COMMUNICATING HISTORY:

THE MNEMONIC BATTLES OF THE 2011 ARAB UPRISINGS

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation explores how history has been communicated during the 2011 Arab uprisings and their aftermath (2011-2015). It is a study about the struggle for finding a historically-grounded revolutionary narrative for an assumed Arab body politic that is torn apart by multiple political forces. I analyze popular communicative practices that invoke history and argue that they have played a crucial role in propagating a narrative that portrayed the uprisings as a collective Arab revolution and awakening. The strategic claim that protestors were making history, I suggest, paved the way for expressing hopes about the future through invoking past history. From 2011 to 2015 in the Arab world, contentious debates about politics were often expressed through a language and a symbolism about history. These controversies were projected towards specific symbols and tropes, which evoked condensed cultural meanings, and which became subsequently used to communicate political aspirations and to assert power in the present and onto the future. In this dissertation, I analyze four case-studies that demonstrate the centrality of collective memory in articulations of identity and politics in the contemporary Arab world.

Through a historically-cognizant approach, I suggest that many of the political controversies in the period under study in the Arab world represent mnemonic battles about the past and the future, which echo a political repertoire from the era of the Arab Nahda (awakening), the cultural and political movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when ideas about modernity and nationalism were first theorized and

popularized in the Arab region. I contend that since the Nahda, a desire to make a new future history has been contrasted with a forked past history, one to be discarded as deviant, and another to be resurrected as originary. This conceptualization of history has dominated modern political and cultural expressions of collective aspirations in the Arab world. My dissertation explores how communicative practices during the 2011 uprisings and their aftermath echoed and provided new iterations of this conception of history and how that exploded in battles, literally and metaphorically.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Chapter II

Chapter III

Chapter IV

Chapter V

(On the prelude to the French revolution) "In no period do we… find a more confused mixture of high-flown phrases and actual uncertainty and clumsiness, of more enthusiastic striving for innovation and more deeply rooted domination of the old routine, of more apparent harmony of the whole society and more profound estrangement of its elements." (Marx, [1867] 1962, p. 326-327)[1]

"For to make sense of our lives from where we are, as it were, stranded in the middle, we need fictions of beginnings and fictions of ends, fictions which unite beginning and end and endow the interval between them with meaning." (Kermode, 1967/ 2000, p. 190).

Introduction

The political upheaval that began with peaceful and popular protests late 2010/ early 2011 in the Arab region has set in motion political changes at a scale unseen since the turn of the 20th century. The turmoil, which played out across no fewer than nine Arab countries, has led to climactic changes in the Middle East, sweeping authoritarian regimes out of power, instigating foreign military interventions, setting in motion devastating civil wars, changing effective borders of countries, empowering armed groups, and killing and displacing millions of people. Since 2010, the region has gone through cycles of hope and despair in envisioning and practicing new kinds of politics that seek to oust decades of authoritarian rule. The political narrative, known as the "Arab Spring" or the "Arab uprisings" begins in Tunisia on December 17, 2010 with the self-immolation of Mohammad Bouazizi, a fresh produce vendor in the town of Sidi Bouzid who set himself on fire in a public square after a policewoman allegedly humiliated him and confiscated his wares. His act of self-sacrifice is said to have triggered protests across

[1] As quoted in White, H. V. (1973). *Metahistory: the historical imagination in nineteenth-century Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Tunisia, eventually resulting in the ousting of Zine El-Abedine Ben Ali, the country's dictator of 24 years, and inspiring people across Arab countries to mobilize via social media and call for the downfall of their own dictatorial regimes. Considered uncritically, the initial pan-Arab revolutionary narrative that inspired millions of young Arabs to risk and sacrifice their lives for a better collective future obscures the complexity of the uprisings and their dramatic political, economic, and security outcomes as assessed in 2015. However, it does so strategically.

In examining communicative practices during the uprisings, it becomes apparent that the concept of history has been key to that narrative of Arab revolution, awakening, uprising, or spring. Describing the Tunisian revolution as historic turned it into a political opportunity for activists across half a dozen countries. History became a fundamental manifestation of how the complexity of geopolitical and economic factors of different countries was flattened in the production of a unified story of an Arab revolution. My dissertation focuses on the place of history, as a narrative trope, in political mobilization. My central research question is: how did communicative practices during the 2011 Arab uprisings and their aftermath reflect and shape understandings of history? And how did they impact politics? Through engaging with these questions, I explore how and why history was mobilized for revolutionary action. I focus on communicative practices that demonstrate the centrality of shifting the meanings of history in order to construct a fresh past that corresponds to a new desired future. The flip side of my approach is to analyze how the sought-after future influences understandings of the collective past. Within this framework, revolutionary action entails a transformation of understandings of collective

past narratives— one that differentiates itself from authoritarian usages of history and invents a new usable past. The intention is to promise a new future and to justify the immense sacrifices in people's lives and livelihoods needed to bring about that future.

I argue that the understandings of history during the 2011 Arab uprisings have been dominated by a discursive binary that posits Arab decline and backwardness against progress and advancement. During the 2011 uprisings, the initial defining reaction of activists and intellectuals was to recreate that conception of history through the discursive temporal erasure of authoritarian regimes and the invocation of originary times in Arab culture and history. In strategically claiming that the uprisings are historic and that the revolutionaries are making history, there was an implication that they shall finally achieve that progress promised since the times of the Nahda, the cultural-political movement known as the "awakening" in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The "awakening" movement relied on a historiography that saw Arab decline under the rule of the Ottoman Empire (ruled the Arab Middle East roughly from the early 16th to the early 20th centuries) and that promised a future in which the Arab body politic shall rise and wake up and achieve an autochthonous modernity.

In 2011 discourses, the binary between decline (now deemed as the result of Arab postcolonial dictatorships), and a promised future, again dominated expressions of collective aspirations. There emerged in Arab discourse a forked consciousness of Arab history: one that invoked unfulfilled historical time (See Al-Jabri, 1991, Sabry, 2013), the time of the wished-for Arab modernity, and contrasted and pitted it against the experienced history of Arab authoritarianism. The fork in the path of Arab linear

progression is imagined as when history took a wrong turn from an orignary point when Arab culture was fulfilling its "historic" role. In other words, to use Koselleck's (1979/ 2004) terms, "the time of experience" in Arab history was contrasted with "the horizon of expectation" of an Arab future, which has been repeatedly invoked since the Nahda. The Arab uprisings were initially hoped to be a revolution that would collapse the distance between a utopian past and future. The uprisings were said to have achieved congruence between what was supposed to have happened, a situation of popular self-determination and home-grown modernity, and what is happening at the moment of protest, which was (hoped to be) a revolution against forms of rule that prevented the previous imagined history from actually occurring. The use of history brings out the latent memory of unfulfilled hopes of modernity to collective consciousness in public discourse. Today's memory of desired history is what was supposed to happen but never did and therefore it needs to be produced, invoked and represented. It is also used in narratives of blame over national failures and of hope in aspiring to new futurity.

My interest in revolutionary action is in its dual claim of acting upon the interests of an already established collectivity, while promising new beginnings and navigating uncharted political horizons. I am arguing that political actors during the Arab uprisings communicated their actions in accordance with the Hegelian conception of the place of action within historical movement. Applied to collective identity, a dialectical approach posits that expressions of shared understanding of past history are necessary for formulating group political identity and commitment. At the same time, in order to maintain group cohesion, political actors seek to formulate new expressions of self-

understanding that break away from the past to correspond to their present circumstances. Said differently, acts of remembrance of group affiliation necessarily entail forgetting. As Taylor (2010) suggests in explaining the Hegelian conception of action, the gap between the two undertakings, that of claiming to pursue one aspect of history, while breaking away from another, is the historical contradiction that moves us on (p. 32). That gap widens in revolutionary times when political actors assert a common identity and thrust themselves into collective action against an existing order based upon a consciousness of the ontological link between their action and the purpose animating it (See Taylor, 2010).

Several cultural theorists have reflected on this relation of sharp division between collective pasts and new beginnings. Bhabha (1994) speaks of the "double-time" in how the notion of "the people" is construed as the historical object of a nationalist pedagogy, "giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin or event" and, at the same time, the people are the subjects "of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people" (p. 145). Massad (2001) describes the tension between diachronic and synchronic temporalities in nation-building. For his part, Laclau (2005) argues that the notion of "the people" presents two faces, "one of rupture with an existing order; the other introducing ordering where there is basic dislocation" (p. 122). As popular identity needs to be condensed around certain signifiers (such as images and words), Laclau suggests that the meanings projected on them reflect an inherent tension in representing old and new, and universal and particular, facets of collective identity. In times of political crisis, he adds,

the symbolic system is overwhelmed by the 'floating' dimension of collective signifiers, whose meanings erode in the contradictions of the signification (p. 132).

Accordingly, in a revolutionary context characterized by a collapse of hegemonic systems of meaning-making in the Arab world, my dissertation analyzes communicative practices and actions that use history as a battleground of meanings. Writing in 2015 about ongoing political turmoil, which began four years earlier, it is difficult to predict the future legacy of this regional tectonic change. For this reason, it is crucial to historicize and analyze the communicative practices of Arab political actors. Conceptualizations of history and their entanglement with understandings of peoplehood and realities of nation-state sovereignty have marked the political culture of the Arab uprisings. Political and communicative practices are not only expressions of underlying realities because they also reconstitute society and politics (Hunt, 1984, p. 12). Accordingly, my focus on these practices as they relate to history captures a liminal stage of meaning making between residual and emergent politics, to use Williams' (1977) terms.

Applying a collective memory approach, my dissertation analyzes the attempts to reformulate a relation between past history and new futurity. During the uprisings, the initial communicative practice that enabled temporal notions of revolution is the description of the uprisings as historic. Opposition activists and politicians from countries as different as Egypt and Bahrain strategically claimed that they are protesting as part of a regional wave of history-making. The dominant narrative about the 2011 uprisings discusses a regional shift from decades of stagnant autocracy to a sudden burst of popular

revolts that is said to have returned Arabs to history; and returned them to urgently thinking about what history means. There was a rhetorical mirroring between the meanings of "history" and "revolution." Both were construed as "a means of strengthening the will to hurry the advent" of the planned and sought future (Koselleck, 1979/ 2004, p. 199). Arab activists and their supporters used the trope of the historic as a rhetorical tool to portray their action as durable and bound for success and to take advantage of the political opportunity represented by the success of the initial protests in Tunisia in December 2010.

Indeed, the 2011 protests seemed historic to observers and participants. It is important to note that the idea that thousands of Tunisians and Egyptians could protest for a few weeks and succeed in ousting their autocratic rulers was "unthinkable" before 2011. The notion that people living under brutal authoritarian regimes, such as in Syria or Libya, or conservative Islamic monarchies, such as Bahrain, would take to the streets in a pan-Arab protest movement was also unthinkable. By "unthinkable," I mean an idea that has been systematically excluded from political discourse (Lustick, 1993, p. 55). When the unthinkable protests took place, the masses were said to have mounted the stage of history (See Badiou, 2012).

The description of the uprisings as historic played a crucial role in creating momentum that expanded the protest movement. Its rhetorical implication is that the uprisings' supporters are making history, while the protests' opponents are risking remaining outside of history. In a typical example of the rhetorical use of what is best referred to as the temporality of the historic, the Lebanese-French author, Amin Ma'aluf,

voiced support for the uprisings in an interview in April 2011 (Al-Salhi, 2011) by describing them as:

> a renaissance of freedoms and demands for democracy, an audacious act that we have been waiting for since our youth… There is a birth of a new Arab world that has its place and role in the world. We were in a coma and we just woke up.

His statement captures the extent of the hope projected on the uprisings as a historic event to awaken "us"—the Arab body politic— from political stagnancy. In much of the initial Arab (and global) discourses, protestors claimed to enact a long-overdue revolution or an awakening. The notion of awakening deflects interest away from the immediate political context prior to 2011 by implying that the Arab body politic had been asleep. It simultaneously portrays the uprisings as a new wave of revolutionary politics connected to more remote pasts deemed as reflective of an Arab political agency. For example, Ma'aluf's statement portrays the present as a promise of a bright future that reveals, and changes, the stagnancy of the past. It also implies that the Arabs represent the political community that shares a collective historic narrative in the past and the future. While this conception of revolutionary temporality is typical of modern political action, my dissertation considers the politics of its reiteration during the 2011 Arab uprisings.

My contention, as mentioned, is that the relation between the past and future in the 2011 Arab uprisings as expressed through communicative practices has echoed an Arab temporal understanding of revolution, initially deployed during the Arab Nahda of the 19th century. History, as used in the contemporary Arab world, continues to be inspired by the 18th century European Enlightenment principles about a linear path of

human development and progression. Progressionism is a brainchild of the Enlightenment and a hallmark of modernity (Zerubavel, 2003). In the Arab context, the trope of the historic reflects and contributes to the Arab desire for modernity and Western-inspired achievement of history. It implicitly signifies that history is a temporal progression that leads to a desired political goal. In terms of temporality, the Enlightenment, as articulated by Kant, is interested in the question "what difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday?" (Foucault, 1984, p. 33). Within this framework, revolution is when the present is tasked with making most difference. In the words of Arendt (1977), the modern concept of revolution is "inextricably bound up with the notion that the course of history suddenly begins anew" (p. 28). Modern revolution involves telling a new story, which is typically about a restoration "of an old order of things that had been disturbed and violated by the despotism of absolute monarchy or the abuses of colonial government" (p. 44). Revolutionaries often plead that they want "to revolve back to old times when things had been as they ought to be" (p. 44). Here, I do not intend to reference the debate whether the Arab uprisings constitute revolutions, civil wars, or counter revolutions. Rather, my claim is that the uprisings have been communicated through a telos of modern revolution, evidenced by their popular description as being historic and as making new history. As Badiou (2012) contends, a riot becomes historical when it carries "the promise of a new, long-term temporality… when, finally, the negative growling of pure rebellion is succeeded by the assertion of a shared (future) demand" (p. 35). This was the case for the "historic" Arab uprisings.

Celebrations of an Arab awakening and revolution have dominated public discourse in 2011. In news media, respected commentators voiced support for the uprisings and hailed the 'Arab awakening.' Lebanese author Elias Khury (2011) wrote, in a column published in the London-based pan-Arab daily *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, that "the new century has started in the Arab world on 2011. The Arabs were delayed for a decade but their start was startling and surprising." Articles with headlines such as "Finally… the Arabs return to history" (Muqalid, 2011) published in Saudi *Al-Hayat*, "the Grand Arab Revolution" (Jalabi, 2011) in the Emirati paper *Al-Itihad*, and "Will the Arab sun rise from Tunisia" (Lecrini, 2011) in the Moroccan *Al-Massa'*, portrayed the uprisings as a long-aspired-for single epic event. News bulletins on Arab networks, such as Qatari *Al-Jazeera*, typically featured in-depth coverage and split screens carrying simultaneous live coverage of protests from multiple Arab cities. They were preceded by short promotional video clips (promos) making explicit linkages between the uprisings as, for example, a two-minute clip that showed snippets from televised speeches by the ousted leaders of Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya with the background of the slogans chanted in protests ("adel," 2011). Another promo featured a famous Arab nationalist song by the late Egyptian diva, Um Kulthum, entitled "I am the people," while showing footage from protests ("Abdullah," 2013). The same applies to online sources. News sites offered interactive maps of the Arab world that enabled readers to access news of different Arab protests seemingly as part of a single news story. For several months following the Egyptian uprising, *Al-Jazeera*'s main page featured an interactive map of the Arab world under the title "the spring of the Arab revolutions." Users were able to click on the map of every

Arab country to see the updates about protests or political reforms. As I will discuss later, these themes abounded also in protest slogans, chants, public art, and social media.

Though much of this public discourse reverberated transnationally within the region, the shared demands of the Arab uprisings have been articulated within nation-states. My focus on invocations of history can only be understood in relation to notions of peoplehood and territory within Arab postcolonial nation-states. That said, the tension between a repertoire conceived for nation-states but used transnationally across Arab countries is at the heart of what explains the story of the Arab uprisings. As Hardt and Negri (2000) argue, "although "the people" is posed as the basis of the nation, the modern conception of the people is in fact a product of the nation-state, and survives only within its specific ideological context" (p.102). During the uprisings, this complexity can be traced in the resounding and most fundamental slogan of the protests, which is "the people want the fall of the regime" (Arabic: *Al-Sha'b yurid isqat al-nitham*), as the protestors chanted in Arab streets from Benghazi in Libya to Manama in Bahrain. The slogan is a rendition of the Tunisian national anthem, which is based on the poetry of Tunisian Nahda-era poet, Aboul-Qacem Echebbi (1909-1934). The slogan was first used in Tunisia and later became the main slogan for protestors' in Cairo's Tahrir Square. It also sparked the Syrian protests when authorities detained teenagers who had written it as graffiti on a school wall in a southern Syrian town. While *al-nitham* (the regime) was known to be the authoritarian ruling establishment, and the political and economic system it set in place, the question that endured is: who is *al-sha'b* (the people)?

As with the definition of nation, "the people" is a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths, historical memories and a mass public culture (Smith, 1999, p. 11). The question here is: how did history get mobilized in mass public culture to consolidate and define "the people"? In parallel to the urgent mobilization of "the people" in the streets, there has been a mobilization of "the people" in temporal narratives. Mobilization connotes a physical concentration of participants in space and time (Gerbaudo, 2012). Similarly, rhetorical mobilization comprises the strategic concentration of nationalist and cultural symbols to persuade publics that a political project represents them and that they should take risks in its actualization. Accordingly, mobilization also occurs through the condensation of desperate symbols of history in service of the collective's shared demand. It is no surprise then that Arab public culture exploded in celebration of history from ancient to modern times.

Part of this mobilization is to claim that the revolutionary moment represents history in the making and that there is a past history which needs to be resurrected as a model for the anticipated future— what I am referring to as orignary times. In the Arab uprisings, dictatorship was initially designated as the object, the removal of which achieves history. In anchoring discourse in times prior to Arab regimes, dissidents engaged in communicative practices that ousted these regimes out of national memory in parallel to the demands to abolish Arab dictatorial rule. I refer to these practices as temporal erasure, by which I mean the practice of how activists and political actors anchored their political demands within historical narratives and symbols that precede the current dictatorial regimes. In 2011 Arab discourse, there has been a surge in invocations

of eclectic historic symbols about particular nation-states, or the region as a whole, which were plucked out of different eras of history. For example, as the protests began in Libya in February 2011, protestors carried the flag of the country prior to the rule of Mu'ammar Al-Qadhafi (in office 1969-2011). Anticolonial figures, such as the national hero Omar Al-Mukhtar (the focus of chapter IV), were chosen as the primary symbols in the repertoire of collective action. In Syria, whose uprising began in March 2011, protestors also carried the flag prior to the rule of the Ba'th party (the theme of chapter III). In public culture, the pre-Al-Assad past was a strategic source of inspiration. For example, this was reflected in the thematic names given by the anti-Al-Assad movement to the days, typically Fridays, when protests were organized, such as Friday June 17, 2011 named as "the Friday of Sheikh Saleh Al-Ali" (an anticolonial hero) or July 22, 2011 named "the Friday of the grandsons of Khaled," in reference to the Arabian Muslim conqueror of Byzantine Syria, Khaled Ibn Al-Walid. In this case, while secular-minded Syrians are represented by the historic symbol of Saleh Al-Ali, an anticolonial hero of the Alawite community, many interpret Khaled Ibn Al-Walid as a more Islamic political symbol.

Communicative mobilization then involves a mnemonic regime. In order to mobilize for collective action, activists and supporters of the Arab protest movements projected a mnemonic designation, basically a conception of what to remember and what to forget, across time. While seeking to forcefully forget and oust Arab dictatorships, Arab dissidents prospectively invoked symbols of history that they thought should be remembered. Building on Zelizer (1998, 2008) and Tennenbaum-Wienblatt's (2014)

approach to mediated futurity, these rhetorical tactics can be understood as prospective forgetting and remembering, which are deployed to persuade the public to eliminate a political actor out of the present and the future. This can also be described through the notion of "retrospective futurity" by which I mean the invocation of a future that corresponds to a past that ought to be. For example, in Chapter V, I explain how the memory of medieval Muslim-ruled Spain, Al-Andalus, was invoked as a site of retrospective futurity, as a desired future that corresponds to an imagined past.

In 2011 Arab protest discourses, these mnemonic tactics have been contingent on political actors' designation of political community. For example, tactics that link current political expressions to the 1950s, which saw the rise of Arab nationalist ideologies, gesture towards a time when a secular Arab nation was the political community at the center of temporal narratives. Proponents of Islamic governance typically focus their historic references on the rise of Islam in the 7th century under the leadership of Prophet Mohammad in order to persuade people to think of themselves as part of a Muslim community, which should be the imagined collectivity in historic narratives (Anderson, 1982). By focusing on certain historic eras as sources of political inspiration, political actors communicate a mnemonic framework that remembers a certain history and seeks to forget others. In other words, there are multiple objects of prospective memory and retrospective futurity that are determined by political affiliation. In protest discourses, history was mobilized by summoning symbols of originary moments in the past, such as the above mentioned examples of 7th century Arabia or 1950s Egypt. History is used to

evoke originary points in time, which are imagined as authentic starting points of a collective temporal trajectory.

Needless to say, public contention has resulted from the multiplicity of clashing temporal narratives and the incongruence between the concepts of peoplehood and history— not least because these conceptions were used to connote discordant political spaces and communities within and across nation-states. During the uprisings, Arab dissidents reclaimed the concept of "the people," which like the concept of nation, "promotes stasis and restoration in the hands of the dominant" but serves as "a weapon for change and revolution in the hands of the subordinated" (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p.106). Concerning the situation in the Arab world, it is useful to make a distinction between the period roughly lasting from December 2010 to December 2011, which was characterized by revolutionary fervor and mobilization against dictatorial rulers, and the year 2012 to 2015, which was characterized by divisions amongst multiple political actors. While initially history was mobilized in the fight against dictators and was used for the persuasion of others to join the revolution. History soon became a divisive trope, often used for coercion against political actors. By 2015, militant Islamist organizations, not least the Islamic State organization, focused their propaganda efforts on portraying itself as carrying on the legacy of early Islam and implementing the historically-accurate interpretations of the Quran.

Following the first year of the uprisings then, it became clear that the difficulty of defining "the people" and its history is mired in the legacies of the postcolonial nation-state and of authoritarian rule. The crisis of the nation-state turned the symbols and tropes

about history mobilized in the 2011 uprisings to sites of intense public debate over the way they represent (if at all) the people. The post-2011 controversies about what history to remember is what I am referring to as "the mnemonic battles of the Arab uprisings." Discussions anchored within originary periods signal the tactics of temporal erasure that seek to discursively eliminate ensuing events or periods in time that are thought to have taken a wrong turn, 'a detour' (See Agha and Malley, 2012). The notion of mnemonic battles (Zerubavel, 1996) captures the contentious politics and discursive struggles over prospective remembering and forgetting. While the invocation of history is a necessary condition and an indispensable tool for collective mobilization, the act of liberating history from the grip of authoritarian control has exposed the fragility of collective past narratives. As Ouyang argues (2013, p. vi) in her analysis of the deployment of nostalgia in the Arabic novel:

> Interrogation of the past is synonymous with the search for the future. There is, however, a dear price to be paid for always resorting to the past, to the language of the past, to express the desire for the future and map the trajectory of modernization (of the Arab nation-state).

That price is the instability of the nation-state and notions of collectivity. Indeed, the contestation of symbols and sites of collective memory (Nora, 1997) reflected and contributed to the deep divisions within national and transnational political communities. This study explores symbols of history that carried the burden of representing "the people" in the Arab uprisings, how they inspired political actors in times of revolution and transformation, and how they were subjected to intense debate on Arab media and in

public discourse. In the next sections, I elaborate on how my focus on communicative practices relates to the Arab context, and how my study of the Arab postcolonial and authoritarian context relates to the study of collective memory.

