful role. Furthermore, they aim to empower women through small economic projects and vocational and technical courses, educational projects for children, and cultural activities., They provide psychological and social support services, sometimes related to basic needs, other times documenting women's oral histories in order to substantiate their political voice and decision-making mechanisms. They have 160 employees and volunteers in the organization and work according to a grassroots approach and using a democratic decision-making process (Women Now for Development, 2018).

In a follow-up to an interview I conducted with Layla, a former employee of the "Women Now" organization, she said: "The support is mostly from foreign feminist organizations. More than 95% of the staff are Syrian women. In the organization in Lebanon and Turkey, there may be some non-Syrians, but most the staff is local, and in Europe all staff are Syrian. However, Arab and foreign consultants are employed. However, most of them are Arab". This mix of local and foreign expertise is indicative of a cross-border organization. Tsing (2024) convincingly argues that "friction' reminds us that 'heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power" (Tsing, 2024, p. 5). This is what is happening in the "Women Now" organization, where the blending of local and foreign competencies has led to new political and cultural formations through democratic mechanisms. In my view, their activism experience shows the emergence of an understanding of feminism in organizational terms, which impacts both the diaspora and women's groups working with them inside of Syria, specifically in Idleb and West Aleppo.

What the strategies and aims of these organizations show, as Tsing continued arguing, " is that universality is not abstract; it is rooted in social and historical contexts. To understand

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Before the regime reoccupied it.

universality, we must analyze its origins and development within a particular culture, where its meanings and connotations are shaped by the particular culture and history that gave rise to it" (Tsing, 2024, p. 6). Tsing talks about how activists translated global ideas of human rights and environmental justice into locally relevant terms and practices within the Indonesian context (Tsing, 2024, p. 2). This may apply to the case of transnational organizations working inside Syria, where activists have adapted Western tools to suit the Syrian context. These organizations target women in conservative areas of Syria and take into account the local culture. The utilization of foreign expertise, in conjunction with democratic mechanisms, has been adapted for application in the context of the Syrian case. This integration of local and global elements within a democratic framework has yielded tangible success on the ground. I believe this is the case of the state of "Women Now" and other organizations, all based in Europe and collaborating with European experts. All result in the production of new experiences, methods, and ways of working that are essentially a combination of the local and the global.

Due to the establishment of organizations on the ground in areas liberated from the Al-Assad regime control since 2015, many women have been able to prove their presence on the ground by working on development projects to empower women and gain political recognition. Some of them reached leadership positions in local administration councils (Salameh, 2017, p. 3), which are councils established by the people to govern areas that were liberated from the Assad regime, despite the daily aerial bombardment that these areas suffered from.

One example I will bring to the discussion is activist Bayan Rayhan. In 2016, Bayan Rayhan was the head of the women's office in the local council of Douma city, a human development trainer at Women Now, a communications officer at The Day After, and the director of the women's section at the Sham Human Rights Centre for Statistics and Documentation. In 2012, Rihan founded the 'Thaqeerat' coordination, the first feminist grouping of Syrian women in Eastern Ghouta and assigned roles to those working in the coordination to engage in medical work to rescue the wounded and injured during the battles and bombardment. In the same year, she co-founded the magazine 'Thaerat' and was active in distributing it in Damascus and its countryside. However, her work in managing the coordination and supervising the magazine was suspended on 25 September 2012, the date of her arrest by the Assad regime, where she was subjected to physical and psychological torture, before being released following a swap with Iranian soldiers and officers.

In 2014, Rayhan, along with a group of Douma activists, received an invitation from the head of the local council, Akram Toameh, to discuss one of the projects they had previously proposed to the council, and the meeting resulted in her being invited to work within the council. 'In the beginning, there were great difficulties as I was the only woman in the council,' Rayhan told Enab Baladi, adding that the support of some of her co-workers helped her overcome the first obstacles and stand up to opponents of her participation in administrative work. Rihan points out that she has repeatedly encountered critics of her work. She and her colleagues met obstacles bigger than war, as they were excluded from the work of the new administrative and political groups, which included actors and power holders in the region. ("Bayan Rayhan: min tanzim al-khara'it ila qiyadat nisa' al-Ghouta," 2016)

This example of a woman reaching a leadership position in a conservative Islamist community shows us the difficulties facing women in Syria, but also how hard work and determination can sometimes lead to change. It also shows us the importance of charismatic leaders in the emergence and popularity of movements. In Rayhan's case, it is a woman who takes on such a role, which is a rare occurrence in the history of Middle Eastern contemporary movements, and as a result, is reshaping traditional gender roles, even under immense constraints.