History and modernity in the Arab world

I suggest that an analytic approach focused on communicative practices and public culture reveals that the uprisings have invigorated questions about formations of Arab collective identity, modernity, and history— echoing a repertoire that dominated the era of the Arab Nahda. As Hanssen (2013) has argued the Nahda is "a kind of Archimedean point on which Arab modernity rests precariously" (p. 55). The Nahda was a pan-Arab intellectual movement, centered in major Ottoman and Arab cities such as Beirut, Damascus, Aleppo and Cairo in the late 19th to early 20th centuries, which sought an Arab "awakening" through the rejuvenation of Arabic language, culture, and nationalism (See Antonius, 1946, Hourani 1962). The Nahda is usually referred to as the Arab renaissance. The word literally means "awakening" or "rising up," actions attributed to the Arab body politic. Since the time of the Nahda, tensions of identity and governance expressed through contention over Islamic collectivity, pan-regional and country-specific nationalisms have characterized intellectual debates and public culture in the Arab world. Arab thinkers have been theorizing autochthonous culture and reconciling these conceptions with their understanding of modernization for more than a century. There is a long modern history then, one that precedes colonialism and the postcolonial state, in which Arab intellectuals have asked the question of who "we" are and where are "we" going. These questions have dominated the post-2011 Arab revolutionary public sphere.

Subsequently, this dissertation contributes to understanding contemporary debates around Arab modernity and identity by focusing on public culture— in contrast to the majority of scholarship on the subject, approached from fields such as intellectual history or literary studies. My dissertation engages with Arab politics by building on scholarly approaches that focus on public culture and media whether contemporary (See Wedeen, 1999, Abu-Lughod, 2005, Hirshkind, 2006, Kraidy, 2010, Sabry, 2010, Bayat, 2013) or historic (See Watenpaugh 2006, Fahmy, 2011). In this section, I argue that the study of Arab conceptions of history must be inextricably linked to Arab politics. Contemporary political aspirations that are expressed through the past and the future should be historicized and connected to the study of politics.

Through my focus on how history has been communicated since 2011, my dissertation highlights how contemporary Arab understandings of history, and the Arabs' place in it, echoes an Enlightenment temporal regime, which was Arabized during the Nahda. The Nahda temporal binary of a past decline and a promising future of progress lives on through national symbols and rhetorical tropes that were mobilized during the 2011 uprisings. Hanssen (2013) argues that two schools of thought have dominated the historiography of the Nahda, one posits it as a pivotal moment of a still incomplete historical project and another pessimistic approach that considers that its noble spirit has been "betrayed by the spread of radical ideologies, nativism, and Islamism since the 1940s" (p. 61). My dissertation is not about the historiography of the Nahda. I am arguing that this debate on the legacy of the Nahda benefits from analyzing the myriad discussions and practices, from various political positions, that continue to invoke ideas

about collective awakenings, new histories, and forgotten pasts. Against the backdrop of the uprisings, I argue that current debates about history capture the struggle over meanings of modernity at a time of a general breakdown of the previously hegemonic intellectual and cultural order established by Arab regimes. The resonance of questions about modernity is evidenced by the anchoring of discourse in originary moments in history that help articulate ideas deemed necessary for, and faithful to, any conceptualization of Arab-Islamic contemporary collectivity.

Following the 2011 uprisings, Dabashi (2012) has made the argument that the Arab protests mark the end of postcolonialism. As open-ended, self-referential, cosmopolitan and post-ideological protests, he contends, the Arab uprisings indicate that the epistemic condition of coloniality "has finally exhausted itself" (p. 11). Dabashi elaborates that postcoloniality refers to the ideological formations that have confronted European colonialism and shaped the modern postcolonial nation-states, primarily anticolonial nationalism, Islamism, and third world socialism (p. 139). While I think it is difficult to predict the lasting legacy of the uprisings in 2015, I am arguing that a focus on the communicative practices of the uprisings reveals the resonance of a temporal schema with its roots in the Arab Nahda about a break with the immediate past, which represents an obstacle to progress, and a promise of a new future.

Arab political actors' reengagement with symbols of modernity is not surprising. Parallel engagements have occurred in different 20th century revolutions and uprisings across the world, whether 1956 Hungary or 1989 China. The reasons for the revolutionary action and the calls for the fall of regimes in the first place are due to these

regimes' failure in implementing promises of modernization. In the Arab world, notions about 'modernness' are pressing because of the perceptions of repeated failures in institutionalizing formations of collective identity and in modernizing the economic and political systems in sustainable ways. By examining contemporary Arab discourses that imagine the uprisings as historic and long overdue, and in which a pastiche of symbols from various periods of history is used, my project complicates simplistic schisms that conceive of politics and culture in the dichotomies of the modern and postmodern, precolonial and postcolonial. Rather, it highlights a continuous history of Arab quests for modernity. As Hourani (1962) has written in the introduction to his canonic intellectual history of the modern Arab world, a full of definition of the "Arab nation" would include "a reference to a historic process: to a certain episode in history in which Arabs played a leading part, which was important not only for them but for the whole world, and in virtue of which indeed they could claim to have been *something* in human history" (p. 1). Hourani's comment captures the (enduring) project of finding a past in order to use it as a launching pad for the future.

The most central polemic that dominated how modernity has been theorized in the Arab world is through the dual question, who are "we," that is the collective unit to be projected onto temporal progression, and why are we "backward," a reference to comparative European advancement. It is beyond the scope of my dissertation to offer a detailed history of modern Arab intellectual engagement with ideas about the collective past. However, I will discuss the major recent Arab cultural scholarly work to demonstrate the scope and breadth of engagement with that dual question. The starting

point of most scholars has been to think about "our" past. For example, Syrian historian Constantine Zurayq dedicated his career to theorizing the Arab past and future in books such as *The Future and us* (1977) and *History and us* (1985), in which he addressed how "our Arab society" must prepare for the future (p. 12). The Syrian poet Adonis (1974), has discussed the history of Arab culture in terms of an ongoing struggle between conceptions of *The constant and the changing*— the title of his book, in which he identifies the past as stagnant against another desirable and variable past, which is more of an Arab repressed memory that can be resurrected as a model for the future (Ouyang, 2013). Moroccan theorist Mohammad Abed Al-Jabri, one of the most prolific Arab writers on the issue of modernity, wrote several books on the subject including *Turath and us* (1980) and *Turath and modernity* (1991), in which he defines *turath* (usually translated as heritage) as "the presence of the past in the present" (p.24). Al-Jabri adds that turath is not only the living legacy of what was in Arab culture but also "what should have been" (p. 24). This notion of the past that "should have been" is what I am referring to, following Sabry (2013), as unfulfilled historical time, which I will elaborate on in the next section. In *The formation of the Arab mind* (Arabic: Takwin al-aql al-arabi) (1982), Al-Jabri defines the Arab "'aql" or mind as Arab thought "which carries with it the history of Arab civilization and reflects or conveys it as well as their aspirations for the future" (p. 6). Many criticized Al-Jabri's often tautological arguments, which echo nationalist historiographies that basically suggest that "we" share collective identity because we share a past and we share a past because "we" have a collective identity. Syrian critic George Tarabishi (1996) criticized Al-Jabri's approach and accused him of

obsessively using Western theories while claiming a uniqueness of Arab thought. There were also two regional conferences, which convened the most prominent Arab intellectuals, to discuss the issue of Arab progress and/or regression. In Kuwait, a 1974 conference was entitled "the crisis of civilizational development in the Arab homeland" and a decade later in Cairo in 1984 another conference was held under the name "heritage and the challenges of the age in the Arab homeland" (See Kassab, 2010).

Within these debates, there emerged calls for historicizing the Arab relation with the past rather than taking for granted the temporal unity of an Arab collectivity. The two most influential within this approach are Moroccan historian Abdallah Laroui and Mahdi Amel, a Lebanese Marxist philosopher. Amel reacted harshly to the aforementioned 1974 conference in Kuwait about the Arab "civilizational" problem. His book, *The crisis of the Arab civilization or the crisis of the Arab bourgeoisie?* (1974), criticizes the essentialist positions about Arab culture discussed during the conference. He argues that the problem is in conceiving collectivity through "the Hegelian approach to the movement of history, in which the disjunctures and leaps of history don't matter because the same self is moving through time" (p. 49). Amel posits that the history that matters in Arab countries "does not start with Islam, or with the Abbasid, Umayyad or Andalusian eras or with the age of decline… but with the (Western) imperialist expansion in the second half of the 19th century," which, according to him, is the era that changed the modes of production in society (p. 23). Though Amel neglects the question of culture, his analysis is firmly and consciously positioned in the present looking at the past, rather than the other way around like many other Arab theorists. Laroui, also writing in 1974, calls on Arab intellectuals

"to espouse and propagandize an 'historicist' rationale" (p. ix) because without historicist consciousness, the mentality of evolution and retardation of the essentialized self may cannibalize politics.[2]

A more recent engagement with these questions came from intellectual historian Joseph Massad. In his Book *Desiring Arabs,* Massad (2007) posits that Arab intellectuals of the Nahda in the 19th century failed to question "recently invented European notions of "civilization" and "culture" and their commensurate insertion in a social Darwinist idiom of "evolution," "progress," "advancement," "development," "degeneration," and most important, "decadence," and "renaissance" (p. 5). He adds that a lasting "developmentalist temporal schema whose telos is assimilation into Europe" (p. 16) has continued to influence Arab cultural production throughout the 20th century. He supports the view that notions of cultural backwardness gained prominence particularly following the resounding defeat of Arab armies in the 1967 war against Israel. Massad dismisses decades of Arab intellectual discussions about modernity and progress/ backwardness as failing to take account of international capital and as a commitment to an evolutionary temporal perspective. He adds that "what is needed" is a view in line with Theodor Adorno and Max Horheimer's view of Enlightenment as myth outside the dualism of *turath* (Arabic for heritage or the enduring past) and modernity (p. 29).

My focus on communicative practices in the 2011 uprisings reveals that in public discourse, popular culture, and media, questions about Arab progress and backwardness,

[2] Here it bears mentioning that there is also an anti-essentialist and humanist approach to understanding history represented by the work of the late Edward Said. However, as Sabry (2010) points out, Said's work "never found the same resonance or reception in the Arab intellectual scene as work that is embedded in essentialist ideologies of cultural unity" (p. 33).

modernity, collective awakening, and the Arab position in history continue to dominate public imagination and expressions. I am not disagreeing with Massad's critique of Arab and Western cultural theorists' failure to recognize the mythic foundations of the Enlightenment and its developmentalist temporal structure. Rather, I am suggesting that the debate on temporality is not only happening at an intellectual and theoretical level. It is an important factor within the ways Arabs today conceive of their political agency and understand their political culture. The judgement, on whether the binary between backwardness and progress, or the sharp division between a new future and a discarded past, is needed or not, misses the opportunity to engage with these binaries and their impact on politics and society. Furthermore, if these commonly used and popular tropes about Arab modernity are to be dismissed as intentionally or inadvertently orientalist, as Massad's analysis suggests, then the concept of orientalism collapses under the weight it is being asked to sustain and the scope of discourse it is asked to describe. An approach that benefits from the fields of cultural studies and communication is key to open up a discussion that, as mentioned, has long been dominated by the fields of literature and intellectual history.

It is David Scott (2004, 2014) who has engaged with postcolonial temporal schema and the question of revolution most thoroughly. In his book *Conscripts of modernity: The tragedy of colonial enlightenment* (2004), he calls for a reinterpretation of C.L.R. James' classic history of the 1791–1804 Haitian Revolution in *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938). Building on the work of Hayden White (1973), Scott argues that anticolonial stories about the "past,

present, and future have typically been emplotted in a distinctive narrative form, one with a distinctive story-potential: that of Romance" (p. 7) with its promises of emancipated futures. He calls for the interpretation of anticolonial narratives not through romance but through the tragedy of colonial enlightenment, which is to be perceived "in terms of a permanent legacy that has set the conditions in which we make of ourselves what we make" rather than a flaw to be overcome (p. 21). Scott calls for historicizing *The Black Jacobins* in terms of how the future and its revolutionary possibilities appeared at the time. He casts doubt on the resonance of a discursive strategy that repeats a conceptualization of political change in terms of a "vindicationist narrative of liberation or a concept of revolution" (p. 65).

Scott's framework centers the Enlightenment as the source of the temporal emplottment of anticolonial/ postcolonial struggles— an approach that I am arguing is applicable to the revolutionary temporal schema of the Arab uprisings in 2011. However, while Scott calls for a reinterpretation of a scholarly work through its historicization, I am making the case that this Enlightenment telos cannot be ignored because its revolutionary temporality dominates popular communicative practices. In social scientific terms, if to Scott the desire for postcolonial enlightenment is a variable dependent on literary reinterpretation, I am suggesting that it can also be studied as an independent variable that contributes to amplifying the stakes of political action and contributes to a fractured political environment. The issue of whether this romantic narrative emplottment works against the aspirations of postcolonial revolutionaries, and in my case Arab activists, is a separate question. As Scott (2014) suggests in his second book about the novels that tell

the story of the "failed" Grenada revolution of 1983, agents act "in a field of potentially rival actions and in circumstances, in which they can, in the end, exercise only partial and unstable control" (p. 34). This focus on contextualized agency echoes the long debate launched by postcolonial literary scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) in her infamous question "can the subaltern speak?" which sparked a decades-long debate on power, representation, and agency within what became the subfield of Subaltern Studies. As Sabry (2010) contends, postcolonial scholarship has privileged postcolonial texts over studying the material conditions and realities "that govern and influence the lives of the 'real,' living breathing postcolonial subject" (p. 187). My focus on the communicative practices that invoke and contest notions about history places ideas and symbols from the Arab Nahda at the center of popular political expressions.

It is perhaps too early to tell the impact of the uprisings on Arab cultural theorization. However, a number of recent books have echoed reflections on Arab temporal progression such as the edited volume *Where are the Arabs going*? (2012) and Abu Yu'run Al-Marzouqi's *The Arabs' continuation of their universal history* (2012). In English-language scholarship, Zubaida (2012) has offered a historicized and historical account of the deployment of collective identity in Arab politics. From "the historical perspective of Middle East politics," Zubaida suggests that, with the decline of nationalist ideologies, Arab regimes' anxiety over losing power since the 1990s pushed them to aggressively revive pre-Nahda identities, such as those based on religious, sectarian, and tribal configurations, through government media, institutions and clientelist networks. These identities, he argues, were precisely what the modernizing Arabs from the 19th to

the mid-20th centuries sought to dispel (Zubaida, 2012, p. 572). Though Zubaida focuses on the case of Iraq and how its Sunni-Shi'a schism was exacerbated by the void in any common ideological orientation, his analysis, as he points out, contributes to understanding the political context of several Arab countries (mostly republics). In Libya, as I will discuss in Chapter IV, dictator of 42 years Mu'ammar Al-Qadhafi (in office 1969-2011), and despite his rhetorical focus on global anti-imperialism and Arab or African pan-regionalism, is known to have strengthened tribal and clan affiliations in divide-and-rule tactics. In Syria, while the ruling party, the *Ba'th*, meaning "ascendance," echoed Nahda themes about nationalism and cultural revival, it institutionalized social divisions, for example in the way parliamentary membership gave official and unofficial quotas to notable families, tribal leaders, and regional representatives.[3] The point is that many Arab dictators sought to consolidate their power through reviving identitarian configurations that prevent any pan-national or cross-class mobilization to occur and to challenge their authority. Accordingly, inherent in the initial rhetoric of Arab activists during the 2011 uprisings is the attempt to reclaim modernity and to mobilize across sect and class as a prelude to what was hoped to be a renewed push for modernization. Thus, the resurgence of Nahda symbolism cannot be understood without consideration of how those symbols were used by Arab dictatorial regimes and how the 2011 uprisings necessitated a reclaiming of Arab symbols of collectivity and modernity. As I will show, when anticolonial symbols, such as national heroes, were used in the uprisings, they

[3] The Palestinian-Israeli public intellectual Azmi Bshara has made this argument in an interview with *Al-Jazeera* (See "Intifada," 2011).

acquired new meanings and significations that have little to do with colonialism and more to do with authoritarianism.

While consolidating their power and acting upon divide-and-rule tactics, Arab authoritarian regimes have long claimed to be the enactment of the aspirations of the modernizing Arabs of the 19th century and the anticolonial activists of the early and mid-20th century. Postcolonial scholarship has highlighted how nationalist states deploy the legacy of colonialism in the governance of postcolonial countries. Fanon (1963) argues that the national bourgeoisie often continue the legacy of colonialism by taking over the same institutions, after independence, in order to suppress the majority of the people. At the institutional level, postcolonial scholarship interrogates the nationalism propagated by postcolonial regimes as a continuation of the colonial legacy. In the words of Bhabha (1994), Fanon is "far too aware of the dangers of the fixity and fetishism of identities within the calcification of colonial cultures to recommend the 'roots' be stuck in the celebratory romance of the past or by homogenizing the history of the present" (p. 9). Examining the case of Jordan, Massad (2001) argues that the postcolonial state institutions sustain the colonial legacy by using the same means of discipline and repression, such as colonial law and the military, in addition to state communication, to control "the time and space of the nation" and formulate their efforts as a project for consolidating a national identity "as that which has always *been*" (p. 4). The irony of this, Massad (2001) points out, is that the new national identity is presented as anticolonial agency, while, in fact, it is a continuation of colonial hegemony (p. 278). Therefore, the postcolonial state cannot be thought of as an end to colonial modes of rule. The

difference, at the communicative and symbolic levels, is that these postcolonial regimes in the Arab world continued colonial legacy in controlling their populations while using anticolonial symbols and language. This also sheds light on why during the 2011 uprisings, symbols of Arab modernity, whether precolonial or anticolonial, were recycled and reclaimed. The Arab understandings of their place in history, and their desires for a new future, have to be analyzed in conjunction with politics and political culture, rather than being limited to intellectual debates. In this next section, I will expand on how my approach relates to the study of collective memory.

Memory: authoritarianism and postcolonialism

In starting from the premise that understandings and imaginations of the past are collective and social phenomena, my dissertation is situated within collective memory studies. My approach is to focus on mnemonic practices that reshape and contest imaginations of the past and make of collective memory a whirling phenomenon that makes and unmakes political meanings out of history. The field of collective memory by definition conceives the past's position in the present as malleable, relative, processual, unstable, and contested (Zelizer, 1995, 1998) — and therefore the field readily lends itself to understanding varied cultural and political contexts. Nevertheless, societies have particular ways of bringing their pasts into their present depending on the context of the production and circulation of past narratives. As Hodgkin and Radstone (2006) argue "regimes of memory" are "produced by historically specific and contestable systems of knowledge and power" and "what history and memory produce as knowledge is also contingent upon the (contestable) systems of knowledge and power that produce them"

(p. 11). The field of collective memory has long-focused on and examined how the past is socially-constructed by groups, rooted in space, object, ritual and media, and used strategically in relation to collective social and political present and future needs (Zelizer, 1995, Schudson, 1995, Olick & Robbins, 1998, Kitch, 2005). The French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945) is considered the father of the field of collective memory. His major contribution is to distance memory from individual psychology by stressing how remembrance is shaped through social processes.

Traditionally, memory studies, particularly as approached from the field of communication, has mostly focused on Western and democratic contexts. By examining the case of the contemporary Arab world, I highlight how the uprisings against postcolonial authoritarian regimes have reignited quests for homegrown autochthonous modernities and exacerbated struggles of collective identity formations. Needless to say, this context affects memory regimes. Variables such as authoritarianism and postcolonialism disrupt the neat framework provided by theorists such as French historian Pierre Nora (1997), a seminal figure in memory studies. Nora's structured periodization of modernity and his focus on the French context, with its hegemonic historiography (in the sense of the centralized institutionalization of collective past narratives), is not a generalizable context.[4]

I argue that at times of crisis in systems of signification, as is the case in the Arab world since 2011, history and memory are conflated. By crisis, I mean the collapse of

[4] The concept of hegemony plays a key role within this framework. Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci's (1971/ 2012) concept of hegemony offers a productive framework to contextualize both history and memory, by showing that enquiries in both fields and the way the past is understood in general is dependent on the hegemonic ideas and imaginaries of a certain society in a given time and place.

hegemonic meaning-making processes. Zelizer (1995) argues that "history sometimes takes a chameleon-like role, taking on some of memory's characteristics" (p. 216). In the context of the Arab world, authoritarian control over past narratives has bred the instability of temporal regimes and led to the overflowing of memory in relation to history. The focus on authoritarianism highlights how history has been hijacked by regimes through enforcing and institutionalizing a historiography that acts as an authoritarian tool of discipline and control. As such, activists in 2011 sought to undo this authoritarian historiography through communicative practices that reengage with history and present alternative interpretations and renderings of historic narratives and symbols.

One of the most effective tactics in the 2011 uprisings has been to upset and challenge Arab regimes' dominance over narratives of the collective past. Throughout my dissertation, I discuss temporal erasure, as a tactic through which political actors rhetorically erased authoritarian regimes and their repertoire of symbolism. This is an attempt to forcefully forget life under Arab dictatorships and to gesture towards the desired future. As Cavalli (2006) notes, when a crucial event inflicts a community, it tends to discharge the past most recently preceding the event, since that past "must not hinder the path toward the actualization of the images of the future" and this is often accompanied by a reestablishment of a continuity with a more remote past (p. 172-173). Though Cavalli discusses "catastrophic events," his explanation is applicable to the Arab uprisings, which amount to more than one crucial event as they are an upheaval brought about by a series of collective actions. Authoritarianism represented an immediate past to

be discarded. Its erasure enabled the expression of future desires and the reconnection with originary times.

Of course, as Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983/ 2012) argue, states in general have a vested interest in "inventing traditions" and using history "as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion" (p. 12). This is what Zerubavel (1997) has described as a country's "master commemorative narrative" through which stories of the past are articulated in education curricula, memorials, tourism industry, archeology, national rituals and ceremonies, political speeches, literature, and art. Different states have different levels of institutionalizing their commemorative narratives. I am suggesting that in authoritarian states that narrative is enforced and is not seen as separate from state authority. As Trouillot (1995) argues "it is not that some societies distinguish between fiction and history and others do not" (p. 14). Rather, the difference is in the range of the narratives that collectivities discuss and imagine at a certain point in time (p. 14). In the Arab uprisings, with the loosening of Arab regimes' long-hegemonic discourses on history, the range of temporal narratives freely expressed in the public sphere significantly increased based on configurations of national belonging, ethnic, sectarian, and tribal identities, political and religious ideologies, and place origin. Stated differently, under authoritarian rule, there is a pretense of an excess of forgetting because officially and publically, only one version of the past may be expressed. However, at times of revolution, there is an excess of remembering because finally individuals and groups express different memories (See Ricoeur, 2006). In the latter scenario, the main object of forgetfulness is the immediate past of dictatorship. While in democracies the contestation

of the official state-sanctioned history is allowed, and counter understandings of history are represented in media and public life, and often institutionalized in governmental or non-governmental organizations, in authoritarian contexts, counter memories are prohibited from public expression. History is part of the coercive and violent tools to discipline people into accepting (or pretending to accept) a particular past narrative as a shared history. This often violent and coercive relation between peoples and dictatorships breeds collective memory and weakens the notion of a hegemonic history. As Chakrabarty (2000) contends, history is "a disciplined and institutionally regulated form of collective memory" (p. 43). Accordingly, the contestation of history in the Arab context is highly implicated in the mistrust of state institutions. In other words, the history propagated by Arab regimes is as enforced, and prone to contestation, as the authority of the regimes themselves. It is no surprise that historians, as Di-Capua (2009) discusses in the case of Egypt, are largely implicated, through their academic and public output, in furthering the authority of those in power. Di-Capua gives a historic account of how official historiography in Egypt has shifted dramatically depending on how authorities use past narratives to consolidate their power. Accordingly, in examining the contestation of past narratives at a moment of revolt during the Arab uprisings, my dissertation highlights how authoritarian regimes' policing of the remembered past has been challenged in remarkable ways.

In addition to authoritarianism, another variable that contributes to the destabilization of temporal regimes and the conflation of history and memory is colonialism and postcolonial rule. The return to originary times, which I argue

characterizes post-2011 Arab discourses, is due to a forked consciousness of Arab history that contrasts decline and progress and awaits the evolution of Arab modernity. As Prakash (1994) contends, a "sense of failure overwhelms the representation of the history" of India and postcolonial societies generally. "So much so that even contestatory projects … write off non-Western histories in terms of failed transitions" (p. 1485). Postcolonial historiography criticizes colonialism, Prakash (1990) argues, but "does not eliminate the teleological vision" (p. 396) that conceives the history of postcolonial nations in terms of lack and failure as if, in postcolonial contexts, history has failed "to keep an appointment with its own destiny" (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 31). In the words of Guha (1988, p. 43), postcolonial history:

> is the study of the historic failure of the nation to come to its own, a failure due to the inadequacy of the bourgeoisie as well as of the working class to lead it into a decisive victory over colonialism and a bourgeois-democratic revolution.

This postcolonial sense of failure is at the heart of how history is conflated with memory. It also explains the notion of unfulfilled historic time, which evokes the history that could have been. In the Arab world, that unfulfilled history is the one promised by Nahda intellectuals and poets and by anticolonial fighters and activists. This relation between past and future is what Scott (2004) terms the tragedy of postcolonial enlightenment, which makes the present appear atemporal. According to Scott, it is a tragedy because past pursuits, questions, and frameworks about temporality are repeated and recycled without historacization.

Historicization is key to the study of collective memory. Without offering a history of memory, studies of collective memory run the risk of portraying a group's present version of its past as a transtemporal identity separate from the contemporary politics that give it shape. For instance, Klein (2000) contends that one of the reasons for the field of collective memory's "sudden rise is that it promises to let us have our essentialism and deconstruct it too" (p. 144). Historicization allows for a wider perspective that acknowledges the ebbs and flows of memory formations. It brings to life the complex patterns of movements of ideas about memory, how they form, morph, mutate, lose their value, and get recycled and given new life. Each twist and turn of how past narratives are communicated depend on the group's vision of its contemporary interests. In my dissertation, I go beyond describing how the past is currently remembered through contextualizing memory within a history that explains the politics involved in the production and dissemination of past narratives and symbols. This also relates to the notion of collectivity. In his work on collective memory, for example, Zerubavel (2003) focuses more on how a group remembers rather than on how practices of remembering are one of the main ways that the group maintains its social cohesion. Without an exploration of why the group remembers, collective memory research runs the risk of ignoring the very premise of the field of memory studies, which is the social construction of remembrance. In other words, collective memory is the study of how the group produces itself as it produces its memories. In media studies, Yang and Clark (2015) argue for "a historically informed analysis" that "views social practices and formations as the outcomes of the interactions between social action and social structure"

(p. 2). They stress that "the past is not just data or background, but the very conditions that constitute the present" (p. 2). Applied to memory studies, the past is as implicated as the present in the malleability of processes of remembering.

In the revolutionary context of the Arab uprisings, I begin to trace the complicated relation in the way the past and the future are invoked in the present. My dissertation contributes to the expanding interest in collective memory studies in complicating the relation between futurity and pastness. In historicizing the past, we need to take into account how the past and future of that past appeared and were experienced. Subsequently, we need to take into account how that past temporal regime (its vision of its past and future) are carried into our present and can themselves become collective memories. Within this context, my argument is that Arab political actors' communicative practices in the 2011 Arab uprisings and their aftermath resurrected the past/ future binary of the Arab Nahda.

Theorists of nostalgia have highlighted the relation between futurity and pastness. Boym (2001) explains that nostalgic sentiments, outbreaks of which often follow revolutions, are not always directed towards the past but also towards "the unrealized dreams of the past and visions of the future that become obsolete" (p. xvi). Similarly, Wenzel (2006) discusses anticolonial nostalgia, which "acknowledges the past's vision of the future, while recognizing the distance and the difference between that vision and the realities of the present" (p. 7). Within the context of the Arab world, Ouyang (2013) echoes Boym in arguing that nostalgia is a longing for continuity in a fragmented world and a defensive mechanism not only to the

accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals that is modernity "but also to the overwhelming presence of the cultural other in Arab modernity" (p. 51). In my project, the presence of the other is within the resonance of the temporal binary of European Enlightenment that continues to reverberate in Arab cultural and political discourses.

Nostalgia then complicates notions of linear temporality in its Janus-faced emotional force. In my dissertation, nostalgia is fundamental to the understanding of the communicative practices that invoke history. In revolutionary times, there is an enactment of a nostalgic yearning to the idea of making and being part of history. This is at the heart of the outburst of political agency expressed during the uprisings. Living under authoritarian rule, Arabs had a distanced relation to the idea of history, which as I have been arguing, had been previously under strict government control. Part of the energy mobilized for revolution then is an enactment of a nostalgia towards history, whether the heroic tales of the past, or the notion of history-making in the present. In the words of one Syrian activist, Mohammad Al-Attar (2011), Arab youths have only consumed history in black and white footage about obscure triumphs and as a result have a yearning for "a visual memory in color." This notion of nostalgia for history informs my analysis and I shall elaborate on it in Chapter IV, when I discuss how the memory of Al-Andalus was utilized during the Arab uprisings and the turmoil of their aftermath.

Furthermore, there has been an increasing attention to how the future relates to the past— what Szpunar and Szpunar (forthcoming) call collective future thought,

which they define as simultaneously dependent on the past and itself acts as a catalyst for the (re)construction of the past. Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2013) makes the distinction between collective retrospective memory and collective prospective memory. While the former is about the memory of the past, the latter is about determining what issues about the past shall be discussed in the future. While Tenenboim-Weinblatt's focus, building on the work of Zelizer (2008), is on journalistic authority in narrating temporal narratives, my dissertation explores these mnemonic frameworks across media and through communicative practices more broadly, which is an aspect I elaborate on in this next section.

On mnemonic practices

My dissertation contributes to collective memory studies in examining a postcolonial context consumed by revolutionary action that seeks to radically reconfigure collective relations with the past and the future. Through the notion of mnemonic battles, which captures how mnemonic communities contest the social and political legacy of the past (Zerubavel, 1996, p. 295), I use collective memory to analyze how groups contest meanings of the past. As Zerubavel points out, mnemonic battles are fought over what to collectively remember, the correct way to interpret the past, and the point at which historical narratives ought to begin. Their consequence is the (re)definition of the group. In my dissertation, I systematically consider how the mnemonic practices of political actors and groups communicate notions about history. I ask: how is history being communicated? What originary point in time is invoked and how does it relate to group political affiliation? How is the legacy of that orignary time interpreted? And how is it

linked to the present and the future? In asking these questions, I am analyzing one aspect of revolutionary (and counter-revolutionary) action, which is the attempt to synchronize diachronic narratives. My approach then is to think through the history of collectively remembered narratives, symbols, sites, or tropes, which necessarily entails a consideration of power structures and institutions. Accordingly, I argue that political actors during the Arab uprisings have reformulated symbols and tropes from the past in order to claim that their actions are revolutionary and thus shall instigate a new future and erase the recent past. That historic formulation of modern revolution and the promise of a new history has been a recurrent theme in Arab politics, with its origins in the Arab Nahda at the cusp of the 20th century.

My dissertation contributes to the growing literature on mediated memories (van Dijk, 2007, Zelizer, 2008, Garde-Hansen et al., 2009, Meyers et al., 2011) with a focus on everyday communicative practices. As Couldry (2012) suggests, the Bourdieusian and cultural studies approach to the analysis of practices reframes communication questions that focus exclusively on media as texts and effects. Couldry argues that (p. 35):

> A practice approach to media frames its questions by reference, not to media considered as objects, texts, apparatuses of perception or production processes, but to what people are doing in relation to media in the contexts in which they act.

A practice approach then enables a multi-platform scope to understand how activists and political actors relate to history. Rather than centering media texts, analyzing menemonic practices hones attention on how people habituate various temporal domains which

together inform the process of making sense of individual and collective experience (Keightley and Pickering, 2012, p. 57). I am interested in the communicative practices that collectively produce and reflect a public political culture rather than a specific medium. In my dissertation, I explore an array of practices that projected new meanings on history, and challenged others, through symbols and rhetorical tropes circulated in public culture, whether protest slogans, banners, street art, and graffiti, or mass media, social media and news media.

In my study, I focus on the circulation of symbols and themes across media. As Meyers et al. (2011) argue "collective memory is performed across the media" and its study requires comparative research that examines that process across genres, productions/ consumption qualities and the intertextuality within different media (p. 15). I highlight the mobilization and network-building that occurs at the level of everyday media use. Their key importance in the construction and contestation of memory regimes lies in their pervasiveness and everydayness (Huyssen, 2000, Volkmer, 2006). Mediated memory opens up the "terrain that is remembered and turns it into a multiple-sided jigsaw puzzle that links events, issues, or personalities differently for different groups" (Zelizer, 1998, p. 3). Accordingly, I select episodes of contention and controversy that have generated much public discourse in the Arab media sphere not only about the meanings of past events but, more importantly, about how the past is to be brought to the present and how it shapes the future.

I analyze communicative practices across media platforms that push for a strategic configuration of prospective remembering and forgetting. I examine how the

mediated construction of originary points in the temporal progression of collective communities is used by different political and social groups to prospectively extend their power and influence over the future and weaken that of others. This approach suggests that the study of communication should be contextually-grounded within the cultural and political environment in question, rather than isolated and medium-centric. In this way, my approach differs from much of the initial literature on the question of media and mediation in the Arab uprisings. Whether from the perspective of technological pessimism or optimism, the bulk of the literature (Howard & Hussein, 2011, Khamis et al., 2012, Castells, 2012, Gerbaudo, 2012, Faris, 2013) examines the role of social media in how protests took shape, and not the long-term build-up or impact of protest. For example, much of the scholarly analysis of media and the "Arab Spring" focuses on the 18 days in Egypt, from the start of the uprising on 25 January to the day of then President Hosni Mubarak's ousting on 11 February 2011. In my dissertation, I follow a broader scope of analysis that considers the public contention over the meanings of history during and in the aftermath of the uprisings. My analysis is not limited to activism against the state but also encompasses the controversies that irrupted amongst various political actors. As Sitrin (2012) stresses, revolutions and uprisings take different forms and can be conceptualized as the result of everyday transformations, "not as a storming of the Bastille" (p. 7).

My focus is on the practice of communication rather than the media as simply a text. The breadth of the media I analyze highlights the linkages and relationality of meaning-making at a time of urgent political activity. My broad scope avoids a general

trope in the literature "that radical political imaginaries can emerge out of" particular media practices "in isolation from the myriad other generators of subjectivity embedded in phenomenal experience" (Markham, 2014, p. 97). In regards to social media, as Lomborg (2013) contends, though they present themselves as texts, they are only brought into existence through communicative practices that are "emergent, editable, and undergoing a continuous process of development" (p. 80). With this in mind, and in relation to protest, it is important to note that media texts are produced, consumed and circulated within communication processes that are inherently 'social' across media platforms. In regards to news media, I consider the practices of journalists in representing and narrating events, whether in news stories or opinion editorials, as part of a larger political discourse. As news production is implicated in Arab regional politics, news reporting and editorials are often reflections of the policies of the countries or the political groups that own the news outlet. Throughout this dissertation, I have strategically analyzed how news media, which represent various political affiliations, have dealt with the issue of history and memory.

My dissertation highlights the linkages, rather than the disjunctures, amongst various media. I foreground a media environment referred to by Kraidy (2006, 2010) as a hypermedia space, which entails communication processes that are repeatedly remediated, "since each medium in the hypermedia chain refers to, and borrows elements of symbolic communication from other media" (2006, p. 2). In the case of Arab media, as Kraidy and Khalil (2009) point out, it is important to consider the authoritarian political context. Authoritarian control over the media environment, the subsequent surveillance of

media, and the lack of freedoms of expression, affect how media technologies are used— and also makes the past a more popular terrain, within which political discussions are anchored. Papacharissi (2014) has argued that in "regimes where or during times when media are controlled, inaccessible, or not trusted," social media platforms (like Twitter in the case of her study) permit individuals to bypass traditional gatekeepers and contribute directly to political discourses (p. 37). In authoritarian contexts, social media— and despite risks of surveillance and censorship— allow for a kind of participation that is not possible in other media. Furthermore, as Han (2014) explains in the case of the social media platform Weibo in China, the past becomes a convenient tool for journalists, activists, and commentators to engage in politics while seemingly discussing apolitical issues about history and cultural memory.

As mentioned, I am examining a liminal stage in meaning making characterized by a breakdown in hegemonic systems of signification. In relation to discourse analysis, communicative practices can be conceived as acts of incitement to discourse, to put it in Foucauldian terms. As Foucault states (1972/ 2010) the aim of discourse analysis is to grasp a "statement in the exact specificity of its occurrence… (and to) establish its correlations with other statements that may be connected with it, and show other forms of statements it excludes" (p. 28). To use Foucault's methods then is to construct a "history of the present" (Kendall and Wickham, 1999, p. 4), which in my case is the study of communicative practices that produce and reflect Arab struggles over the articulation of history in post-2011 media discourses.

By examining struggles over meanings of the past across media platforms, I focus on the realm of articulation. In the words of Huyssen (1995), the past "is not simply there in memory, but it must be articulated to become memory" (p. 34) and its articulations are relational and changing. As Fairclough (1992) emphasizes, the meanings that texts acquire are relational, since they "are constructed through other texts being articulated in particular ways," depending upon social circumstances (p. 9). Articulation does not happen in a discursive vacuum but in relation to other articulations within systems and structures of power. Laclau and Mouffe (2001), for instance, stress that discourse analysis should consider hegemony as "the central category of political analysis" (p. x). They add that the concept of hegemony supposes "a theoretical field dominated by the category of *articulation*; and hence that the articulated elements can be separately identified" (p. 93). Similarly, Wodak (2011) argues that in studying politics, discourse analysis must identify "the knowledges contained in discourses and texts… and how these knowledges are linked and connected to power relations in power-knowledge" institutions (p. 45). Accordingly, as much as the controversies I examine have given voice to new expressions and representations of history, as much as they have been shaped and influenced by the enduring social, cultural, and political memories that animate Arab political culture.

Case selection and data

The case selection in my study is not meant to claim that the examined events and symbols of history correspond to a particular order whether by chronology or importance. I have selected episodes of contentious politics, which have been particularly

controversial in Arab public discourse and which, considered together; demonstrate a framework to understand the centrality of memory and history in post-2011 Arab discourses. The chapters of my dissertation discuss controversial episodes of mnemonic contestation that revolve around symbols and tropes of pronounced relevance in political culture, and whose themes have dominated public discourse. They represent symbols and narratives of "mnemonic density," which are characterized by intensity in temporal signification (Zerubavel, 2003, p. 26). The case-studies are also varied in terms of the media platforms, through which the controversies about the past are played out. In the case-studies, I analyze verbal, visual, and audio-visual content on social media, television and news media, political speeches and public space.

The four case-studies examine memories and representations and articulations of history across media platforms— stressing intertextuality, circulation and social context. The cases are not meant to be exhaustive but strategically chosen for their breadth in interrogating events and symbols. The chapters are of regional resonance, though most examples focus on Syria, Libya, and Egypt. This dissertation's themes resonate with Arab countries in general, particularly Arab authoritarian republics. Arab monarchies and oil-exporting rentier states, mainly those in the Gulf region, represent slightly different cases; since they have particular governing structures, colonial experiences, and postcolonial histories. Some countries, which did not experience Arab Spring mass protests, such as Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Algeria, Morocco, and Sudan have been drastically affected by events in neighboring countries and are implicated in the uprisings' political and cultural repertoire about history and collective identity. As for the uprisings, I have focused on

countries where activists have consciously adopted the narrative of the "Arab Spring/ Awakening" and strategically used it for mobilization and political maneuvering. This excludes the case of Tunisia where protests first took place and thus were confined to the country.

The first case-study analyzes the trope of the "garbage dump of history" in Arab news media and social media. The trope is used to rhetorically dispose of unwanted political figures into an imagined "garbage dump" or "dustbin" where all those who should be forgotten by history reside. At the beginning of the 2011 uprisings, the garbage dump of history was reserved for dictators and used to persuade publics to participate in 'historic' protests. However, following the struggle for power in many Arab countries, political actors symbolically claimed that their opponents should be thrown away into garbage as well. In this chapter, I analyze the metaphor of temporal trash as a signal for the future-oriented forgetting of political adversaries, and as a way of justifying their violent "cleansing" in reality. The chapter highlights how the use of metaphors as rhetorical tropes is a communicative practice that conveys complex meanings. The "garbage dump of history" demonstrates a battle over who is to blame, retrospectively and prospectively, for political decline. It also showcases how the use of metaphorical tropes projects power over understandings of the past and the future. In this chapter, I analyze news articles that mentioned "the garbage dump of history" from 2011 to 2014 on five Arabic-language news sources: the Qatari news network *Al-Jazeera*, the Saudi-owned and Dubai-based news network *Al-Arabiya*, in addition to three London-based pan-Arab dailies: the Saudi-owned and London-based *Al-Hayat* and *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*

and the pan-Arab independent *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*. The number of articles I read and analyzed amount to 273. Through a Google Image search, I also selected and analyzed dozens of political cartoons and social media memes that visually portray the garbage dump of history. In addition, I have monitored the use of the "garbage dump of history" hashtag on Twitter from January 2011 to April 2014 (and collected more than 500 tweets).

The second case-study focuses on the context of the uprising and civil war in Syria. It explores the communicative practices of using flags as forms of media with a heterotopic function that carries temporal signification. It analyzes the public struggles to represent imaginings of collectivity in Syria through flags with a focus on the national flags of the Ba'thist regime and the main opposition, in addition to Islamist rebel flags. Since the beginning of the revolt in March 2011, the Syrian opposition claimed the country's flag that was used prior to the ascendance of the ruling Ba'th Party. While the opposition propagated the flag as an originary Syrian symbol of independence and political pluralism, regime supporters claimed that the opposition flag represents the period of colonial subjugation. As the uprising in Syria turned into war and rebel groups splintered into several, flags bearing Islamic political symbolism signified that Islam should be the central nexus of collective belonging. Another reflection of the Arab mnemonic battles, the war over flags in Syria demonstrates the relational contingency of meaning-making and how that shapes the struggles over signifying different groups within a warring nation. In this chapter, I have analyzed 221 articles from six major Syrian news sources in the time span of January 2012 to April 2015. My search terms

were “Syrian flag” and also “the mandate flag” (term used by pro-regime media) and “the independence flag” (term used by opposition media), which are common ways to refer to the opposition’s flag depending on the politics of the news medium. I have also searched for the term “Al-U’qab,” which is the name of the Islamic banner used by salafi-jihadist rebel groups in Syria. In the chapter’s introduction, I elaborate on my news sources and how the articles I analyzed have reported on the main ways that flags were utilized in Syria, including campaigns to deploy the flag in public spaces and on social media pages in online mobilization campaigns. Using the search term of “the Syrian flag” (Al-Alam Al-Sury), I have also conducted a YouTube search for videos of demonstrations and/ or battles, in which the flag has been prominently featured, displayed, and used.

The third case-study focuses on the symbol of Omar Al-Mukhtar, a Libyan anticolonial national hero, who led the anti-Italian insurgency in the 1920s. It explores the communicative practices that use the historic symbol to create and appeal to publics. This chapter interrogates Al-Mukhtar’s symbol as a contested floating signifier used by Al-Qadhafi and also by different rebel groups and political commentators in post-2011 Libya. The figure of Al-Mukhtar, central to Al-Qadhafi propaganda, was reclaimed by rebels and protestors in 2011 as a symbol for their NATO-supported revolt. The circulation of Al-Mukhtar’s image not only reveals the fixation of Libyan discourse on an originary national moment of anticolonial confrontation, but also the struggle to give meaning to history and national identity. In this chapter, I examine historical documents, political speeches, news media sources, social media, and popular slogans. In addition, I examine statements and interviews given by Omar Al-Mukhtar’s son, Mohammad, and

follow debates about the history of the memorial and burial site of Omar Al-Mukhtar. I explore how the invocation of Al-Mukhtar relates to the formation of publics. For this chapter, I conducted a search for the term "Omar Al-Mukhtar" in two post-2011 Libyan media news media outlets, *Libya Almostakbal* (Libya Future) news website, which yielded 110 articles from February 2011 to July 2015, and the *Libyan News Agency* (LANA), yielded 260 entries from July 2012 to July 2015. I have also analyzed historical statements by the Omar Al-Mukhtar Association (1943 to 1951) as included in the book *The documents of the Omar Al-Mukhtar Association* (Arabic: Wathai'c Jami'at Omar Al-Mukhtar) by Muhammad Bashir Al-Magihrbi (1993) and as shared on its Facebook group after its relaunch in 2011. Furthermore, I have analyzed two speeches given by Al-Qadhafi— his first speech announcing his coup on 1 September 1969 and one of his last speeches on 22 February 2011.

The fourth case-study examines how Al-Andalus, the name of Muslim-ruled Spain from the 8th to the 15th centuries, was imagined and narrated during the uprisings. It explores how nostalgic and affective uses of history for political mobilization are reflected in communicative practices. It analyzes a social media campaign and a web series that reclaim Al-Andalus from the previously hegemonic Arab secular nationalist imaginary and use history to articulate new religiously-cognizant political positions. However, the two cases diverge in the political messages they extract and highlight from the history of Al-Andalus. Against the backdrop of the political situation in the Arab world in 2013, the two media cases differ in their subtle commentary about relations with the West, the efficacy of collective action, and, more fundamentally, the meaning of an

Arab-Muslim collective identity. In this chapter, the focus is on the role of nostalgia within mnemonic mediated practices. I conducted a textual analysis of the social media campaign, primarily of the status updates, memes, videos and Twitter hashtags shared by the administrator. Though I have been closely following the campaign since its launch in 2010 until 2015, in this chapter I focus my analysis on the year 2013 (from December 2012 to December 2013) because that was the year when the campaign gained considerable popularity. As for the web series and TV series, "The Story of Al-Andalus," I have watched and analyzed the entire thirty episodes of the show on YouTube. Each episode is about twenty minutes long. In both analyses, I conducted thematic coding of any comment or visual representation that mentions or represents current affairs or contemporary culture and politics.

Chapter II: The battles over the "garbage dump of history"

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the "dustbin" or "garbage dump" of history trope (Arabic: *mazbalat al-tarikh*). The trope basically implies a mnemonic framework about what history 'we' ought to remember and what history 'we' ought to forget. By invoking the garbage dump, one political vision is deemed worth remembering and another is pushed to be forgotten. This metaphor is strategically deployed in political discourse to envision a favorable political future by rhetorically making claims about the present, which is disguised as the future's past history. The history invoked in the metaphor is "the past in the future anterior" that is the past as the accomplished future, which corresponds to the future construed as the utopian past (Al-Azmah, 1993, p. 48).

On an Arabic Wikipedia page, *mazbalat al-tarikh* is defined as "a symbolic place, in which objects such as figures, events, ideologies and monuments are thrown away when they become forgotten or marginal within the pages of history" ("Mazbalat Al-tarikh," n.d.). The Wikipedia definition confuses passive and active forgetting (Assman, 2010). The *mazbala* trope is not a sign of passive forgetfulness. To the contrary, it signals

an intentional act of forceful forgetting and imposed amnesia, which as Assman (2010) points out, is "violently destructive" when targeting a particular community (p. 98). The trope seeks to influence the future-oriented public agenda (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2013) by mediating prospective forgetting. In this chapter, I analyze how the expression is deployed in communicative practices. I ask: why and how do Arab political actors and media users and practitioners invoke the trope? What are the mnemonic politics inherent in the expression? And how does it relate to collective action and violence? I examine how the use of the trope in Arab media rhetorically utilizes history as a future-projected goal.

I argue that the "garbage dump" trope reflects a legacy with its origins in the Enlightenment's conception of progress and decline. Applied within the Arab context, that Enlightenment temporal regime has been reiterated since the Arab Nahda at the end of the 19th century into the anticolonial and postcolonial periods. Accordingly, there is a history of articulating political change as a desire to change the course of national histories. In this chapter, I examine how the metaphor of the "garbage dump" has signified this desire for a new history. The trope reflects accusations of blame over who is responsible for the decline of collective temporal progression. Subsequently, it also projects affirmations about who shall bring about and spearhead the sought-after new history. Its invocation in the 2011 Arab uprisings and the resulting political conflicts has been mired in the legacy of Arab dictators, who portrayed their rule as an end point in Arab history and obliterated anyone who challenged their claims. The trope reflects an Arab postcolonial quest for achieving the desired imagined history. In the Arab context,

any change in power is typically portrayed as a total shift in political and national life—"a new page in history."