Since Idlib and eastern Aleppo are conservative Islamist areas, organizations working on the ground have to be careful about when to adopt a feminist label or show that they are working on gender issues. I will bring the case of Heba al-Hajj to illustrate this point. On 26 February, feminist activist Heba al-Hajj Arif was assassinated in the al-Abab area in eastern Aleppo, an area outside of regime control at the time and under the rule of the Syrian National Army (SNA), which governs it under Turkish auspices. According to an interview I conducted in February 2024 with Islamic feminist activist Mona Freij (who does not mind using her real name in the research), "Haj Arif was killed because of her feminist activism in her area and her political activism, as Haj Arif was holding an administrative position in the local administrative council in her city, and since then organizations in the region have been trying to work less visibly in terms of demanding women's rights." This experience has led some organizations to avoid the language of feminism to protect women in these areas.

7.3 Syrian feminist non-movement

I now want to turn to another less obvious manifestation of Syrian feminism, "non-movement" and argue that there are many Syrian women who do a lot of activist work. However, they do not belong to organizations formally defined as "feminist". Some of these activists refuse to call themselves feminists. Mona Freij, who was an activist in the Syrian revolution and a member of the Feminist Advisory Council, explains: "I know many women who say I am not a feminist, as if it is a charge, as if it is a crime. I seek to be a feminist. My definition of feminism is equal rights for everyone, regardless of gender. It is equal rights, not hatred of men. We defend the rights of youth, men, and women in a participatory and just manner". A large number of these women are nonetheless active in the field of women's empowerment and rights without being organized in a group or formally. They are present at political conferences that discuss Syrian issues and always demand direct political representation for women.

These women activists, with their presence and visibility in the Syrian political and social space, especially on social media, are slowly changing the Syrian consciousness and the importance of talking about women's liberation and rights. This relentless feminist who is not in the organizational movement and not in feminist' activism represents a state of non-movement that Assef Bayat (2007) spoke about. Bayat argues that the unorganized but collective interaction of Iranian women led to changes in the laws and social status of women in Iran and gained them rights as a result (Bayat, 2007). I see the non-movement as a form of resistance practiced by these women on the ground against not only the Assad regime, but also against the Islamist groups that controlled the liberated areas.

Moreover, James Scott (1990) argues that small acts of resistance carried out by people in their daily lives are important and should be taken into account, as they may at some point lead to an overt popular movement leading to significant change (Scott, 1990, p. 227). In Syria before 2011 (as explored in chapter 6), this type of resistance was the only one possible because of an authoritarian regime that punished open political opposition, as Byatt also explains in the case of Iran (Byatt, 2007). Since 2011, this form of resistance has continued to some extent among women and feminists on the ground in Syria, in the liberated areas, but also in the areas that remained under Assad's control until 2024.

As for the diaspora, one can argue that women's activism and the feminist movement – those not affiliated with organizations as discussed earlier – take the form of daily resistance. These daily activities, especially among women activists (who do not necessarily see themselves

as

feminists), are building up, and may even form an organized movement now, especially after the fall of the Assad regime and the creation of a political opportunity to self-organize. This includes joining WhatsApp groups more actively to discuss the rapid political changes inside Syria, to organize trips, and to coordinate humanitarian efforts.

7.4 Conclusion:

This section explores the Syrian feminist and women's movement inside the areas liberated from the Assad regime since 2015 and outside Syria in the diaspora. It argues that the context, circumstances, and time of the Syrian women's movement are different from the context, circumstances, and time of traditional Western feminist movements. The circumstances of the war inside Syria and the conditions of the diaspora in exile imposed on feminist activists a different way of working, which crystallized in development work through transnational organizations with strategic goals of liberating Syrian women and gaining maximum rights for Syrian women. On the other hand, some activists refuse to call themselves feminists or activists who are independent of the transnational organizational movement. These Syrian activists prove their presence both on social media and in the Syrian political space through daily and straightforward actions, thereby changing the Syrian feminist scene every day.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

This thesis attempts, through ethnographic research, to examine the development of political identities and subjectivities among Syrian women activists who participated in the 2011 revolution in Syria and how they became political actors in different contexts, from authoritarianism to revolution, war, and exile.

Through the narratives of fifteen Syrian women, this thesis shows that the revolution did not only take place on a political level but was also a profound transformation on a personal, social, and emotional level.

The regime's violence and its staying in power despite all the protests, the militarization of the revolution, and the rise of Islamic factions have held back democratic developments in Syria, but the personal and collective transformations brought about by the revolution are undeniable. The women interviewed described the revolution as a "rebirth," a moment in which they redefined themselves and their identities as they discovered their capacity for action. They also recounted

how they rebuilt communities based on solidarity and revolutionary values such as justice, solidarity, and freedom.

Exile added new complexities to these women's journeys. While displacement led to the fragmentation of identities and feelings of loss, alienation, and nostalgia for the past, it also provided opportunities for new identities to emerge and opened doors to new work, discussions, and reflections on Syrian women's and feminist issues. Activists in exile have continued their work, maintaining hope for social and political change.

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