I have chosen "the garbage dump of history" trope as the theme of this chapter for the ubiquity of its use in Arab political rhetoric and also for its powerful material symbolism in relation to trash and the economic and value system that determines useful objects from foul and disposable others. Considering that the "garbage dump of history" trope has been invoked at a time of rampant political violence in several Arab countries, including Egypt, Libya and Syria, I argue that it must also be understood as a site of memory (Nora, 1997) for the legacy of state violence against the bodies of dissidents and also a site for the anticipation of violence in the future. Needless to say, the symbolic ejection of political opponents in a trash dump reflects a crisis in collective identity and political governance. It exposes the difficulty faced in institutionalizing a coherent narrative of collective temporal continuity for national or transnational imagined communities in the Arab world; not least because the association of political actors and groups with trash indicates that they have purportedly lost any value in the political system. It also suggests that these trashed figures should be cleansed for the sake of restoring order. In this way, the trope is often used to foreshadow and justify violence against those with undesirable and offensive political worth. The invocation of the trope demonstrates how history is summoned as a future-oriented tactic of mobilization that seeks, through mnemonic metaphors, to reconfigure politics.

In this chapter, I analyze news articles that mentioned "the garbage dump of history" from 2011 to 2014 on five Arabic-language news sources: the Qatari news

network *Al-Jazeera*, the Saudi-owned and Dubai-based news network *Al-Arabiya*, in addition to three London-based pan-Arab dailies: the Saudi-owned, *Al-Hayat* and *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* and the pan-Arab independent *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*. Furthermore, I have set up a Google Alerts notification for the term "garbage dump of history" (*mazbalat al-tarikh*) from February 2014 until April 2015, which has yielded further results that inform my analysis from across the spectrum of Arabic news media. The number of articles I read and analyzed amount to 273. Examples from that sample will be relayed throughout this chapter. Through a Google Image search, I also selected and analyzed dozens of political cartoons and social media memes that visually portray the garbage dump of history. In addition, I have monitored the use of the "garbage dump of history" hashtag on Twitter from January 2011 to April 2014 (more than 500 tweets). The material I looked at is not exhaustive but it suffices in order to offer an informed analysis of how the trope was used during and in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings by political actors, journalists and commentators from various political inclinations.

The selection of texts I analyze reflects different political ideologies and positions and media outlets. The trope can have different (but related) functions in Arab rhetoric such as explicitly calling for collective action, attacking adversaries, or presenting a political choice, amongst other motivations. The trope can also have different temporal durations. For example, stating that a certain policy or event has been thrown into a garbage dump is of less significance than claiming that the era of authoritarianism in the Arab world has been thrown away. Furthermore, the metaphor has been used across media platforms and tools of communication whether news media, social media, protest

slogans and banners, political cartoons and internet memes. It has also been invoked by leaders and politicians, journalists and talk show hosts, activists and rebels.

It is important to note that the trope was commonly used before the Arab uprisings. However, with the strategic description of the uprisings as a collective Arab historic revolution against dictatorship, its use gained importance. In 2011, it was mostly used against dictators in statements that hailed the uprisings as the Arab gateway into history and therefore as a revolution to dispose of Arab dictators into the garbage dump of history. With the escalation of political struggles in several Arab countries, it became more of a trope to signal the rejection and desire to eliminate a political opponent in reciprocal threats, for example by the Muslim Brotherhood and the army establishment in Egypt, or the rebel movement and the ruling regime in Syria. Despite this plurality of contexts and articulations, the basic meaning conveyed by the trope is the same: one's political position is rightful and powerful. It will prevail because alternative political views and ideologies shall be written out of history. They shall be, either forcefully and immediately, or eventually and gradually, forgotten by "us"— that undefined "us" that seeks be something in past and future history. The chapter is divided into two sections. First I examine the "history" aspect of the trope; I then explore how the "garbage dump" metaphor relates to the rhetorical use of the notions of cleaning and cleansing in political conflicts, particularly the notion of ethnic cleansing.

What is the garbage dump of history?

The garbage dump of history trope is a complex metaphor implicated in conceptions of modernity and social and political order. The trope includes two main

metaphors meshed into one: the first is the act of ejecting and disposing of political actors into a garbage dump and the second is about calling for their erasure from memory and history. The trope as a whole, in both its metaphorical components, expresses a desire for a total shift in collective historical progression. This totalizing vision of the present expresses collective memories of violence in the past and justifies, calls for, and anticipates violence in the present and future.

Within this context, there are several Arabic rhetorical tropes deployed to portray the notion of "historical juncture" or "crossroads" to signal a total change of course for a country or community. The projection of agency onto history as "a judge" or "a court" that either condemns or celebrates current political movements or positions is another way to convey these meanings. The designation of people as either "outside history" or "making history" is a similar distinction.

One popular Arabic idiom that signifies the movement of history is "the dogs bark but the caravan rolls on" (Arabic: Al-Qafilah tasir wal kilab tanbah). This idiom is used to comment on political struggles or controversies to convey that history will prove that a certain political movement will march forward along the historical path, while others represent temporary and background noise with no impact on historic progression. Connoy (2002) describes the idiom as Arab in origin. He observes that it evokes a scene, in which dogs are barking in frivolous attempts to stop the caravan. However, "the caravan is time flowing endlessly on, while the dogs bark from specific points in time" (p. x). The caravan represents then the political community, the transtemporal self that moves through time uninterrupted. While the dogs, no matter how many, are outside the

political community and subsequently outside its eternal temporality and progressive trajectory. Regardless of how loud they are, the caravan must ignore them and fulfill its destiny to roll on. In fact, the idiom is particularly popular in radical militant Islamic-jihadist media. For example, radical Jordanian Muslim cleric and theoretician, Shaikh Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi (2004), authored an important treatise as guidance to his followers using the idiom as the title "the caravan is moving and the dogs are barking." Advising his followers not to be intimidated by their many critics, he writes:

> the best answer to those bad people is ignoring them and to stay with the Jihad and to continue to kill and fight every enemy of Allah. Disregard their opinion, the caravan is going and the dogs are barking. They enjoy the barking.

Al-Maqdisi uses the idiom then to indicate that no matter how loud and seemingly powerful the critics of Islamic militancy are, they are in fact merely like loud but powerless dogs who cannot stop the inevitable progression of Islam. Accordingly, he seeks to produce the legitimacy of his interpretation of Islam through portraying it as the one that has always been and is destined to prevail because it represents the genuine Islam.

The function of the garbage dump trope is similar. The expression of the garbage dump, trash heap, or dustbin of history far precedes its use in the Arab world. The trope (as the caravan idiom) reflects the European Enlightenment principles about history as a linear path of human development and progression. The trope's genealogy reflects a modernist and Western conception of history as linked to the dialectics of the Enlightenment and to the notion of progress. In fact, it connotes the Arab desire for

modernity and a Western-inspired achievement of history. It implicitly signifies that history is a temporal progression that leads to a desired political goal. Foucault (1984) has explained that the European Enlightenment project conceptualizes history as universal and teleological. History is "humanity's passage to adult status and (it) situates contemporary reality with respect to the overall movement and its basic directions" (p. 36). In the words of Nisbet (1980), "the idea of progress holds that mankind has advanced in the past— from some aboriginal condition of primitiveness, barbarism, or even nullity— is now advancing, and will continue to advance" (p. 4). He adds quoting historian J. B. Burry that progress is "a synthesis of the past and a prophecy of the future. It is inseparable from a sense of time flowing in unilinear fashion" (p. 5). The garbage dump of history is a metaphor to indicate not only the linear progression of history but also the obstacles that are imagined to stand in the way of its liberating denouement in the form of the achievement of a utopic state and society. The way the end of history is envisaged is subject to political ideology. For example, liberals use Hegelian thought to claim that the end goal of political progress in history is the achievement of the liberal state, while Marxists use it to strive for a communist society as an end to history (See Fukuyama, 1992). The trope of the dustbin has been used in Western contemporary political rhetoric on both the left and the right.

In fact, the trope is often first attributed to the Russian Marxist revolutionary and theorist, Leon Trotsky (1879-1940). Trotsky had famously said at the Second All-Russian Congress of the Soviets on 25 October 1917 – addressing his political opponents, the Mensheviks (a faction of the Russian socialist movement): "You are pitiful isolated

individuals; you are bankrupts, your role is played out. Go where you belong from now on—into the dustbin of history!" (as quoted in Marcus, 1995). The dustbin trope is typical of Marxist revolutionary politics as reflected in the Communist Manifesto and the call for a worldwide and total revolution. As White (1973) explains "Marx's idea of history represented a perfect Synecdoche: the parts merged into a whole which is qualitatively superior to any of its entities that comprise it" (p. 282). Marxist thought emplotted the historical process on two levels, that of the Base and that of the Superstructure (White, p. 286). Revolution was thus a rupture in the whole of modern human history of economic production and distribution. And the Communist Party, and more precisely its leadership, is the representative of the interests of workers and their revolution. It is no coincidence that, under the rule of Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union, the campaign of political repression was called "the great purge" and was often justified in Stalinist propaganda as a cleansing of those who stand as obstacles in the historic progression of Communism and workers' empowerment.

The metaphor has also been used in Western liberal and conservative contexts. A typical trope of Western contemporary political rhetoric is to claim that capitalist liberal democracies represent the universal system of governance that shall prevail. During the Cold War, futuristic claims about the prevalence of democracies were used to project power within democratic countries, to taunt the Soviet Union, and to justify interventions in the affairs of other countries. One example of the rhetorical use of history on the international stage is when US President Ronald Reagan (in office 1981-1989) addressed the British parliament in 1982. Reagan asserted that the temporal march of democracy is

unstoppable and that "future historians" will look favorably at how Western countries were defending their values on the international scene. He added that the march of freedom and democracy "will leave Marxism-Lenninism on the ash heap of history as it has left other tyrannies" ("ReaganFoundation," 2009). After the end of the Cold War, it was Francis Fukuyama (1992) who most famously articulated the political theory of "the end of history" and the universal triumph of liberal democracy. His conclusion is based on a combination of the Hegelian notion of the dialectic progression of history and a social Darwinist conception of power. As I explained in the introduction, this evolutionist temporal framework has been reverberating in the Arab public sphere since the Nahda movement of the late 19th century. It has been adopted by nationalist secular, Islamist, and Marxist and communist groups, each promising to launch the genuine Arab history.

The garbage dump of history in the Arab context

In the Arab world, the notion of the end of history or a utopic goal of temporal progression has dominated cultural and political discourses. As Di-Capua (2009) argues, the modern idea of history came to Egypt and the Arab countries in the late 19th century. It changed conceptualizations of temporality and spatiality. In relation to the former, it projected thought and action towards the future. In regards to space, it established the nation-state as the setting onto which the past is projected. With the advent of authoritarian rule in the mid-20th century, Di-Capua adds in his analysis of Egypt, the understanding of the history of Egypt got reduced to "a transcendental continuum of several evolutionary dates" of events deemed historic for the country, each of which miraculously led to the other" (p. 254). In most Arab countries, leaders claimed that their

rule represented the end of history. In Libya, when Al-Qadhafi came to power on 1 September 1969, he declared in his first speech that the age of tyranny, which spans from Ottoman times to the (ousted) reign of King Idris Al-Sanusi (in office 1951-1969), was over and that he just turned a new page in Libyan history. As I will elaborate in Chapter IV, Al-Qadhafi then proceeded to theorize and implement a policy of absolute rule, while claiming it is a form of direct rule by the Libyan people that is immune to change. He propagated the idea that his political system is the final form of rule in Libya. In Syria, state propaganda under the rule of Hafez Al-Assad (in office 1971-2000) claimed the he will rule forever. In schools, Syrian students chanted fascist slogans everyday such as "forever, forever, O Hafez Al-Assad" or the slogan in the form of a rhetorical question "Who is our eternal leader? (Ba'th) Secretary Hafez Al-Assad (Arabic: Qai'duna ila al-abad? al-amin Hafez al-Assad). Al-Assad's takeover of power, which involved the obliteration of enemies and rivals, was termed "the corrective movement" and was communicated in terms of historic progression. In reality, it was a coup against fellow Ba'thist officers and a move to establish his dictatorship in Syria (George, 2003). Arab regimes then portrayed their rule as having erased and disposed of not only past forms of rule but also as having eliminated the opportunity of an alternative future regime. As one Arab commentator stated, in an article in the pan-Arab daily *Al-Hayat,* about the garbage dump of history and what it says about Arab political culture, the "garbage dump" is imagined as belonging in history because of "the nature of Arab political life, in which every battle is viewed as "fateful" and "final"… (As if) the victor would enter history while the loser only has the option of going through a mandatory tunnel that only leads to

the garbage dump of history— his only sanctuary" (Al-Madhun, 2000). Al-Madhun adds that those who hold power imagine that they own history. Every political struggle in the Arab world aims to eliminate a rival and to delete any mention of that rival in history and in space, he concludes. Similarly, commenting on the victory of secular Tunisian parties over the incumbent Islamist Al-Nahda Party in the 2014 election, a journalist writing on *Al-Arabiya* news website states that it is unacceptable to describe the secular electoral victory as the "send-off of Islamists to the garbage dump of history" because such hyperbolic statements do not reflect democratic political culture and are "bound to set the country on a path of instability" (Al-Majed, 2014). In fact, the garbage dump trope has also been popularly used during electoral mobilization. For example in the 2014 Iraqi parliamentary elections, it was typical to warn voters "do not let your vote go to the garbage dump of history" (Saleh, 2014).

The garbage dump of history uses the metaphor of waste and projects it onto those who challenge regime power in order to allow for their "cleansing" and elimination (which I discuss in the next section). However, as the contemporary Arab case shows, it can also be used as a counter-hegemonic communicative practice when deployed against authoritarian power. In fact, the metaphor is indicative of a common and pervasive rhetoric of social movements in the 20th century, along the lines of "we are fulfilling history, and we will prevail" (Tilly & Wood, 2012, p. 66). It is no coincidence then that the dustbin of history is most useful as a metaphor in times of revolution, political change, and social uncertainty. During the 2011 uprisings, the metaphor was used mostly against Arab regimes— designated as the garbage that should be cleansed in space and

time. As the uprisings progressed, the garbage dump trope became a highly divisive tool of intolerance and radicalism as each political group claimed that it represents the history that shall be remembered— while its rivals are the ones who will be thrown out of history into a temporal garbage dump and become a forgotten glitch in an otherwise 'authentic' collective temporal progression.

Garbage is also a useful metaphor to describe the framework of the use of history in revolutionary action that seeks to overthrow a regime. I have been arguing that while history has been mobilized for revolution, the revolutionary moment has also changed the way history is invoked. As explained, collective memory is the invocation of the useful or valuable aspects of the collective past. Thompson (1979) suggests that the designation of value and rubbish is relational and continuously under change. He explains his *Rubbish Theory,* the title of his book, in terms of a relationship between "chickenhood" and "egghood," which cannot be confined to a perpetual closed system of laying and hatching (p. 144). The relationship between chickenhood and egghood needs to take account of genetic gain and loss that changes and opens up the system. Stated differently, the relation between remembering and forgetting is not a locked and totalizing framework because it must account for rubbish or the ability to create and destruct value that continuously changes world views and the scope of actions available for political actors. The relation must account for "the type of creativity which involves rubbish" and to the inherent potential for what was invisible and valueless to become visible and valuable again in new ways (p. 149). Thus, if we consider certain collective memories as rubbish today, we must take into account that aspects of that rubbish may gain new value under

different circumstances. Accordingly, within the context of this chapter, the "garbage dump" site, while purporting to be a final place of forgetfulness, is a relational site, whose contents change according to the politics at the time of its articulation. In the next section I begin by analyzing the trope as used from 2011 to 2012 in anti-regime revolutionary politics, and in the backlash by those regimes, before delving into how the trope reflected the divisive politics that emerged in the Arab world following the initial year of the uprisings.

The garbage dump during and in the aftermath of 2011

The invocation of the garbage dump metaphor was one important example of the communicative practices by Arab activists and dissidents aiming to portray the 2011 uprisings as historic and pan-regional. In April 2011, the Lebanese author, Elias Khury expressed these sentiments on *Al-Jazeera*: "A page from the history of Arab peoples has been turned. Every enduring oppressive regime is dying— either a slow or a quick death. Yet, there is no escape from death," he said (Al-Ghurra, 2011). Writing on Syria, one journalist declared "a new Syrian history has begun on 15 March of this year (the date of the beginning of the protests in 2011). A popular uprising has shaken the foundations of tyranny. It toppled the barriers of fear forever… It is a decisive moment in the path of history, society, and nation" (Kana'n, 2011). In a similar vein but a more universal outlook, other commentators used the garbage dump metaphor by claiming that dictatorship as a form of rule is universally anachronistic. "What the remaining (Arab dictatorial) leaders do not realize is that the time of the single leader and the single ruling party is over. The (Arab) peoples have recognized that this backward mentality is an

obstacle in the path of development… All who stand in the way shall end up in the garbage dump of history. History shows that a people will wait but will not waiver" (Qadri, 2011). These comments exemplify the 2011 discourse that portrayed dictatorship as dying and the Arab body politic as awakening and returning to history. The comments exemplify how history was used to claim that supporters of the Arab uprisings represent the "people." Arab activists and those who backed their cause portrayed themselves as the agents of history. They were the ones turning the page of history and disposing dictators into its garbage dump. The following political cartoon visualizes the trope:

Fig. 2.1

The above image was produced by the Arab comic collective Abu Mahjoob, launched by Jordanian political cartoonist Imad Hajjaj. The cartoon, which was circulated on Arab social media in early 2011, shows an old man, drawn as an ancient Greek mythological figure, holding a book entitled "history" and a sign that reads "please expand the (garbage) dump as soon as possible." He is standing next to an overflowing trashcan labeled as "the garbage dump of history" as a strong young man from behind a wall, sprayed with the words "Arab Spring," hurls more trash into the dumpster, including military boots, framed pictures of dictators, thrones, flags, weapons and statues. The

cartoon exemplifies the early use of the "garbage dump of history" trope during the 2011 uprisings. It portrays the Arab uprisings as a corrective historic movement that sets the course of temporal development right by forever disposing of dictators and their national symbols into a metaphysical and meta-temporal realm of waste and excess. Agency is attributed to the Arab protestor, who is the one taking action and making history. The figure holding the book of history actually represents history at large. He is portrayed as a passive witness and judge, who is acknowledging the action of the protestor.

At the early stages of the uprisings, the protestor was depicted as endowed with political agency and the ability to make history. On the other hand, the dictator was depicted as the one acted upon. History was the arbitrator. "History still has white pages ready to be filled by those want to inscribe their names," wrote one commentator in January 2011 in an editorial in the pan-Arab *Al-Quds al-Arabi* (Bahhaj, 2011). "History is looking for the men who will write their names with credibility. Others will reside in the garbage dump of history to be condemned by successive generations," he added in reference to Arab regimes and their supporters. Dictators were portrayed as belonging to another era as if their existence was an anomaly. Another commentator described Arab regimes in April 2011 as "backward bandits and killers who come from the Middle Ages and previous eras" (Kamel, 2011). Kamel added that after rulers are ousted, Arab peoples "ought to keep specimens or samples of Arab regimes to be displayed in natural history museums next to cavemen and extinct animals. The rest can go to the garbage dump of history." In these comments, the garbage dump trope allows for the portrayal of dictators as obstacles in the way of achieving development and modernity. The mention of a

natural history museum is interesting in relation to modernity because museums are modernist institutions par excellence. Kamel then portrayed dictators as obstacles in achieving modernity, which are so outdated, powerless, and irrelevant that they may as well be prospectively studied as phenomena as remote and curious as extinct dinosaurs. As for the protestors, they are the ones with political power and determination to make change.

However, the situation in Arab countries changed after the initial year of protests. In Egypt, the political divisions between the Muslim Brotherhood and secular-minded Egyptians dominated the public sphere. In addition, it eventually became evident that the Egyptian army is not willing to concede political power to an unfriendly civilian government, which resulted in the army coup d'état against the elected Muslim Brotherhood President Mohammad Morsi in July 2013. While the Yemeni and Bahraini uprisings were caught up in Saudi military interventions to crush any radical political change, the situation in Syria and Libya developed into armed conflict. These developments were reflected in the way the garbage of dump of history was used in post-2011 Arab media.

The previous discussion was from the viewpoint of the supporters of the uprisings. For their part, in early 2011, Arab regimes resisted and ignored the common usage of the trope of 'making history' in general and that of the garbage dump of history specifically. They sought to downplay the importance of protests by initially ignoring them. In the early months of 2011, Arab officials' statements highlighted that the protest movement was only specific to Tunisia. In mid-January 2011, the Egyptian foreign

minister at the time, Ahmad Abu-al-Ghaidh, declared that "Egypt is not Tunisia" and thus it is safe from any revolutionary spillover (Shahin, 2011). Similar statements were eventually made by Libyan, Yemeni, and Syrian officials reiterating that their countries are neither Tunisia nor Egypt and thus they will not face the same fate of popular revolt. Libyan and Syrian official media initially reflected the policy to ignore the protests, which began in Libya in February and in Syria in March 2011. However, the protests rapidly became a source of unrest and needed a counter communicative strategy to mobilize regime supporters against the dissident movement.

For example, as I explain in Chapter IV, Al-Qadhafi in Libya continued to use his usual political terminology of resisting colonialism, by portraying the 2011 conflict as yet another historic confrontation in the ongoing fight against imperialism. He invoked the garbage dump trope in one of his last speeches on 22 February 2011. He described his confrontation with the Libyan NATO-supported rebels and protestors as a "historic battle." He added "we are fighting a band of fascists, who will be thrown by history into its garbage dump… we are leading the revolution against tyranny and imperialism" (Al-Qadhafi, 2011). Both Al-Qadhafi and the rebel movement claimed to represent a Libyan patriotic revolution against tyranny. Both argued that history will be on their side simply because they rhetorically are the ones making history. In Libya, Al-Qadhafi did not last long after the uprising as he got captured and killed by the rebels in October 2011 in his hometown of Sirte. Following the fall of Al-Qadhafi, Libya faced myriad political, security, and economic problems as no central authority managed to take control of the different armed militias with tribal allegiances or jihadi ideologies. Four years after Al-

Qadhafi's death, there is no sense of progress or a feeling that a new page in history has been turned. Rather, there has been a strong feeling of disappointment and political anxiety over the future. Within that context, the garbage dump trope continued to reverberate in the Libyan public sphere. For example, a Libya commentator, Zaher Fayyad, wrote on *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* in March 2013 an article entitled: "This is not the Libya we wanted!" Accusing the new Libyan political establishment of treason in its reliance on the West, he addressed it by saying "this is not what the Libyans wanted. Your place is the garbage dump of history and you will regret what you have committed against Libyans sooner or later" (Fayyad, 2013).

In Syria, the fighting between the rebel movement and the regime has continued since 2011 into the year 2015 with no end in sight for the near future. As with other Arab contexts, Syrian dissidents used the trope of 'the historic' in mobilization against the Al-Assad regime. The Syrian opposition figure and human rights activist, Michel Kilo, commented in March 2011 on the success of the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings by saying that their leaders have been thrown into the garbage dump of history. He added "today our Arab countries are on a historical juncture. There is a widening gap between the future's way of thinking, represented by the new generation, and the miserable reality (of the present) represented by the current regimes" (Kilo, 2011). He expressed hopes that the future will bring a new free and democratic reality that would not reproduce the tyranny of the past "that we are departing today— hopefully forever." The longer the Syrian confrontation took, the more divisive the rhetorical use of history became. The Syrian regime and its supporters claimed that the Syrian National Coalition, the main

opposition body, and armed groups shall be defeated and forgotten. Syrian media also accused the foreign backers of the opposition of the same fate. For example, a news article on the Syrian official *Al-Watan* daily about the defeat of former French president Nicolas Sarkozy in the 2012 French election ran with the headline "Sarkozy to the garbage dump of history." The article celebrated how Sarkozy's political role came to an end before that of Al-Assad, knowing that the former had been one of the most vocal Western leaders about the need to oust Al-Assad ("Sahifah sooriyah," 2012). Similarly, the communicative practices of the Syrian opposition supporters relied on the use of the garbage dump trope on social media and news media not only against the regime but also the countries backing it, mainly Iran and Russia, in addition to the militias fighting alongside the regime, mainly the Lebanese Hezbollah group. Since 2012, this division in political rhetoric reflected the civil struggle on the ground. One Syria commentator, Samir Al-Taqi (2012) warned that though Al-Assad "will undoubtedly head to the garbage dump of history soon. The question is now how to save the country from the fangs" of Al-Assad "before all the gains and values of independence, and all the historic foundations of the country, are dissipated. Revolution is not just the elimination of past history" but a building of a future history, he suggested.

In the case of Egypt, the use of the garbage dump of history trope reflected the various shifts in political leadership that occurred since 2011. In February 2011, a military council, which controlled the country after the ousting of President Hosni Mubarak under protest pressure, vowed to administer elections to transfer power. In June 2011, Mohammad Morsi of the long-persecuted Muslim Brotherhood party became the

first democratically-elected president of Egypt. His rule lasted roughly two years until July 2013 when Morsi was ousted through a military coup backed by popular protests. New controversial elections were held in May 2014, which brought to power the former military chief Abd-al-Fattah Al-Sisi. In each turn of this four-year history, it was claimed that a new historic era has begun, while the preceding phase has been ejected into the garbage dump of history. Prior to the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood, commentators and officials repeatedly invoked the trope of the garbage dump to emphasize that Mubarak is long gone as a powerful actor in Egyptian political life. "The winds of history have blown," as one journalist wrote in January 2011, and knocked out Mubarak into its temporal garbage dump (Al-Karafis, 2011). In 2013, there was a bitter rhetorical mnemonic battle between Egyptian army supporters and the Muslim Brotherhood backers over who represents history and who shall be ousted from history and memory. The rhetorical battle mirrored the struggle for power and the violence on the ground in Egypt.

In fact, former President Mohammad Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood repeatedly invoked the garbage dump trope. In a talk show in 2012, Morsi accused his predecessor Mubarak of treason by saying; "the garbage dump of history awaits traitors. A just punishment awaits them for the crimes they have committed against the nation." He added that the Egyptian people would not accept anything less than their complete eradication out of political life after they have ruined the country over the course of thirty years!" ("Morsi amam," 2012). In very different circumstances, following the military coup d'état in July 2013 and the imprisonment and trial of the now former president, Morsi evoked the garbage dump when he said in court "the coup will be undone and its

symbols will go to the garbage dump of history" ("Morsi," 2014). The trope was as ubiquitous within the media output of army supporters. In fact, on the day of the coup, the front page headline of one pro-army daily, *Sawt Al-Umma*, read "the garbage dump of history" along with a picture of Morsi leading his cabinet.

The media mobilization for the anti-Muslim Brotherhood rally that paved the way for the military coup of army chief Abd-al-Fattah al-Sisi in July 2013 is another case, in which the "garbage dump" trope was ubiquitously used. For example, an Egyptian talk show host mobilized viewers to participate in the pro-military rallies by urging Egyptians "to rewrite the Arab and Islamic history" through taking to the streets ("ONtv," 2013). The TV host then called on Egyptians to voice support for Al-Sisi in order to "sign the obituary of the Muslim Brotherhood as a political group… (and to witness) its exit into the garbage dump of history" ("ONtv," 2013). A pro-Al-Sisi official described Al-Sisi's rise as the "burial of the Muslim Brotherhood in the garbage dump of history" (Al-Barsh, 2014). Al-Sisi supporters also claimed that countries such as Qatar, which support the Muslim Brotherhood, have gone to the garbage dump as well. "Qatar has entered history and exited it in a single moment," one editorial proclaimed (Fandi, 2014). The Muslim Brotherhood "did not realize that their entrance into history was through a revolving door. You enter and you leave in one rotation" (Masr, 2014).

On social media, references to both sides as heading to the garbage dump of history were common. The following two memes are an example.

Fig. 2.2 Fig. 2.3

The two political cartoons are about Egypt. They were circulated on social media to comment on the popular Egyptian army coup against President Mohammad Morsi. The image to the left (Fig. 2.2) is signed by cartoonist Philippe Fakry. It was posted in July 2013 on a web forum focusing on Egyptian women's issues, *Fatakat*. The cartoon shows many faces of Muslim Brotherhood leaders in the garbage dump of history, portrayed as a metaphysical place in the sky. The tossed away figures apparently include US and Israeli leaders such as US President Barack Obama, former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and former Israeli foreign minister Tzipi Livni. A gigantic hand, purportedly symbolizing the masses of patriotic Egyptians— the Egyptian body politic— tosses former Egyptian president Morsi into the dumpster. The caption on top of the image reads "thank God for your safety, Egypt," which is a common phrase in Arabic used when someone recovers from sickness. The cartoon to the right (Fig. 2.3) is the profile picture of a pro-Muslim Brotherhood Facebook group called (Egyptian President Abd-al-Fattah) "Al-Sisi to the garbage dump of history." The group, which was launched in July 2013, clearly aims to mobilize support for the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Its description

states “this page is for the free only. The worshippers of the military boot have no place amongst us”— in reference to the supporters of Al-Sisi’s military coup. The image shows the face of Al-Sisi as broadcast on television with a Jewish Star of David imprinted on his forehead. The TV set with Al-Sisi’s face is found in an overflowing and smelly trashcan. Designed and circulated at the same time, both images showcase the deep divide in Egyptian society, a split in which each side seeks to obliterate the other in time by invoking history and in space by imagining the other disposed of into a garbage dump. While the first image includes US and Israeli leaders in the dump, the second imprints the Jewish Star of David on Al-Sisi’s forehead, an example of anti-Jewish racist imagery. Both portrayals of foreign symbols signify that the figure in the garbage dump is an inauthentic leader who serves the interests of the US and Israel— and therefore is bound to be disposed of and thrown away. Foreign “enemy” symbols signify that space portrayed is that of the disposable enemies who are foreign to Egyptian history.

The violence of the garbage dump trope

The use of the trope in media discourses pushes for a strategic prospective mnemonic framework. Its deployment in discourse aims to persuade the public to disregard a political group by suggesting that it will be forgotten tomorrow and that it is responsible for the problems of the past. As deployed in the present, the trope then justifies and calls for the elimination of political adversaries. In this way, its invocation is an example of a communicative practice to deal with, justify, and anticipate violence. Violence is also expressed through the notion of garbage and cleaning. In a study on Egyptian school books, Starett (1998) mentions that cleanliness in Egypt is taught as a

"token of advancement and civilization, strongly bound to the progress of peoples, for advanced peoples are cleaner in their attire than others, and in their food and drink, and their streets" (p. 140). Here cleaning is a way to achieve cultural advancement, westernization and modernity. Typically, garbage is rendered as the opposite.

The cleaning of garbage metaphor is used to indicate a shift in the relation between the individual and notions of collectivity in relation to space and time. In fact, it is common in Arab political repertoire to verbalize dissatisfaction with the political situation by referring to it as garbage (*zibala*). The term garbage is colloquially used to voice disdain towards political actors and regimes, and also as a way to complain about the status of most aspects of cultural, political, and economic life. Subsequently, during the 2011 uprisings, activists invoked the metaphor of cleaning garbage to express their desire to get rid of the social and political ills associated with authoritarian regimes and their corrupt policies. For example, Wa'el Ghoneim, the administrator of the popular and influential Facebook group, "We are all Khalid Said" (*Kullina Khaled Said*),[5] stated in an interview following the ousting of Mubarak in January 2011: "We will change our country. All the garbage that has been happening in the country, it must be cleaned. We are all a single hand and we will clean it" (Furniss, 2012, p.1). This metaphorical use of cleaning (*tandhif*) implies an enactment of citizenship. As Furniss (2012) points out, Ghoneim's figurative language was taken literally by many activists in Cairo who headed to Tahrir Square with brooms and rubber gloves the day after Mubarak stepped down to

[5] The "We are all Khaled Said" Facebook group was launched to protest the killing of an Egyptian activist under torture in 2010. It was administered by Wa'el Ghonaim, a Dubai-based Google executive. Ghonaim received ample Arab and global media attention when he was arrested in February 2011 and his identity as the Facebook group was revealed.

clean up and "beautify" the central square where the biggest protests in Cairo were held. One graffito in central Cairo read in February 2011: "Starting today, this is our country. Do not throw rubbish. Do not pay a bribe… Do not submit to injustice and tyranny" (Challand, 2013). As Challand notes, the graffito is an example of the politics of "the dialectical structuring of immediate injunctions and the emergence of new subjectivity" (Challand, 2013, p. 179). Activists organized protests on Friday 8 April under the title of "the Friday of purification" (Winegar, 2011) in reference to the struggle against the "flul," which in Egyptian dialect means remnants or remains, and is used to signify those who worked for the Mubarak regime. They are deemed as remnants of something that was discarded, and that they must be cleaned out as well.

This figurative use of cleanliness is related to narratives about order and also progress and civilization. Douglas (1966/ 2003) argues that dirt "offends against order. Its elimination is not a negative movement but a positive effort to organize the environment (p. 12). She adds that dirt implies two conditions: "a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order" (p. 48). The cleaning of dirt is an act that recognizes the danger and power intrinsic to disorder. Cleaning identifies, classifies, and rejects matter responsible for disorder and for preventing any systematic organization of the environment. This idea of cleaning dirt "takes up straight into the field of symbolism and promises a link-up with more obviously symbolic systems of purity" (p. 48). Within this framework, cleaning dirt is a metaphor for negotiating a system of order. The classification of dirt is only relative to the sought out system. The rhetorical gesture towards the removal of dirt indicates that there is a system— either desired or in place—

and also designates what the obstacles are to that system's functioning that need to be removed.

Rhetorically, this framework is more obvious when words such as waste, trash, rubbish, or garbage are used because they signify a product of human activity and production, which may be distinct from the category of dirt that may exist outside of human consumption and production processes. The notion of practices of disposal is crucial to understanding how the trope of the garbage dump of history is used. Gille (2007) emphasizes that "materials are not "born" to be waste: they are transformed into waste by identifiable material and social processes" (p. 18). Therefore, she adds, the focus must shift "to the activities from which waste emerges" (p. 18). The cleaning and removing of garbage goes beyond the notion of order and disorder and is more clearly implicated in notions of progress and modernization, which have an obvious temporal dimension. Pye (2010) argues that the status of trash in modern life is "simultaneously present yet absent, empty and yet replete with potential" and this is what makes it symbolically "especially attractive against a background of anxieties about durability and order and the relationship between self and other, present and past" (p. 7). Garbage is a byproduct of development. In relation to the future, garbage is removed out of visible space because it is deemed as worthless, at best, and detrimental, at worst. It is implicated in the illusion of modernity, which presents itself as "the separation of the wheat from the chaff" (Neville & Villeneuve, 2002, p. 7). Modernity is understood as the achievement of a state of progressive social existence, which is advanced in relation to the elimination of aspects of life that are no longer necessary and thus outdated, backward, and

anachronistic. The rhetorical production of modernity is in the very process of designating unmodern objects and phenomena: the people, places, objects, and habits that can be miraculously discarded in its pursuit. And this perhaps captures the violence of modernity because its pursuit, and discursive production, require the disposal of the "unmodern."

Bauman (2004) applies this notion of waste in his theorization of the liquid modern and its relation to human creation, whether in art or economic production. Modern human creations involve the "separation and destruction of waste" (p. 21). Bauman adds that it is "through cutting out and throwing away the superfluous, the needless and the useless, the beautiful, the harmonious, the pleasing and the gratifying was to be divined" (p. 21). Similarly, economic progress designates humans as "human waste" whose lives have no value and can be discarded in pursuit of modernization and economic progress and as an inseparable accompaniment of modernity. The wasting of certain human lives "is an inescapable side-effect of *order-building*," each order casts some parts of the extant population as out of place, unfit or undesirable (p.5).

The pursuit of modernity and the removal of waste are then synonymous phenomena. Both are about seeking pure social, political, and economic systems. The logic is that a community is to achieve modernity if and when it discards impure elements that stand in the way. Within narratives about collective pasts during the Arab uprisings, I have discussed temporal erasure as a practice to discursively erase and discard those who are deemed as deviant in the temporal trajectory of a community. I have also argued how the present is equated with the past through linking current events with past symbols and

sites that are considered as originary moments in communal temporal trajectories. The garbage dump of history trope rhetorically allows for the disposal of political actors who are considered as obstacles in the path of the achievement of modern progress. The trope is rhetorically anchored in the present but has a Janus-faced projection to the past and future. What is deemed disposable today is portrayed as non-existent tomorrow and deviant yesterday. In other words, the rhetorical dichotomy between the valuable and disposable, in terms of the contemporary, parallels the contrast between the original and deviant in terms of historic imagination. What should be erased from history must also be disposed of in the present. This disposal requires action and often alludes to violence.

In an ethnographic study about violence in Lebanon, a country which has suffered from repeated wars, Hermez (2012) argues that the question "is the war going to ignite?" in Lebanese everyday parlance, which is used to spark casual conversation, shows that "forms of violence are present and implicated in the seemingly ordinary" (p. 328). The abovementioned rhetorical question, he contends, "suggests a recollection of past violence and an imagination of future violence" (p. 330). Ordinary communicative practices can be ways to deal with past memories of violence and the future anticipation of violence. Writing about China, Mueggler (1998) emphasizes how state "violence on bodies lies at the root of social memory" (p. 169) and how the authoritarian state's narratives take shape through its citizens' memories of state-sponsored physical violence. This relates to how the garbage dump trope retains the memory of Arab states' eradication of the bodies of dissenting citizens. The trope reproduces the same kind of violence endured by the body politic for decades. It represents the memories of how

bodies of dissidents disappeared from time and space as if they were cleansed out of society and ejected into a meta-temporal and metaphysical waste-site.

Of course, metaphors of cleansing have been historically associated with violence all over the world. In modern times, European colonial discourses have often produced and projected European power through metaphors of cleaning and washing the dirty colonized populations (See McClintock & Robertson, 1994). Also, ethnic "cleansing" has a long history in the modern world particularly in relation to imagined European white racial purity. The genocide against European Jews during the Holocaust was typically communicated through metaphors of cleaning, such as the German term *Judenrein*, used to describe territories that are "clean of Jews" (Bell-Fialkoff, 1993). More recently, in the 1990s, metaphors of cleaning were used in the Balkan and the Rwandan genocides. It is not a surprise then that Arab dictators resorted to similar metaphors about pathology, purity and danger in discussing how they intend to deal with their opponents. For example, Libyan leader Mu'ammar Al-Qadhafi famously described protestors as diseased rats and viruses. He vowed in a speech on 22 February 2011 to "cleanse Libya inch by inch, house by house, alleyway by alleyway, until Libya is cleansed from the filth" in what was widely feared to be the beginning of orchestrated killings of dissidents. In Syria, President Bashar Al-Assad repeatedly invoked the metaphor of cleaning. In a statement in March 2013, he vowed to "destroy extremism and ignorance until we have cleansed the country." Answering a question about army units' and politicians' regime desertion, Al-Assad said it is a process of "self-cleansing for the nation and the state" ("Al-Assad nakhoud," 2012). Similarly, Syrian rebel forces used the metaphor of

cleaning in describing their control of areas previously held by the regime. Many amateur videos that show rebels' destruction of statues and physical symbols and sites of the regime in areas that come under their control are uploaded on YouTube with a title referencing "cleaning" that area of Syria. These metaphors, of course, are used against the backdrop of widespread violence in a war that has claimed the lives of more than 230,000 by 2015.

When the metaphor of cleaning is projected onto the stage of history, the violence referenced is deemed of historic proportion as well— as if it is the final act of violence that will obliterate its object out of history. As an editorial on the pan-Arab daily, *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* stated, "the rightful place for our rulers, their sons, and relatives is the garbage dump of history. I wish we can guarantee that they won't pollute the earth with their filthy blood. I doubt that even the worms of the earth will be able to consume their rotten and diseased corpses" (Naji, 2012). This is an example of how dictators are portrayed as agents of filth and disease, who pose a public health hazard and danger. It is no surprise then that with this extent of popular incitement against authoritarianism, the rebels in Libya killed the Libyan dictator on the spot when he was found in a hiding place in Sirte in October 2011.

Metaphors of cleaning were used in relation to violence ubiquitously in Egypt, which saw the most dramatic shifts in political power. Following anti-Muslim Brotherhood mass protests in Cairo, the Egyptian army led a coup against the Brotherhood on 3 July 2013, placing the president Mohammad Morsi under house arrest and arresting the organization's most senior leaders. As one journalist in *Al-Hayat* daily

pointed out, the political division between the two sides became so sharp that both are in a "struggle about which (group) will find itself in the garbage dump of history, and will be annulled into nonexistence" (Khairy, 2014). Indeed, the year 2014 proved to be very violent in Egypt. Supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood took part in anti-coup protests by occupying public squares, mainly the Raba'a al-Adawiyah Square in east Cairo. The group's supporters sought to maintain the open-ended sit-in to put pressure on the new Egyptian army regime to release and reinstate Morsi as president. After a tense and violent political standoff, the army moved in to forcefully clear the square on 14 August. The army used live fire to disperse the unarmed protestors— killing more than 800 people in what was considered a crime against humanity (See "Egypt," 2014). The pro-army rhetorical buildup for the storming of the square focused on metaphors of cleanliness.

In fact, since the occupation of Cairo's Tahrir Square in 2011, the issue of cleanliness was important. In early 2011, pro-Mubarak forces repeatedly argued that the popular occupation of Tahrir Square represented a health hazard because of its dirtiness and chaos and claimed that the square has become a site of social ills related to public sex and drugs consumption (Abd-al-Rahman, 2012). Following the ousting of Mubarak, Tahrir Square continued to serve as the central site of protests. The army repeatedly cracked down on attempts to hold sit-ins in the square— often through arrest and killings of protestors. These episodes of violence were often framed by pro-army media as efforts of cleansing the city. For example, in an article titled "We want to clean Tahrir," a pro-army journalist wrote in the Egyptian daily *Al-Ahram* that Tahrir Square "has become an

epicenter of filth and lawlessness. We demand the removal of the ugly tents" where protestors are holding their sit-in, he said (Abd-al-Rahman, 2012). Similarly, in the buildup to the storming of the Raba'a Al-Adawiyah Square in 2013, where Muslim Brotherhood supporters staged ongoing protests, a pro-army journalist wrote that the square represented a "tragedy in cleanliness." He accused the Muslim Brotherhood protestors of vandalizing public statues and gardens and relieving themselves in public—saying that residents of the area have been complaining about foul smells and "that strange insects have begun appearing" in the neighborhood because of the unhygienic conditions (Omar, 2013). This echoed discourses about deviant behaviors in the square, such as the claim that public sex was sanctioned under an interpretation of Islam that allowed for extramarital sex (known in Arabic as 'jihad al-nikah'). Anti-Muslim Brotherhood social media campaigns also centered on such themes, for examples the social media "campaign to cleanse Egypt of the Brotherhood."

This discussion is an important part of the context to explain the use of the garbage dump of history trope. When the army stormed the Raba'a al-Adawiyah square and killed more than 800 people in August 2013, the event was described as the sending off of the Muslim Brotherhood into the garbage dump. The meme below is taken from a popular social media campaign, which had about 70,000 followers on Facebook and 80,000 followers on Twitter in August 2013, called "Egypt is not a Izbah"— a term that means a form of rural tenement. It was shared on 16 August 2013, two days after the army massacre.

Fig. 2.4

The meme shows a man saying “dirty and polluted figures” placed above pictures of the Muslim Brotherhood leadership with the caption “to the garbage dump of history.” Other memes that were shared on the Facebook and Twitter campaign focused solely on the cleaning and cleansing metaphor without explicitly mentioning history.

Fig. 2.5 Fig. 2.6 Fig. 2.7

The meme to the left shows the actual cleaning of the square and the placement of a poster of Mohammad Morsi into a plastic bag. The caption reads “your place is in the garbage, Morsi the garbage.” The meme in the center (Fig. 2.6) was shared on August 18,

four days after the army killings. It shows a broom sweeping logos of the Muslim Brotherhood party and groups that are affiliated with it. The caption reads: "A new beginning for a civilized Egypt. Clean your country." It inadvertently portrays the killings as a positive and civilizing act of cleaning. It implies that the killing was a necessary chore for keeping one's country clean by obliterating the dirty and uncivilized. The act of mass killing is then a new page in history for Egypt and its civilization. This again echoes how cleanliness is construed as a sign of civilization and modernity and how it requires the disposal of those deemed uncivilized. The 'civilized' Egyptians are the ones who may start a new beginning, while the rest must be eradicated because they are deemed the obstacle that prevents the progression of Egypt along history.

The third meme (Fig. 2.7), which was shared on 19 August, shows the face of Mohammad Badi', the general guide of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt who was sentenced to death by an Egyptian court in April 2015, juxtaposed on the body of a cockroach. It also shows a canister of Raid bug spray. The canister has the picture of President Al-Sisi with the caption "pesticide for all kinds of insects" and "kills fast." The meme's caption is "Al-Sisi exterminates all kinds of Brotherhood insects. He kills in fast speed." The symbol of the cockroach is associated with garbage and more precisely with the consequences of failing to dispose of and throw away garbage. The cockroach is culturally thought to be a carrier of disease. It is an object of disgust, especially when found at home. Thus, the portrayal of Muslim Brotherhood leaders and supporters as cockroaches is not only a dehumanizing depiction but also a metaphor that seeks to normalize their killing and to portray it as necessary in order to maintain a clean country.

President Al-Sisi is portrayed as representing the solution and the weapon to rid Egypt of its unwanted dirty and diseased in order to put the country on the course of progress and civilization. Needless to say, the fact that these memes were shared days after the massacre of the Raba'a al-Adawiyah Square shows how much they are rhetorically implicated in the killings that happened. In the first anniversary of the massacre, supporters of the army continued to evoke the metaphor of cleanliness. On 14 August 2014, some Egyptian Twitter users tweeted with the hashtag garbage dump of history (#مزبلة_التاريخ). One shared the following meme:

Fig. 2.8

The meme shows the image of a broom with a caption that reads: "no one must forget that 14 August is the anniversary of the cleaning of Raba'a (Square), and not the storming of Raba'a." The tweet is an example of the relation between the garbage dump of history trope (invoked through the hashtag) and the violence of the cleaning metaphor as used to describe the Raba'a al-Adawiyah massacre.

In war-torn Syria, the Arab country that has witnessed the most violence and destruction, tropes about cleanliness have also been prevalent. For example, the meme below is taken from a popular Syrian pro-regime Facebook page, which translates to "the

youths of the Syrian flag." The flag, as I will explain in the next chapter, has been an important medium of mnemonic signification.

Fig. 2.9

The image shows a drawing of a man throwing trash into a bin, which is labeled "the garbage dump of history." The trash being thrown is labeled "the opposition." On top of the image the following words are written: "keep your countries clean!" Against the backdrop of the Syrian regime's aggressive military campaign against the opposition, which includes the shelling of civilian areas and mass arrests, torture and killing of dissidents, the meme represents a call on Syrians to actively dispose of the opposition into the garbage dump of history. Therefore, whether in Egypt or Syria, the trope has consistently reflected acts of violence and killing and justified them in terms of a necessary cleaning up in order to clear the way for the nation's temporal progression.

Conclusion

The trope of the garbage dump shows how communicative practices contribute to the dissemination of violence in society often through ordinary mnemonic posturing about the need to forget certain political actors. In this way, these practices also anticipate the occurrence of violence in the future. These brutal intonations are embedded in temporal narratives and metaphors about the attainment of modernity and progress. The

temporal metaphor is important in discursively concealing violence, while calling for it. While it may be crass, or at least uncreative, to call for the obliteration and eradication of one's enemies on news and social media, it is easier to anchor violent statements within the past or the future. Clearly, under certain conditions, the projection of the current crises onto history exacerbates conflict— leaving no common ground between political adversaries neither in the present nor in the future.

It is also important to note that the mnemonic politics expressed in the garbage dump of history do not actually reflect the forgetfulness of political actors and symbols. In claiming that something needs to be forgotten, one is also reminding themselves and others of it. Rather, the ubiquitous use of the garbage dump trope by people from across the spectrum of political affiliations reflects what Laclau (2005) calls "organic crisis" when floating signifiers overwhelm the system of signification without a hegemonic meaning-making process. In this framework, history is a trans-temporal rhetorical tool to evoke one version of an imagined desirable progression and outcome of current events— and to use it in acts of self-positioning against political opponents. History is constructed as a site against which to assess whether current events are heading in one's desired direction or not. History is brought up to stress the urgency and righteousness of one's position. In articulating history through the garbage dump trope, the speaker gestures to the future and tautologically implies that he/ she is the most powerful agent to influence the future and thus will be on the right side of tomorrow's history.

The relation between past and present, expressed through "the garbage dump of history" trope is not a closed system of signification. Rather it is a dynamic system, in

which new political actions and opportunities reconfigure how the past is remembered and how it influences current actions. Communicative practices of remembering and forgetting occupy a liminal stage within that process. They are based in the present but they interact with the longue-durée of collective memories and future anticipations whether hopeful goals or fearful anxieties. Metaphors of remembering and forgetting set the agenda for the past and future through the present. They project understandings of contemporary politics into a temporally Janus-faced orientation.

In his book "The dustbin of history," Marcus (1995) describes the dustbin as "a wasteland" – "a territory, unlike history, without any means to a narrative, a language with which to tell a story" (p. 18). For his part, Moser (2002) criticizes the linearity of Marcus's conception of history by emphasizing that the designation of waste is not a final and complete categorization but part of changing power narratives. He writes (2002, p. 101):

> Yet, what winds up in the dustbin of history, what is rejected and, in this way, devalued, acquiring ipso facto the status of waste, can be retrieved to serve as a support for counter-memory, a springboard for untold narratives.

My analysis of the trope of the garbage dump of history in Arab media supports Moser's (2002) criticism. The garbage dump is not a final wasteland of what is written out of history. It is a relational metaphor. It deploys aggressive mnemonic politics in its attempt to set the agenda for who should be forgotten and who shall be remembered.

The garbage dump of history is a trope then has been invoked in news articles, political cartoons, memes, and Twitter and Facebook hashtags. It allows for the mobilization of people against authoritarian rule, as was the case during the beginning of the 2011 uprisings. It is also a powerful metaphor with condensed symbolism that expresses the will to start a new stage in history through the forgetting and eradication of the undesirables that are imagined to stand in the way of the achievement of modernity. The garbage dump trope then has multiple meanings. It resonates because of its capacity to mobilize anxieties about the failures of progress, development, and modernity in the Arab world and turn them into a defiant revolutionary action. When used against political rivals, it is also indicative of the deep roots of the problems faced by Arab societies, particularly in relation to the extent of the fissures that separate political actors. It is therefore a telling case-study of the mnemonic battles of the Arab uprisings. In the next chapter, I discuss another case-study of mnemonic struggles as expressed by the use of flags in Syria.

Chapter III: The mnemonic battles over Syrian flags

Introduction

This chapter analyzes how flags, as symbols that capture the nexus between history, peoplehood, and territory, have been deployed in mnemonic battles in Syria. My approach to the study of flags is in emphasizing the communicative practices that invoke their historical signification and its relation to imaginings of peoplehood and territoriality. Focusing on the ongoing war in Syria, which began following the initially peaceful uprising in March 2011, I examine the use of flags in media and public spaces, whether in everyday situations or in contexts when people put their lives on the line in defense of the flag. Flags are crucial symbols for the mobilization of people. As objects, the allure of flags is in their particularity in representing a single nation, a people, or a political project; while also signifying a recognized universality as official symbols in the world of nations (Billig, 1995). Flags are not passive reflections of a primordial national identity. Rather their signification is dependent on the political context of their use and the relational practices of their deployment. With this in mind, this chapter approaches nationalism and collective belonging by analyzing communicative practices within struggles for hegemonic meaning-making.

In fact, debates about flags are by no means new to Syria. In Syria, there is tension between imagined geographies of belonging and actual nation-state sovereignty, which is expressed in a discordant history of a changing flag— the totem of communality. In the 2011 Syrian uprising and the subsequent civil war, new controversies about what flag should represent Syria's people have emerged. One

controversy has been between the Al-Assad regime and the official opposition, with each promoting a different national flag. Another violent debate emerged between on the one hand, the opposition, which is represented by the Free Syrian Army militia and the internationally-recognized National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, and, on the other hand, jihadist rebel groups, who reject national flags and argue that Islamic symbols should be the exclusive expressions of Muslim collectivity in Syria and beyond. Proponents of Islamist and jihadist militant groups argue that national flags aim to divide Muslims according to Western notions of sovereignty and national belonging. Islamic flags are said to be transtemporal and transpatial symbols of Islam.

Through analyzing these public debates and conflicts, I highlight a history of politics that is often neglected by historians and political scientists— one that emerges through debates about symbols that capture the complexity of collective identity. I argue that flags are versatile symbols with important temporal signification. They represent a collective orientation towards specific eras in history that are imagined as originary moments for the temporal progression of political communities. In that way, flags capture how political expressions get conjoined with and strategically anchored within past historical times. They are also symbols of a renewing and mutating history that disrupts the notion of nationalist linearity, which they are said to signify. As symbols of dissonance against the Al-Assad regime, flags— whether the opposition's national flag or the 'Islamic' flag— communicate a desire for the temporal erasure of the regime by anchoring contemporary political activism and armed rebellion within pre-regime eras. For the proponents of the opposition flag, the originary temporal setting is within the

postcolonial nationalist era, which was characterized by relatively pluralist politics, and in which the dreams of postcolonial liberation dominated political expressions. While for the jihadist factions, the originary times of inspiration lie within the rise of Islam in the 7th century.

In post-2011 Syria, flags have circulated through a web of hypermediation across spaces and media platforms. As Holert (2013) argues, the flag, as a concrete material thing and as an abstract symbol, "is only interesting in its relationality, as a thing among things, an actant among actants—only interesting when it is experienced as part of an event, as an element of affective encounters or a socio-technological fabric." Since the Syrian uprising erupted in March 2011, flags have been used as physical objects in public spaces. They are worn on the bodies of activists, whether in opposition or in support of the regime. They are used to drape the dead corpses of Syrian fighters and civilians who have fallen victim in the war, which is estimated to have claimed the lives of more than 220,000 people and displaced more than half of the population, in its first four years. They have inspired the biggest rallies and demonstrations that have occurred in Syria. They have also instigated intense and divisive debates in popular culture, social media, and news media amongst various political actors and militant factions. Since 2011, flags representing Syria have been desecrated, torn, and burnt in public expressions of anger and defiance. While maintaining their powerful signification of collectivity, their meanings are relational depending on the political context of their use and the mediated aspect of their circulation. Accordingly, I understand flags through the framework of heterotopology,

using Kraidy's (2013) elaboration on the Foucauldian concept to capture this mediated mnemonic battle of the Arab uprisings. I also apply Bhabha's (1990) framework of the "double-time" of nationalism to the study of flags and analyze the flag battles in Syria in terms of pedagogical controversies about collective historic origins and performative strategies about new political formations. Flags then falsely appear as normative symbols of stable nationalism or unwavering religious affiliation. Conceptualizing them as heterotopic is crucial in revealing the dogmatic pretence at the heart of their power. As I will show in the case of Syria, the same flag acquires different meanings depending on where and how it is imposed, used, and protected and against whom it is projected.

As for my method, I have analyzed 221 articles from six major Syrian news sources in the time span of January 2012 to April 2015. My search terms were "Syrian flag" and also "the mandate flag" (term used by pro-regime media) and "the independence flag" (term used by opposition media), which are common ways to refer to the opposition's flag depending on the politics of the news medium. I have also searched for the term "Al-U'qab," which is the name of the Islamic banner used by salafi-jihadist rebel groups in Syria. I looked at three pro-regime sources: *Al-Watan* daily (n=33), *Tishreen* daily (n=35), and *Addounia TV* (n=40). Established in 2006 and owned by the business and media mogul and cousin of President Bashar Al-Assad, Rami Makhlouf, *Al-Watan* is a private paper that reflects the official Syrian editorial policy. *Tishreen* daily, established in 1975, is one of the state-owned dailies. It is considered a mouthpiece of the regime. Similarly, *Addonia TV*, also owned by Makhlouf, is the main non-state pro-

regime TV station and news website. It has been a major source of news in Syria since its launch in 2007. The three opposition news media I looked at are: *Orient TV* (n=38), *Zaman al-Wasl* (n=44), and *Enab Baladi* (n=31). Launched in 2005, Dubai-based *Orient TV* is a 24-hour news channel and website. It is owned by Syrian businessman Ghassan Aboud and has become one of the main opposition media outlets. *Zaman al-Wasl* is a news website that was established in 2005. Following the 2011 uprising, it has gained prominence as a pro-opposition news outlet. Finally, *Enab Baladi* is a pro-opposition ezine, which was first established in the restive Damascus suburb of Daraya in 2011. The articles I analyzed have reported on the main ways that flags were utilized in Syria, including campaigns to deploy the flag in public spaces and on social media pages in online mobilization campaigns. I have also conducted a YouTube search for videos of demonstrations and/ or battles, in which the flag has been prominently featured, displayed, and used. These videos inform my analysis. Before presenting my data, I will elaborate on the academic literature within which I situate this chapter in relation to my larger study.

Nationalism, communicative practices & postcolonial disruptions

The literature on flags has been mostly approached from the interdisciplinary field of nationalism. And mnemonic politics has been long conceptualized at the heart of nationalism, whether in relation to class struggles within nation-state formations or in regards to how nations construct historic or commemorative narratives to build and institutionalize national identities. Ernest Renan, the foundational 18th century nationalism theorist, has famously proclaimed that "forgetting, I would even go as saying

historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation," particularly in relation to forgetting the violence and brutality involved in nation-building (Bhabha, 1990). Many scholars of history and collective memory have theorized the link between nationalism and memory by critiquing popular beliefs that national belonging is a primordial concept, rather than a constructed idea. Hobsbawm's (1983) canonic work emphasizes that nationalism is often cultivated by traditions, which "claim to be old" but are in fact invented and instituted through the repetition of a set of practices (p. 1). Rituals of reverence to flags are of course a primary example of invented traditions.

According to Gellner (1983/ 2008), nationalism is "primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent" (p. 1). Modernist theorists of nationalism suggest that statehood typically precedes nationhood although the latter operates as a primordial identity. Its power, as Breuilly (1983/ 2008) argues, is in its appearance of naturalness. Hardt and Negri (2000) are amongst the scholars who emphasize that the primordial appearance of national identity serves the interests of ruling classes and national elites because it extends the subjugation and domination of the modern concept of sovereignty by mystifying the basis of its bourgeois establishment (p.102). Within this perspective, flags can be main instruments that the ruling elite use to propagate the sanctity of sovereignty and the legitimacy of their power through symbolic claims about history.

For Anderson (1982/ 2006), nationalism relies on the ability to imagine community. His influential theory posits that this imagination is based on experiences of shared temporal contemporaneity— the shared empty time—which was advanced since

the 18th century by developments in the printing press and other textual artifacts and technologies. Anderson's theory has been since criticized from different perspectives. Marvin and Ingle (1999) criticize Anderson's emphasis that people imagine being "bounded by a horizon conforming to the reach of a written vernacular" (p. 26). In their study on the American flag, they argue that a flag is a totem that signifies rituals of blood sacrifice for the nation and that nationalism is a civil religion and a community of blood and not text. However, they neglect explaining the political context of totem rituals and how they are utilized and institutionalized within different nation-state formations. For example, how do national totems collapse, change, and mutate? How do differences in history and systems of government influence group formations and their willingness for bloodletting sacrifices? Questions that the case of Syria, as I will explain, sheds light on.

Scholars working on postcolonial contexts have also critiqued Anderson. Bhabha (1994) complicates Anderson's theory by articulating temporal tensions within the conception of the people as a community sharing empty time. Bhabha stresses the premise that postcolonial time "questions the teleological traditions of past and present, and the polarized historicist sensibility of the archaic and the modern" inherent in notions of nationalism and the linearity of national progress (p. 153). Bhabha writes that the nation's people are construed (p. 145):

> in a double-time; the people are the historical 'objects' of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin *in the past*; the people are also the 'subjects' of a process of

signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity. Accordingly, the notion of an imagined community cannot be reduced to contemporaneous time without accounting for how it simultaneously necessitates a historic grounding and an erasure of previous conceptions of community through the productive imagination. While pedagogical and didactic strategies seek to construct a people's historic origin, performative strategies enact national belonging in order to forget previous histories of community.

Flags are symbols that demonstrate the temporal tension inherent to nationhood and, as Sergie (2003) points out, signify the "double-time" of the national community through their pedagogical functions and performative usages. Thus, their use is contextual and should not be understood normatively. As Holert contends, "flags never occur in isolation. Rather, they are always (more or less firmly) integrated into material, social, urban, and technological environments and arrangements." They are relational forms of media with a "heterotopic function, in the Foucauldian sense" (Holert, 2003). As Foucault (1986) contends, our experience of the world is no longer in linear development and temporal progress but rather "through a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein" (p.1). Heterotopia captures this relational complexity of time in space because they emerge out of "a set of relations that delineate sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another" (Foucault, 1986, p. 3). As a heterotopic object, and a temporal symbol, the flag, has the curious ability of establishing relations with the

totality of sites of memory that are deemed relevant to its collective signification. As with Bhabha's notion of double-time, Foucault's heterotopia is a double-space— one that purports to be simultaneously real and a mere reflection of other things. Kraidy (2013) uses the notion of heterotopia to explain the uses of graffiti in times of revolution— describing the appropriations and subversions of graffiti as extensions of warring politics and as 'other' spaces autonomous from politics. In my notion of mnemonic battles, flags' heterotopic character enables the mobilization of snippets from history and collective memory to construct novel a novel symbol that is effective in the confrontation with political rivals.

The crucial aspect of flags is that, in the words of Marvin and Ingle (1999), they are holy symbols treated both as a live being and as the sacred embodiment of a dead one. They represent the history of a people despite their novelty and fragility, whether as a physical object, or in relation to their unstable histories, which are most apparent in postcolonial and authoritarian contexts. Since Syrian independence in 1946, the flag has officially changed four times and continues to be contested by other flags. In fact, the popularity of flags as representatives of political community can be traced back to the early 20th century, the time of the Arab Nahda. Since the late 19th century, the Nahda movement propagated nationalist thought through its "revival" of Arab culture, language, and history.

In Ba'thist Syria, flags, like other official symbols of collectivity, became symbols of the state and authoritarian power. Under Al-Assad's rule, all public expressions of nationalism have been primarily in celebration of his regime as well.

As examples of invented tradition, national flags are tasked with symbolizing social cohesion and legitimizing the authority of state institutions (Hobsbawm, 2012, p. 9). In authoritarian regimes, the latter function prevails over the former. In Syria, the regime's use of the national symbol erodes its collective signification through authoritarian monopolization of the sanctioned practices of its performance and circulation. In her work on Syrian authoritarian politics under President Hafez Al-Assad (in office 1971-2000), Wedeen (1999) contends that the Syrian regime uses an exaggerated rhetoric and symbolism in glorification of the president as a "strategy of domination based on compliance" (p. 6). She calls this strategy "Assad's cult" and argues that it operates as a "disciplinary device, generating a politics of public dissimulation in which citizens act *as if* they revere their leader" (p. 6). Indeed, rituals held in reverence to the Syrian flag echo those revering Hafez Al-Assad. In Billig's (1995) framework of "banal nationalism," flags are literally one way of "flagging" or reminding of nationhood in Western nation-states characterized by their "confidence in their own continuity" (p. 8). As I have argued, countries ruled by authoritarian regimes are different from Western and democratic contexts in that the use of nationalist symbols (or other mnemonic symbols) is exclusively monopolized by those in power for the purpose of bolstering their authority. That said, the litmus test of the hegemony of authoritarian systems of signification is whether they are publically communicated through practices that are also banal. For example, the daily chanting of pro-Hafez Al-Assad slogans by children in Syrian schools in the 1980s and 1990s became part of banal everyday life even if in other countries these practices may seem

extreme. My point is that though Billig describes practices of nationalism in democratic countries, his framework about everyday practices can be applied in authoritarian systems. However, rather than speaking of "banal nationalism," it would be more appropriate to describe such practices in a place like Hafez Al-Assad's Syria as "banal authoritarianism." Of course, this is not to minimize the violence perpetrated by the state against those who dissent. But it is to capture how authoritarian nationalism is experienced by the majority of the people in everyday life.

Here it must be noted that under the rule of Hafez Al-Assad, flags did not configure strongly in a state propaganda program that focused exclusively on the cult of presidential authoritarian rule and on pan-Arab nationalism as official ideology. In contrast, when his son, Bashar Al-Assad came to power in 2000, he sought to revamp his regime's communicative strategy by encouraging nationalism towards the Syrian nation-state and claiming that his rule was intrinsic to national identity (Al-Ghazzi, 2013). The flag was projected as a symbol of an alleged consensus over Al-Assad's rule. For example, in an editorial in the official daily *Tishreen* in 2007, one commentator celebrates the increased use of the Syrian flag by claiming that "the complete consensus over President Al-Assad is a consensus on the flag's glory… (because he) has dedicated himself to protect that flag from humiliation and servility" (Zriqa, 2007). Notably, the regime-sanctioned increase in Syrian nationalist expressions was reflected through more prominent use of the official flag and map of Syria. For example, in celebration of the 10th anniversary in 2010 of Bashar's takeover of power, a huge 637-square-meter flag was erected in a central Damascus park on top

of a 107-meter high pole ("Akbar alam," 2010). The regime launched similar projects across Syria. As a pro-regime news agency put it at the time, the flags were to be erected "everywhere" and shall "become a major part of the public scene across the country" (I'bo, 2010). Bashar Al-Assad's regime enabled new flag practices in the Syrian public sphere, such as increasing use of the flag in popular culture, television logos and clips, advertising, festivals, and other popular venues, which contrast with the exclusively official uses of the flag during the rule of his father. The 2011 uprising marked a dramatic shift in the way flags were used in Syria but one that is preceded by a history of instability in national identification mired in the country's postcolonial and authoritarian politics. In the next section, I show that the attempt to give a linear history of Syrian flags reveals a nexus of mutating and changing national totems.

Syrian history told through its flags

Syria has changed flags several times since it gained independence in 1946. Its mutating flags reflect tensions between pan-Arabism, Syrian nationalism, and communal allegiances within Syria. The flag changes tell a story of a struggling nation-state, whose leaders had to confront difficult challenges within and beyond the borders of Syria. The unstable history of flags in Syria reflects the difficulty of symbolically designing a nation that represents a diverse population in ethnicity, religion, and class. It also sheds light on the difficulty of building a state capable of facing arduous international political challenges, particularly in relation to the colonial legacy. Syria is a country that sees itself as having been brutally divided up by colonial powers. Most Syrians hold the view that Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, and the Alexandretta (Hatay) province in Turkey are lands

that were snatched away by colonial powers in the early 20th century from a country that itself belongs to a wider geopolitical Arab space. At the same time, within Syria, tensions around religious and ethnic identification have often dominated national politics.

The establishment of modern Syria within its current borders took place within the context of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the victory of the Allies in World War I. Needless to say, despite this new history, Syria is home to some of the world's oldest continuously inhabited areas. Under the Ottoman Empire, whose rule over the Arabic-speaking Middle East lasted more than 400 years (roughly from 1516-1920), the region was administered as different provinces and *sanjaks* (prefectures) usually surrounding main cities such as Aleppo, Damascus, Jerusalem, and Beirut. By the late 19th century, both France and Britain encouraged the Arabs to challenge Ottoman rule. As mentioned, this was also the period that saw the rise of Arab national consciousness and the birth of the Arab political and intellectual movement known as the Nahda. Influenced by the Nahda, leading Arab nationalist theorists sought to implement its values in political party formations and ideologies. For example, the two nationalist theoreticians and founders of the pan-Arab nationalist Ba'th party, Michel Aflaq and Zaki Al-Arsuzi, were educated in Paris in the late 1920s where they were exposed first hand to European nationalism (Tibi, 1997).

When World War I (1914-1918) broke out, and the Ottoman Empire fought alongside the Axis powers, the British-backed Emir of Mecca, Hussein bin Ali of the Hashemite dynasty (known as Sharif Mecca) led the Arab revolt against the Ottomans. He believed that once the war ends the victorious Allies will support his family's rule

over Arab lands. In March 1920, his son, Faisal I, was declared the king of Syria. However, later that year, French forces entered Damascus and enforced their League of Nations-endorsed mandate over the country, which began a 26-year colonial period (Seale, 1988).

During the Arab revolt, "the Arab flag," as it is commonly known, was the representative flag. The flag, as shown below, consists of a red triangle with three horizontal stripes in black, green and white. The black represents the flag of Prophet Mohammad and his companions (called *Al-U'qab*, literally meaning the hawk), and the Abbasid empire; the green represents the prophet's family; white represents various Arab leaders; and the red triangle the Hashemite dynasty (Podeh, 2011, p. 424).

Fig. 3.1

The new flag mobilized the colors of Arab-Muslim history in a claim that the Arabs are rising and awakening again after centuries of Ottoman dominance. This flag remains the inspiration behind the flags of 11 Arab countries (out of 22) and continues to reflect the tensions between pan-Arab national identity and nation-state belonging in the Arab world (See Podeh, 2011). There are two theories about how the flag was designed. Some historians argue that it emulated banners designed by pre-World War I Arab national clubs and associations, while others believe that it was none other than British diplomat Sir Mark Sykes who first designed it (Podeh, 2011). Sykes was the British signatory to

the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 between Britain and France that divided up former Ottoman Arab territories between them. Many Syrians consider the treaty as responsible for crushing their forefathers' historic aspirations for independence and unity. As Seale (1988) explains, "every Syrian schoolchild is brought up to hate the Sykes-Picot Agreement" as an instrument "to carve up and dispose of 'natural Syria'" (p.14).

Under the French, several flags were designed not only for Syria as a whole but also for its different regions, particularly those inhabited by religious minority groups. Syria's population has a majority of Sunni Muslim Arabs with three substantial religious minorities, Christians, Alawites, and Druze.[6] While Christian populations are spread out throughout the country's urban centers and rural areas, the Muslim offshoot heterodox sects of the Druze (concentrated in south Syria) and the Alawites (mainly reside along the Syrian coast) dominate particular regions. French plans for the future of the two regions initially fluctuated between giving them full independence to partial autonomy within a federal Syria. Though some local politicians favored local autonomy, most Druze and Alawite representatives supported unity with the rest of the country. At the outset of its mandate, France insisted that a miniature French flag was to be drawn in the top left corner of all Syrian flags. However, in 1932, amidst nationalist Syrian pressure, a new flag was adopted.

[6] About 10 percent of the Syrian population is Kurdish. In fact, Syrian Kurds revere the flag of Kurdistan. During the Syrian civil war, Syrian Kurds have mobilized and fought under the banner of the Kurdistan flag.

Fig. 3.2

The flag, as shown above, consists of three horizontal stripes of the traditional Islamic/ Arab colors of green, white, and black, with three red stars representing the districts of Damascus, Aleppo, and Dayr al-Zor— which were the three main Ottoman provinces currently in Syria (Podeh, 2011).[7] This banner had been Syria's official flag from 1932 through independence in 1946 and up until 1958. The Syrian opposition in the 2011 uprising adopted this flag.

In its first decade, the young postcolonial Syrian state navigated difficult circumstances as it pursued modernization. Only two years after independence, Syria fought a war and was defeated, along with other Arab armies, in the 1948 war against Israel, which unfolded in retaliation for the latter's declaration of independence and expulsion of thousands of Palestinians from their hometowns. Politically, the country was governed as a parliamentary democracy, allowing sharply different ideological parties, such as the Communist, Ba'th, and Syrian Socialist Nationalist parties, in addition to the Muslim Brotherhood, to compete for political and social influence. Within the context of a world engrossed in third world solidarity and anticolonial fervor, and a popular regional desire for Arab unity, local politics got enmeshed with regional and international influences and aspirations. Within this context, the charismatic Gamal Abd-al-Nasser led a coup in Egypt in 1956, nationalized the Suez Canal, and defended Egypt in a war declared by France, Britain, and Israel. Abd-al-Nasser captured the political imagination

[7] Following independence, and the merger of Alawite and Druze areas within Syria, it is said that the three stars began to represent the Alawite coast, the Druze southern mountain, with the third star representing the districts of Damascus, Aleppo, and Dayr al-Zor.

of Syrians like no other leader. Overwhelmed by demands for unification, Syria united with Egypt in 1958 and formed a short-lived united republic, the United Arab Republic—beginning a new chapter in the story of Syrian flags. The two countries adopted a new flag, as shown below, of three horizontal stripes of red, white, and black with two green stars that represent Egypt and Syria. This flag is the Syrian national flag and one of the main symbols of pro-Al-Assad Syrians in the post-2011 civil war.

Fig. 3.3

The new united country lasted for only three years as Syrian military officers grew weary of Egyptian dominance. In 1961, Ba'thist officers led a separatist coup, setting in motion the enduring reign of the Ba'th Party in Syria. The new Ba'thist regime restored the previous flag with the three stars. Ba'th, which means "ascent" is an Arab nationalist party established in 1941 and influenced by 19th century German romantic nationalism (Dawisha, 2009). It advocates an Arab political rebirth based on socialism, the empowerment of the peasants and the working class, and secular nationalism. Unsurprisingly, the party attracted members from Syrian minorities of rural and newly urbanized backgrounds, including Hafez Al-Assad (in office 1971-2000), who hails from a village along Syria's coastal mountains and belongs to the Alawite religious community (Seale, 1988). The party's flag adopted a slightly changed version of the previously-mentioned anti-Ottoman Arab revolt flag.

In 1971, Hafez Al-Assad, who served as defense minister at the time, launched a military coup against his fellow Ba'thists. The flag was changed three times under the Hafez al-Assad regime. Even though Arab nationalism suffered a severe blow when Israel defeated Egypt, along with Syria and Jordan, in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Arab countries continued to pursue unity, at least on the rhetorical and symbolic levels. In 1972, Syria, Libya, and Egypt adopted a new united flag as they formed the Federation of Arab Republics. The flag consists of red, white, and black stripes with a yellow hawk in the middle. The hawk is believed to represent the symbol of Prophet Mohammad's Quraysh tribe— a move that many think is meant to amplify Islamic symbolism so as to balance Arab nationalism's secular origins in the eyes of religious Arabs (Sergie, 2003). In 1980, Al-Assad changed the Syrian flag for the final time back to the flag with the two stars used when Egypt and Syria were united under the United Arab Republic. The change was not coincidental. In the early 1980s, Al-Assad faced an armed rebellion by Islamist insurgents seeking to overthrow his authoritarian rule. Based out of their strongholds in the cities of Aleppo and Hama, the insurgent movement assassinated many Ba'thist and Alawite officials. Their armed activity launched a brief civil war in Syria that was brought to a bloody end when Al-Assad launched a military campaign in 1982 to uproot the movement. The campaign instigated what is referred to as the Hama massacre, when the Syrian army basically bulldozed large parts of the old city of Hama, killing tens of thousands of civilians (Seale, 1988). It was amidst these battles that Al-Assad re-introduced the two-starred flag in what was considered as a claim that he represents the legacy of the popular Egyptian leader Abd-al-Nasser and the ideology of Arab

nationalism against radical Islamic insurgents (Sergie, 2003). As mentioned, that flag remains the Syrian official flag in 2015.

Flags: Between pedagogical and performative strategies

Prior to the 2011 uprisings, the use of flags in Syria was subject to the authoritarian policies of the Al-Assad regime, which sought to monopolize narratives and symbols of collective belonging. As outlined above, since the late 1950s, national symbols reflected an understanding of Syrianness that served authoritarian rule. Though expressions of nationalism changed under Bashar, the fact remains that national symbols are only used in service of his authority. It is no surprise that the Syrian opposition opted for different symbols than those used by the regime, including its mobilization under a different national banner. The process of the opposition's use of the pre-1958 flag happened within months of the eruption of the uprising in March 2011.

The incident credited for setting the country on the path of revolution took place in the southern city of Dara'a when school children sprayed the slogan of the Arab Spring, "the people demand the fall of the regime" on their school wall (Abouzeid, 2011). The children were arrested and brutally tortured, which prompted anti-regime demonstrations. The violent police crackdown on these unprecedented protests in Dara'a encouraged Syrians throughout the country to revolt—putting the country on the destructive path of civil war, when the opposition began to take up arms. On the rhetorical level, the regime initially sought to ignore the popular expression of dissent and to deny that what is happening is part of the revolutionary wave sweeping across Arab countries within the context of the "Arab Spring." As President Bashar Al-Assad told the

Wall Street Journal on 31 January, 2011, no revolt would happen in the country because "Syria is not Egypt" and its population does not share the same animosity towards its leaders ("Interview," 2011). Regime officials attempted to portray the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia as a result of both countries' pro-Western foreign policies— claiming that Syria's anti-Israeli rhetoric and support for anti-Israeli resistance movements in Lebanon and Palestine would shield it from revolutionary fervor. As of June 2011, three months after the initial demonstrations that took place in Dara'a, the protest movement grew and the pro-regime media could no longer ignore it at a time when pan-Arab news media, especially the Qatari *Al-Jazeera* and the Saudi *Al-Arabia* channels, were focusing on the Syria story with a clear anti-regime line. While denying that the regime was committing atrocities in its attempts to crush dissidents, regime media called the opposition "terrorists and armed groups" and eventually declared that Syria is defending itself against a "universal war" that had been allegedly launched against it. The regime and its supporters also mobilized and organized rallies in support of Al-Assad. They claimed to represent genuine Syrian nationalism in contrast to the opposition, which they accused of serving foreign agendas. Within this context, the signification of the official national flag was fortified as a prominent symbol of regime supporters.

The gradual change of the opposition's flag of choice has occurred, as Moubayad (2012) argued, to reflect anti-regime forces' "desire to break with everything that reminds them of 49 years of B'ath Party rule— even if it means bringing down Syria's oldest surviving state symbol." The new flag communicates that Al-Assad can be erased across time, as well as from the present political reality. He can become an "aberration" in a new

nationalistic vision of Syrian past and future. One Syrian activist, Al-Mashriqi (2012), commented in a blogpost that the controversy concerns "the dialectics of patriotism/ treason." The opposition flag, he stated, was used officially for the first time in a meeting of the Syrian National Coalition on 1 June 2011 in Istanbul. Opposition activists were inspired by the way their Libyan counterparts began using their country's pre-Al-Qadhafi flag. The decision communicated "a complete rejection of all that is related to the current Syrian regime," said Al-Mashriqi. One Syrian veteran dissident told the anti-regime *Orient TV* that the opposition flag represented a "history of dignity and honor. It symbolizes the history of our forefathers who… genuinely struggled for the country and not for their personal interests." He concluded that "the flag exposed the brutality of the Syrian regime. It demonstrates that no matter how much time passes the criminal Al-Assad gang is an anomaly in Syrian history" (Smasim, 2015). Through these comments, the flag's meanings are explained across time and are said to be rooted in history. But in the present, it signifies the rejection of the Al-Assad regime and its brutality, which contrasts with pre-Al-Assad history and the aspired for post-Al-Assad future.

On pedagogical controversies

The main flag controversy, between the opposition and the regime supporters, has been about whether the flag adopted by the opposition represented "colonialism" or "independence." The regime controlled the framing of the debate by accusing the opposition of rallying behind "the colonial flag" or "the mandate flag" under the justification that that flag was used when Syria was administered by the French mandate. Of course, the accusation ignores that the now opposition flag was the banner that Syrians

utilized during their struggle for independence and for more than a decade following its achievement. To regime supporters, the opposition flag is a foreign symbol and proof that its proponents follow a foreign agenda. As one commentator stated sarcastically in an article on the website of pro-regime *Addonia TV*, opposition meetings convene "rich politicians who wear Turkish suits, Italian shoes, Swiss watches, American cellphones, and French mandate flags to allegedly ask for 'justice and equality' for the Syrian people!" (Qassem, 2012). Here the author lists products of countries that support the Syrian opposition, including the "French mandate flags," which is portrayed to be as foreign and remote, in the eyes of the average Syrian, as a Swiss watch. The article reflects the mutual accusations of treason between government supporters and opponents. The pro-Al-Assad Syrians believe the opposition serves Western, Turkish, and Gulf Arab policies, as evidenced by the foreign military backing of Syrian rebels. On the other hand, pro-opposition Syrians see Al-Assad supporters as pawns in the hands of Iran and also Russia.

The regime accusations of the treason of its opponents are outlined in an article entitled "the mandate flag" on the official daily *Tishreen*. Writing in June 2011 when the opposition flag began to be used, Ghosn (2011) proclaims that it is "remarkable and surprising that some protestors have been raising a flag that belongs back to eight decades ago." He explains that "it is a flag that was conceived under the French occupation." Linking the flag to the motivations of the protest movement, Ghosn debunks the nonviolence of the protestors. "Why would protests that allegedly call for reform and change necessitate an insult to all symbols of nationhood and sovereignty?" he asks. He

claims that the flag change demonstrates that the aim of protestors is to "shake the unity and independence of the country, and more importantly, to target coexistence." He concludes by voicing support for initiatives to raise the national flag over the different Syrian regions and provinces as "an important popular confirmation of genuine belonging to Syria and of the rehabilitation of its symbols of nationhood and sovereignty."

Other examples echo the theme of the "mnemonic battles" of the uprisings in the way that news media practitioners have mobilized the temporality of progress in support of their political positions. It is the familiar teleological claim, this time expressed via debates on flags, which seeks to prove a group's power in the present by claiming that it will be the one to prevail in the future. One pro-regime commentator, Saqr (2013) wrote in *Al-Watan* daily using conspiratorial language that the change of flags is evidence of how the main goals of "the so-called Arab Spring have been to defeat the concept of the national state with all its components, its authority, institutions, and the foundations of economic and social life." The intent, he added, is "to regress to the era prior to the national state through promoting sectarian and provincial allegiances." Saqr was implicitly arguing that Syria had been consistently progressing since it has gained its independence in 1946 and that "regressing" to a symbol out of past history aimed to setback those achievements. He concluded that "the logic of history shall prevail anew. Order shall beat chaos and shall rescue the nation." The "logic of history," according to the author, is linear progress. On the other hand, any attempt to disrupt it, such as through an uprising, is chaos that is bound for defeat. The flag is seen as a symbolic attempt to disrupt Syrian national linear progress.

Similarly, the anniversary of Evacuation Day or Independence Day, which commemorates the departure of the last French soldier and the declaration of full Syrian independence on 17 April 1946, provided further opportunities to discuss how the flag relates to Syrian nationalism. On the 2014 anniversary, an editorial on *Al-Watan* attacks the opposition flag(s) as a national insult. In what reflects what I have been calling forked historical consciousness, the author draws direct links between the opposition's actions and acts of treason throughout Syrian history. He identifies moments in history, in which Syrians' political positions were tested as either patriotic or treacherous in order to portray the present situation as also requiring a fateful choice either on the side of Al-Assad patriotism or an anti-Syrian loyalty to foreign countries, which he sees is represented by the opposition. The tactic of imagining various periods in history to express a current political opinion induces the whirling effect of collective memory that I have been tracing. In an alarmed tone, the author, Abu-Abdallah (2014), lists historic figures and symbols that signify the subjugation of Syria, such as the modern colonial and medieval Crusader occupations. He "recalls" an incident when French troops entered Damascus in 1920. Abu-Abdallah narrates that the French army general at the time, Henri Gouraud, stood in front of the statue of Saladin, the Muslim leader who defeated the Crusaders in a decisive battle in Palestine in 1187. The statue stands in central Damascus in front of the city's ancient citadel walls. The statue, however, was in fact constructed in 1992 ("Fananun," n.d.), which makes the incident in the opinion piece wildly anachronistic and fictional but an important reflection of how characters and events in history are eclectically mobilized in the service of contemporary politics. Abu-Abdallah

contends that French Commander Gouraud allegedly said that day as he looked at the statue "we have come back, Saladin"— meaning that the French occupation of Damascus in 1920 was a direct continuation of the medieval Crusade occupation of Jerusalem and the Levant. After relaying the story, the pro-regime writer says:

> Imagine that in the 21st century, there are Syrians who, under the guise of being an opposition, call for the re-occupation of their country by NATO. They want NATO to destroy Damascus and to stand in front of the statue of Saladin. Imagine that some want to bring the Ottomans back. They want to bring the French back through the grandchildren of Gouraud and the followers of his legacy, such as (French Prime Minister) Hollande and (French Foreign Minister) Fabius— but this time under the name of the friends of Syria.

After his multiple references to history, Abu-Abdallah asserts that "the war against those criminal gangs (meaning rebel groups) and their expulsion outside Syrian territory is a fundamental part of the second battle for independence, which the Syrian people are fighting now." He implies that those who refuse to revere national symbols, as defined by the regime, cannot be genuine Syrians. "No Syrian disagrees with another about national independence, the fight against terrorism, and the rejection of foreign intervention." He concludes that because of the sacrifices of the army and the regime supporters, Syrians "will be the ones saying 'we are back' to the grandchildren of the French colonial commander Gouraud,"— a reference to Syrian opposition forces, who according to the author, are reenacting acts of treason that happened during the Crusades in the 12th century and the French mandate in the early 20th. The writer projects Syria, the nation-

state ruled by President Bashar Al-Assad, onto history in his insinuation that support for Al-Assad represents a Syrian transhistorical genuine nationalism.

Also in a statement on the 2014 anniversary of independence, by the pro-regime Syrian parliament,[8] as reported by *Addonia TV*, echoes the same themes discussed in the Syrian press. The statement refers to the current war in Syria as "the most brutal war ever launched by imperialist states," adding that "it is a shame that they got the support of some of our countrymen, whose memories do not retain the struggles of the Syrian people against criminal imperialists." The statement accuses the opposition of "incessantly begging the West to invade the country or at least to launch a military campaign that would setback the foundations of the national state. They seek the disintegration of the country and the overthrow of all the accomplishments of their countrymen since the dawn of independence until today." The parliament calls for "remembering the sacrifices of our forefathers" in order to challenge "some Syrians who choose to raise the flag of the French mandate instead of the national flag" ("Majlis," 2013).

On the opposition side, many debunked the claims of the regime. For example, Dalloul (2012) wrote on the opposition news website *All4Syria* a historical survey of the ways the regime used the current opposition flag as a nationalist symbol prior to the 2011 uprising. He provided visual evidence of several occasions that the "independence flag," as it is referred to by the opposition, was used in official celebrations of Syrian independence before 2011. Dalloul contended that "the Syrian regime does not mind

[8] The Syrian regime has maintained the semblance of democratic rule by holding periodical parliamentary elections, which are widely considered to be mere political theatre. Only a few pro-regime parties can legally operate in Syria. The parliament is considered a pro-regime state institution rather than a genuine body that represents the Syrian people.

destroying the Syrian national memory if it is the key for its endurance." He recounted the production of an official clip that shows Syrians waving that flag in 1997, the release of official stamps that show the flag in 2007, and a televised celebration of independence in 2010, in which performers raise the same flag that is now used by the opposition. He argued that the regime, by accusing the opposition of treachery, is subsequently crushing the memory of the post-independence era between 1946 and 1958. For his part, blogger Al-Mashriqi (2012) contends that the regime's "cheap and methodological campaign against the Syrian independence flag" is a dangerous distortion of the history of anticolonial struggle in the country and an unforgivable wrong against the founders of Syrian independence. Projecting skepticism over the green flag is an accusation of treason to our founding fathers who saluted that flag every morning since the dawn of independence until 1958," he warns.

As a physical object, the use of flags echoes the controversies about whether it represents independence or colonial occupation—blurring the line between the pedagogical and performative strategies of its deployment. The flag demonstrates control over territory but it also claims to be a sign of liberation of previously occupied areas. Thus, when the regime or the rebels establish control of a territory, they claim to have liberated it. The rhetoric of occupation and liberation had been previously reserved for areas in the Middle East controlled by Israel, the US, or historically by European colonizers. As with a foreign occupation, the symbols of the "occupier" are destroyed when control over territory shifts. In fact, since the beginning of Syria's war, it has been common to remove, and sometimes desecrate, the flag raised on a certain territory, and to

hold ceremonies to raise the other flag— depending on the situation. For example, when the regime's army re-established control over the city center of Homs in May 2014 after a long battle with local rebels, the Syrian official flag was immediately raised over the central square followed by a formal ceremony attended by military generals and regime officials to raise and salute the flag in celebration of the "liberation" of Homs. TV coverage and statements by officials echoed themes of liberation that referred to rebels as a foreign occupation. One year later, in May 2015, official celebrations were held to commemorate the first annual anniversary of the regime's re-establishment of control also by raising the flag in the central square. And like similar events in the western town of Yabrud and in the Crusader castle of *Crac de Chevalier*, the army's acts of raising the flag were carried live on Syrian television, whose logo is also in the colors of the Syrian flag. Similarly, opposition parlance uses the term "liberated" for areas controlled by rebels and "occupied" for those under regime control.

In addition to the theme of independence, the Arab nationalist era of the 1950s is also portrayed as an originary time, against which current positions are assessed. Commemorations of the pan-Arab nationalist era, the life of Egyptian leader Gamal Abd-al-Nasser, and the brief union between Syria and Egypt are used as pegs to attack the opposition flag in regime news media. Similar to the accusation that the opposition flag represents colonialism, another line of attack is that it is the symbol of the separation between Egypt and Syria after their short-lived unification under the United Arab Republic (1958-1961). As mentioned, the official Syrian flag was first used during that period under the rule of Egyptian Arab nationalist leader, Nasser. For example, the pro-

regime *Al-Watan* daily reported on an event held in Cairo in 2013 to commemorate the anniversary of Nasser's death. The article emphasized that in the ceremony "the Syrian flag, which is the same as the flag of Arab unity, was raised" (Abu-Shawish, 2013). The paper interviewed Nasser's son, Abd-al-Hakim Abd-al-Nasser, and quoted him as saying that rebels "are waging a proxy war against Syria evidenced by their symbol, the flag of the French mandate." He also sent a letter to Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad to voice his support ("Nasser," 2014). It addressed Al-Assad by saying: "You are raising the flag of the United Arab Republic, which was held by Gamal Abd-al-Nasser 55 years ago in Cairo and in Damascus, the capital of Arabism. Be as firm as Abd-al-Nasser was in 1956 when he confronted Britain and France"— a reference to the British-French-Israeli joint attack on Egypt in reaction to his nationalization of the Suez Canal. The use of Nasser's legacy in support of the Syrian regime is contested by the Syrian opposition. For example, Syrian opposition media objected to the raising of the regime flag by members of the Arab Democratic Nasserite Party in Egypt, who claim to follow the legacy of Nasser. Syrian opposition activists claimed the act "represents an insult to and distortion of the legacy of Nasser. The question here is: if Abd-al-Nasser was alive, would he have accepted supporting this murderous regime or would he have mobilized popular support to fight against it?", a report on pro-opposition *Orient TV* asked ("Alam al-Thawra," 2013). In addition to the debates about what history the flag represents, the flag's use in public spaces and by public figures has been severely contested. This is the focus of the next section.

On performative battles

As a temporal signifier and a symbol anchored in history, the flag has not only been the subject of discursive tension. Its spatial positioning and ritualistic usages, as I have already suggested, have played a significant role in influencing the course of events in the Syrian conflict. In fact, since the beginning of the Syrian uprising, the flag has been an important indicator of the shifting domestic and international political positions towards the regime of Bashar Al-Assad and the Syrian opposition seeking to overthrow him. Controversies about the flag demonstrated anew how communicative symbols, their theatrical deployment, and performative utilizations are at the heart of political struggles. In several cases in Syria, the choice of what flag to bear has been a matter of life and death for whole communities.

In June 2011, a series of rallies were held across Syria to voice support for President Bashar Al-Assad and his regime. They were called "the flag rallies" and were framed as celebrations of the national flag and genuine Syrian nationhood. The events kicked off on 25 June 2011 in the capital Damascus when thousands of Syrians carried a 2300-meter-long flag across its main streets in what was called the ceremony to celebrate the "biggest national flag in history" ("Mi'at al-alaf," 2011). In a live broadcast of the rally by government TV channel, *Addonia*, the news anchor comments "we reiterate that this is the Syrian flag, the common denominator among the 23 million Syrians" ("HananNoura," 2013). The implication is that the pro-opposition Syrians are not Syrians at all. In fact, they do not even exist because the 23 million Syrians allegedly support the regime.

These pro-regime rallies involved people standing on both sides of the streets helping carry a huge cloth in the colors of the Syrian national flag. Some popped their heads out of the huge flag to physically demonstrate their belonging to the Syria represented in that flag. Others waved small flags or showed off their painted faces in the national colors. Other events organized by regime supporters included the raising of the flag on record-breaking long poles, the painting of the flag colors on mountain tops, and in urban settings, such as painting the flag on the metal rolling shutters of store fronts or on school walls. Many of these campaigns began on social media. One social media-instigated campaign was called "high up shall be your banner," which included organizing workshops to sew flags in order to raise them on army checkpoints, as a gesture of support for soldiers on duty. The campaign explained the importance of flags whose "colors tell the story of our history and civilization" and signify "the values of sacrifice, patience, and victory" (Ali, 2014).

On a few occasions, protestors managed to hold large demonstrations in public squares. On 1 July 2011, perhaps the biggest protest of the Syrian uprising took place in Hama (See "Bin nadara," 2011). The demonstration emulated the tactics of the regime supporters by holding together a huge official national (regime) flag. Two flags were visible in the protest, the official and also the opposition's. On 24 July 2011, a similar protest was also held in Hama. Protestors were dressed in the color of the official flag, red, white, and black. The initial year of the uprising was a period when both camps used national flags, although on many occasions two flags were held at the same time by opposition protestors. It is important to note that the two aforementioned videos are

uploaded on YouTube with the logo of the opposition flag, which is visible next to the name of the account that uploaded them and also as a logo on the bottom right corner of the video (See "0Syria," 2011).

The YouTube logo brands and frames the video as a production approved by the opposition. Though the protestors shown in the videos celebrate what has become the regime flag, they are digitally-branded by the opposition flag, which shows the heterotopology of flag use. The flag is a medium, which undergoes multiple layers of mediation. Its meanings are not inherent in its symbolism but in its relational position to its different usages, invocations, and mediations.

Regime supporters enjoyed the freedom to use the flag in public spaces in often extravagant events that physically stretched flags across urban areas that were further extended through the events' mediation on multiplatform media, such as the national TV, press, and social media. In contrast, the ways that the opposition activists utilized the flag were subject to the violence and constraints that the regime imposed on them to prevent their use of public space. The opposition's flag faced difficulties in appearing as national and inclusive because its public use was constrained to alleyways, rather than central squares— demonstrating how contextual aspects of flag practices determine its meanings.

Against the backdrop of the success of Egyptian protestors particularly in their occupation of Cairo's main square, Tahrir, as a revolutionary tactic that captured the world's attention, the Al-Assad regime prevented dissidents from gathering in central squares at all costs. The regime's tactics mostly succeeded. Protestors were forced to gather in their own neighborhoods relying on their knowledge of the alleyways and their

trust of their neighbors to increase their chances of escaping the arrests and live bullets of police forces. In the spring of 2011, there were attempts to hold protests in public squares whether in the capital Damascus or other cities and towns. As soon as people gathered, security forces dressed in civilian clothes would arrest protestors, which would only be the unfortunate beginning of their ordeal of incarceration and torture. Consequently, mosques after Friday prayers became the most convenient time and location for protests, which in turn tipped the protest movement towards religious expression and benefited religious rather civil factions. Often protestors' fear of an army raid or strike at any moment during their protest made most of their use of urban space hurried and nervous. Many times they remained at the level of neighborhood or village, which meant that protestors were limited in number. Importantly, the regime's tactics of indiscriminate use of live fire and of killing unarmed protestors turned initially festive protests into occasions of mourning and burial, which intensified the religious symbolism of protests and introduced Islamic banners into demonstrations—an issue I elaborate on later.

However, despite the challenges, Syrian protestors succeeded in innovatively maximizing their use of space and time through the choreography of protests and the use of digital media for documentation. The flag was a key component of the opposition's symbolic regime. For example, in a protest in the village of Kafruma in the northern Idlib Province in January 2012, a video of which has been uploaded to YouTube, we see 12 opposition activists at the front line of a demonstration each wearing the independence flag, as they lock their hands together to dance the traditional Syrian dabke dance (Eid, 2012). This video serves as an example of the hypermediation of the flag and the

condensation of its signification through the performative repertoires of its representation on the body, in public space, and in digital media. It starts with showing a piece of cardboard with the date and location of the protest, a tactic that is meant to provide evidence of the authenticity of the footage (See Al-Ghazzi, 2014). The location is written as "Occupied Kafruma," which is a common reference by opposition activists meant to portray their relationship to the regime as one of colonial subjugation and control and also to depict their struggle as a movement for self-determination and liberation against an outside occupier. In the mediation of this new kind of nationalist performance, this simple communicative move of adding the word "occupied" next to the town name implies a demand for a pedagogical shift in national historiography, when the regime becomes the occupier.

In the video, we hear a singer chanting a song that spoofs a speech by the Libyan leader Mu'ammar Al-Qadhafi delivered on 23 February 2011, in which he threatened to cleanse dissidents "household by household." The song enmeshes the protest in this Syrian village within the narrative and symbolic repertoire of the Arab Spring. Visually, the flag dominates the scene. It is not only worn by the performing protestors at the front of the demonstration but it is also waved by many in the crowd. The biggest sign held is a banner with the name of the village, Kafruma, written with letters in the colors of the (opposition) flag. Furthermore, the flag drapes a wall to the side of the crowd.

On more than one occasion, the flag has been a key point of contention in formal negotiations between rebels and the regime. The most prominent example took place in 2013 in the rebel-controlled Damascus suburb of Ma'damiyah, which was subject to a

regime food embargo to put pressure on the rebels by starving the population. The talks were referred to in opposition media as "flag for food" negotiations because the primary condition of the regime was to remove the opposition flag and place the national flag on top of official buildings in exchange for allowing food into the residential area. On 28 December 2014, the rebels raised the official flag on the highest point in Ma'damiyah in order to facilitate the entry of foodstuffs for the starving civilian population ("Hudna," 2013). One resident activist expressed sadness to succumb to the regime's demand. "There's sadness inside us, but we raised the (regime) flag because nobody helped us, no hands were extended to us… For three months, there's been not even a grain of rice" in the town, he was quoted as saying by the Associated Press ("Syrian town," 2013).

The flag has also been a crucial signifier of political positions domestically and internationally. At the international level, Arab League summits have been clear demonstrations of the centrality of flags in political theatre. Although Syrian membership in the Arab League was suspended in November 2011 in order to mount pressure on the Syrian regime, different Arab host countries of the summit communicated their policies towards Syria through the flag they displayed. When the Arab Summit was hosted by Qatar in 2013 and by Kuwait in 2014, whose leaders are hostile to the Syrian regime, the Syrian opposition flag was displayed, causing outrage by pro-government media. On the other hand, in the Iraq 2012 and Egypt 2015 Arab Summits, the Syrian regime flag was the flag of choice, a reflection of both countries' preference of the Syrian regime as compared to the opposition (Estayh, 2015). In fact, when Syrian-Egyptian relations improved after the Egyptian army chief, Abd-al-Fattah Al-Sisi, took over power in 2013,

tropes and symbols about history were deployed in official Syrian media to amplify the significance of the improving relations. The pro-regime *Addonia TV* hailed the Egyptian president, Al-Sisi, and stated in a report about his visit to Syria's ally Russia in February 2014 that "Egypt's dignity is back." The report attacked Al-Sisi's predecessor, Mohammad Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, who had raised the Syrian opposition flag on a number of public occasions. The report added that "the mighty Egypt has placed (former president of the Muslim Brotherhood) Morsi and his dark regime in the garbage dump of history… We all remember Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood when he held the mandate's flag. He threatened to avert the battle of the great Egyptian army in accordance to the desires of the Zionists and of the West" (Ibrahim, 2014).

In negotiations between the regime and the opposition, or between different factions of the national opposition, the flag and the details of its presentation and placement played crucial roles. In the internationally-sponsored talks between the Syrian regime and Syrian National Coalition held in Switzerland in 2014 known as "Geneve 2," the "biggest hurdle" of the preparations was about the flag. While the coalition insisted to include the opposition flag in the hall where discussions are held, the regime representatives refused to have the opposition flag in the room. The solution was that the United Nations flag was the only flag displayed ("Al-Alam," 2014). Perhaps the biggest "scandal" was within the camp of the opposition when a centrist Syrian politician, Luay Hussein, asked the head of the Syrian National Coalition, Khaled Khoja, to have the opposition flag removed from the cameras' frames in a televised joint press conference they held in May 2015. Asked about his refusal to stand in front of the opposition flag,

Hussein told reporters in the press conference "I have to admit this is a confusing matter. The (official) red flag should not be considered as belonging only to the regime"—suggesting it should be reclaimed by all Syrians. After his position created a flood of criticism in opposition circles, Hussein stated that Syrian martyrs have lost their lives in defense of both flags" and that their sacrifice should be respected ("Luay Hussein," 2015). However, it was the head of the opposition's official body, Khoja, who came under the most concentrated attack by opposition media. The removal of the flag prompted demonstrations in areas under the control of the national rebel coalition, the Free Syrian Army. Protestors called for the resignation of Khoja for "insulting the revolution." His action is a "crime against all those who have lost their lives under the banner that carries Syrians' hopes and pains," declared one opposition figure (Idlibi, 2015). A statement by "the association for the support of the Syrian revolution" described the incident as "an act of deliberate forgetting of hundreds of thousands of martyrs whose dead bodies have been draped with that flag" ("Tajamu' Ansar," 2015).

The controversy about choice of flags did not only concern Syrian politicians but also celebrities. The debate has also been played out in popular culture, particularly TV series and reality TV shows. As Kraidy (2010) argues, the rise of nationalism in Arab popular culture, particularly reality TV, "should not be mistaken for enduring expressions of a pre-existing and well-defined identity" but rather as part of a constitutive rhetoric to bolster incomplete national projects (p.18). The controversies about flags support his claim that celebrities are also sites of contestation and political practice (Kraidy, 2015). In the 2014 season of *Arab Idol* reality TV show, a rendition of *American Idol*, Syrian

contestant Hazem Sharif, who got praise for singing traditional Syrian songs, won the pan-Arab music contest. While he tried at all costs to appeal to all Syrians and win their votes, he could not escape the flag battles. In the final episode, his victory was announced as he stood on stage alongside one Palestinian and another Saudi competitor. Typically, when the winning contestant is announced, the winner holds his or her country's flag. However, Sharif, whose father was killed by a sniper in Aleppo in 2012, opted for not raising any of Syria's flags ("Hazem," 2015). When his victory was announced, a Saudi flag was given to him but he subtly pushed it aside and opted for not holding it. Syrians from both camps of the political divide blamed Sharif for his ambiguous stance. For his part, Sharif held a press conference with the producers of the show and stressed that flags have been banned on the set, a claim not supported by the show's policy in previous episodes. Pro-regime media outlets reacted to the controversy by attacking Saudi Arabia, since *Arab Idol* is produced by the Saudi entertainment television channel, MBC. And Saudi Arabia is one of the main supporters and funders of the Syrian opposition. An article that reported on Sharif's victory on the pro-regime *Al-Watan* daily ran with the headline, "Syrian flags are banned from the Saudi screen" (Al-Alam," 2014). It reported that the management of the Saudi MBC channel has "conducted a campaign to search for and confiscate the flags at the entrance of the studio in order to prevent carrying them when the results are announced." The article also objected to the "enforced attempt" to hand Sharif the Saudi flag. On the other hand, opposition media claimed Syrian contestants often receive death threats if they raise the opposition flag. They also accused

the regime of cutting power over large parts of the country during the episode out of fear that Sharif may raise the opposition flag (Akr, 2014).

Similar to Sharif's case, Ali Al-Dik, a popular Syrian singer who expressed his support for the regime on several occasions after the 2011 uprising, found himself in the midst of a flag controversy. In a concert in Sidney, Australia, attended by expatriate Syrians, a woman holding the regime flag was attacked by anti-regime fans. As a video of the concert uploaded on YouTube showed, one man took her flag and stepped on it as an act of desecration. A brawl erupted and the concert was halted. Al-Dik appeared to keep calm. His mild reaction to the incident left him accused of tolerating or even condoning the flag desecration. In one TV interview, the singer sought to defend his reaction. Draped in the Syrian (regime) flag, Al-Dik claimed he did not notice the desecration act at the time. "Had I known what the fight is about, I would have never allowed someone to step on my nation's flag," he said in self-defense. He added that he would have "rather died" than have allowed someone to step on the flag. "It was as if he was stepping on our honor and dignity. Our flag is a red line" ("Fehmi Sneij," 2014). In another interview in which Al-Dik justified his mild reaction during the concert, he carried the flag and declared that he wants to talk to the flag in front of the audience. He held the flag in his hands, gazed at it intimately and said "O flag this is such an insignificant incident. The man who did this to you is now exposed for who he is. You are bigger than him, bigger than me, and bigger than the whole world" ("mtvlebanon," 2014). Al-Dik's proclamation demonstrates the multiple significations of the flag, which while humanized as an object that can listen, remains larger than life. Its physical fragility feeds into its sanctity.

Another important popular culture site that was tainted by the flag controversies was the *Bab Al-Hara* [The Neighborhood's Gate] television series. *Bab Al-Hara* is the most successful and popular Arab television series, running for seven seasons (2006-2010 and 2014-2015). Its plot revolves on stories of everyday life in an imagined Damascene neighborhood living under and fighting against the French Mandate rule. The series constructs a Syrian patriotism centered on the struggle against colonialism. As I have explained elsewhere (Al-Ghazzi, 2013), it has acquired importance as a cultural text in its nostalgic representation and enactment of a Syrian national identity. In previous seasons, the flag of Syria at the time is (wrongly and anachronistically) shown as the banner of traitors, who are represented as characters working for the French, such as the police chief. For example, the flag was hung on the wall of the police station set. However, in the series produced after 2011, the flag disappeared completely from the set, as did any mention of rebels. In the pre-2011 seasons, a central aspect of the plot was its celebration of Syrian rebels from the rural areas surrounding Damascus, known as the Ghouta. It is a historic fact that the Ghouta was the stronghold of the armed resistance against the French occupation during the mandate rule in the 1920s. In the 2011 uprising, the Ghouta has been the backbone of the armed struggle against the regime in Damascus. Unsurprisingly, while the series typically celebrated the historic role of the Ghouta-based "revolutionaries," the seasons that were produced after the uprising did not mention any rebels based in the rural suburbs. The erasure of the flag, and of the mention of the rebels, was not lost on opposition media. Commenting on this deletion, a pro-opposition commentator stated that this is "another example of how Al-Assad is not only willing to

burn the country to stay in power. He is also happy to distort and burn history in the service of his tyranny" (Al-Rifa'i, 2014). Another opposition writer opined that the "regime is terrified and obsessed with anything that may remind it of its eminent demise." He adds that "it is a distortion of history to erase a flag that was actually used during the time, and to erase the mention of the Ghouta rebels in spite of their historical importance and proven role in the fight against the French and the Turkish occupations." While these public controversies about flags indicate the extent of the division in Syria about fundamental representations of its politics past, present, and future, none is more dogmatic than the conflicts about the use of Islamic banners by salafi-jihadist rebel groups.

Islamic banners

A major iteration of the flag wars in Syria has been between salafi-jihadist and nationally-oriented rebel groups, which I have been referring to as part of the main Syrian opposition. In fact, conflicts over the opposition flag demonstrate the contextual and relational signification of flags. In areas dominated by regime-opposition warfare, the opposition flag signifies the demands to oust the regime, while in areas where jihadist rebel groups are fighting against the main opposition rebel coalition known as the Free Syrian Army; the same flag signifies Syrian sovereignty and national belonging, as opposed to global Islam. The salafi movement is a transnational Islamic political and religious group that believes in following the legacy and lifestyle of the Islamic *salaf*—literally meaning forefathers. It propagates the implementation of Shari'a laws and the

emulation of the lifestyle and ethics of Prophet Muhammad and his companions in the 7th century. Jihadist doctrine adds a militant component to that ideology in its belief that it is the duty of Muslims to struggle with all possible means to revive that era's form of rule. In the words of Al-Azmah (1993), fundamentalist Muslim conception of temporality is "cleft between origins and corruptions, between authenticity and the snares of enemies. Forces of privation, of foreign – provenance, have no intrinsic extensions: they do not extend to the core of the historical self" (p. 48). Accordingly, any symbol that emerges from outside this temporal framework is an enemy symbol, including national flags such as that of the Syrian opposition. To salafi-jihadists, nationalist flags are Western, secular, and foreign-imposed symbols. Consistent with their understanding of Islamic texts and symbols as temporally sovereign, which is the quality of withstanding historic change and being immune to the effects of temporality (Al-Azmah, 1993, p.77), salafi-jihadists exclusively revere symbols used by Prophet Mohammad and his companions.

The proliferation of Islamic flags in Syria happened gradually. Initially, some religious figures sought to 'Islamize' the opposition's flag. For example, in December 2012, the Saudi-based Syrian salafi television preacher, Adnan Al-Arur, called for writing the Islamic prayer phrase "God is Great" in between the three stars of the opposition's flag. In one of the episodes of his religious talk show on the Saudi *Safa TV*, he wrote on live television the religious statement on a flag that he brought to the studio (Abd-al-Razzaq, 2012). Meanwhile, a number of jihadist groups adopted variations of the Al-U'qab flag, including the notorious Islamic State organization (IS). The Al-U'qab, which means hawk in Arabic, is the name of the flag associated with Prophet Mohammad

and his Meccan tribe of Quraysh. For instance, the official flag of Saudi Arabia is a version of the Al-U'qab. As most other jihadist banners, it is black and bears the Islamic shahadah, the profession of faith— the statement "there is no god but God, Mohammad is the messenger of God." The IS flag, shown below, claims that it depicts the original font used during the time of Prophet Mohammad and bears what is believed to be an image of his stamp.

Fig. 3.4

The Islamic banner Al-U'qab features prominently in jihadist propaganda. In a typical example, one article by a pro-jihadist author, Sharif Zayed (n.d), contends "when colonizers destroyed the Islamic state in Muslim lands, they established many entities. For each entity, people raised and glorified a flag. Inadvertently, the Islamic umma (community) did not experience any glory under these flags." He adds that, in contrast, "when Muslims held the Prophet's flag high, they reached China in the east and the borders of France in the West." One pro-IS author, writing under the pseudonym "Durar Mujahid," taunts nationalist Muslims and their totems: "Look at the flags you are fighting for! For whom are you sacrificing your lives and your blood? Your souls are your most precious belongings, why will you not give them back to God?" he asks. In fact, in the visual media productions of the IS, the flag features prominently, particularly as a threat.

For example, an image showing the IS flag covering the map of much of Africa, Asia, and Europe, was widely circulated to show the ambitions of the global jihadist group. In an October 2014 issue of the IS English-language magazine, *Dabiq*, the cover story is entitled "The Failed Crusade" and the photoshopped cover photo shows the IS flag on top of the obelisk in the Vatican's St. Peter's Square in a threat to the West. A key element of the Islamic flag's signification is the notion that it unites Muslims and destroys artificial colonial divisions amongst them. As one jihadist anthem about the "unification banner" another name for Al-U'qab states "it unites believers from fragmented times and eras and from across the world in one entity, where God is the only sovereign" ("Nabil Al-Quds," 2013).

Salafi-jihadist militias emerged as key players in the Syrian war since the beginning of 2012. As the influence of the official National Syrian Coalition proved to be limited on the ground, it was easy for jihadist networks already existing in post-2003 Iraq, following the US invasion of the country, to extend their activity to turbulent Syria. Initially, the opposition flag coexisted with jihadist symbols. However, by 2014, national symbols were banned in areas under the control of jihadi groups, particularly the brutal and most fundamentalist organization, the IS, which controls large parts of north-east Syria. Other groups such as the Islamic Tahrir militia and the Al-Qa'idah affiliate Al-Nusra Front have also inadvertently banned the use of the national flag in their areas of influence in north Syria, punishing and torturing those caught with that flag. The Islamic Tahrir jihadist group has also focused its propaganda on the Islamic flag. One of their videos is produced as a TV news report. It shows a man asking regular Syrians in various

villages and towns in rural Aleppo whether they prefer the "independence flag" in reference to the opposition's or "the prophet's flag." Of course, all the respondents, some visibly afraid and uncomfortable, hastily and surely respond that the Prophet's flag represents them ("Tahrir Syria," 2015).

The ban against carrying the opposition flag in areas under the influence of salafi-jihadist militias prompted opposition activists to launch a campaign "raise your revolution's flag" on the 4th anniversary of the uprising in March 2015. The campaign was launched on social media as activists tweeted images of the flag and affirmed their commitment to it against the dual hostile campaigns of the regime and the jihadist militias. One activist leader blamed the fragmentation of banners for the messy civil war in Syria and proclaimed that the campaign aims to set the path right (Al-Rahbi, 2015). The campaign also included the spraying of flag graffiti and raising the flag in the streets of Aleppo. At the time, videos were uploaded on YouTube showing highly choreographed ceremonies of raising the opposition flags in squares in Free Syrian Army-controlled neighborhoods in Aleppo. One video shows young men singing nationalist songs and watching a militant carry the flag and raise it on top of a pole in a central square ("nasaem Syria," 2015). The flag then is an intrinsic component of the war in Syria as fought in armed battles, pedagogical discourses about history, mediated battles, and performative public enactments.

These flag battles between two competing notions of collectivity echo struggles between Arab proponents of nationalism and secularism versus advocates of Islamic governance. This debate has been influential in the Arab-Muslim world since the late 18th

century, when Muslim thinkers began to seek the modernization of Islamic thought. Many Muslim scholars hold the belief that the Islamic community cannot be complete unless it is also a state; and that political action should be one of the main ways of serving God (Hourani, 1962, p. 4). In the Nahda movement, most Arab intellectuals veered away from this belief and sought to secularize conceptualizations of collective belonging. As Hallaq (2013) explains, as a result of this uneasy secularization, the nation-state sits uncomfortably in the Muslim world. Muslim scholars, to varying degrees, pit Islamic law and tradition, known as the Shari'a, against Western ideologies rooted in the European Enlightenment and modernity, including the acceptance of nation-state formations and the belief in national identity (Hallaq, 2013). The struggle over symbolism, which became explicit and deadly in warring Syria, is but a reflection of this historic debate. In Bhabha's terms, what is happening in Syria is making explicit what has always been implicitly true that the nation's "people" cannot be contained "in the national discourse of the teleology of progress; the anonymity of individuals; the spatial horizontality of community; the homogeneous time of social narratives; the historicist visibility of modernity" (p. 151). These inherent tensions whether in the Syriazation of Arabs or the Arabization of Syrians, the Westernization of Islam or the Islamization of nationalism, and all other variants, have imploded in discourse and in battlefield within the territory of Syria after the 2011 Arab uprisings.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I applied and expanded on the framework, put forth by postcolonial scholar Homhi Bhabha (1990), about the "double-time" of constructions and

disruptions of national peoplehood by analyzing controversies about flags in Syria in terms of multiple pedagogical and performative strategies and deployments. Through an emphasis on a practice-focused approach to the study of nationalist belonging, I have argued that flags do not have intrinsic meanings but rather their signification is determined by their use in public space and via media. The shifting and relational meanings of flags demonstrate how understandings of history compete and mutate as they are performed and mediated. The stakes are the highest in times of revolution, when radical action seeks to mobilize the use of flags for urgent political purposes. Again within this case-study, a focus on flags reveals how revolutionary action laches on the power of past symbols and disrupts their previous meanings. Political actors resort to symbols with condensed historic signification, in relation to peoplehood and nationalism, in order to claim they represent the whole of society. In doing so, the illusion of a homogeneous populace is collapsed within the organic crisis of signification and meaning-making (Laclau, 2005). As Billig (1995) argues the "reproduction of nation-states depends upon a dialectic of collective remembering and forgetting, and of imagination and unimaginative repetition" (p.10). In times of crisis, such as the 2011 uprising in Syria, there is a proliferation in the scope of political actors imagining anew symbols that were meant to be homogenizing and equivential. The result is an implosion in national and collective belonging. Compared to other symbols I examine in this dissertation, flags are simultaneously more powerful yet more fragile. Unlike symbols of a historical era, such as Al-Andalus (Chapter V), or a national icon, such as Omar Al-Mukhtar (Chapter IV), which may, however remotely, be subjected to historical

evidential assessment, the meanings of flags at any given point are anchored in a unique iteration of past and future. Their provenance is mythical and imaginary and always claiming and gesturing towards a more distant past that will purportedly be born again.

Flags then can be understood in more than one register. As temporal symbols, they are rooted in ideas about history and point to originary times for collective political group affiliations. Their use in media and public space communicates a belonging to a particular history and a commitment to a desired political future. A flag's historic signification and its projection onto the past and future is discussed and explained in relation to other flags and banners. Their signification is not fixed as their gesturing towards the past is contextual, relational, and performative. Flags are a media, through which ideas about temporality are presented, enforced, and contested. They are also ubiquitously mediated across media, new and old. They are disseminated, shared, switched, adjusted, and morphed across a hypermedia environment, whether in public spaces during battlefields and demonstrations, and the digital videos that document them, or through graffiti, social media, and news media. The hypermediation of flags defines their meanings.

I do not mean to suggest that a flag's use is playful (though it can be). Flags command respect and sacrifice because of the scope and depth of their collective signification. Many examples from Syria indicate that people are willing to lose their lives in protection of their flag. As their reverence is an invented tradition, flags appear to be primordial symbols. Their power is in their affirmation and projection of political sovereignty, whether of the nation or of religion, onto transtemporal orientations. Flags

represent the imagined community, living and dead, and, in their physical form, retain their ability to warrant human sacrifice. They are stable symbols in their representation of the temporally sovereign political community. That opportunistic "us" that always claims to withstand the test of time as it changes and adapts. In the Arab world, the discordant modern history of flag mutations each representing pasts near and far reveals the illusions of nationalism's linearity. The region's unstable politics, postcolonial intricacies, and authoritarian systems, are painted in a mixed canvas of colors, shapes, stars, and hawks each pointing to historic glories and tragedies and promising new futures. Flags then are powerful weapons in the mnemonic battles of the Arab uprisings, which have cast Arab systems of signification into a critical phase of reimagining. In the next chapter, I discuss how national heroes have also been mobilized in the revolutionary politics of the Arab uprisings. Focusing on Libya, I explain how new meanings were projected on an anticolonial hero, Omar Al-Mukhtar, which was used as a tool to address publics and counter publics.

Chapter IV: Omar Al-Mukhtar and the Libyan mnemonic battles

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine how the memory of an anti-colonial figure and national hero, Omar Al-Mukhtar, has been reclaimed by the Libyan opposition and rebel movement during the 2011 uprising and how, since then, Libyan political actors have sought to use it for their political purposes. In fact, throughout Libyan history, whoever claimed his image wanted to be portrayed as the embodiment of the aspired and unfulfilled national liberation project of Al-Mukhtar and those who struggled and perished with him. Al-Mukhtar has been typically utilized as a symbol of the Libyan nation and people. In many ways, the story of Al-Mukhtar's legacy and how it has been strategically used by different political actors is the story of modern Libya.

Against the backdrop of the history of Al-Mukhtar's memory in Libya, particularly during the historic junctures of the achievement of independence in 1951 and the Al-Qadhafi-led coup d'état in 1969, this chapter examines the circulation and signification of the Al-Mukhtar symbol in the Libyan revolutionary public sphere during and in the aftermath of its 2011 uprising. In Libya's revolt, which was supported by a NATO military campaign, and led by Libya's former colonial powers, Al-Mukhtar was symbolically distanced from his anticolonial legacy. In post-2011 Libya, different groups utilized Al-Mukhtar in order to portray different publics— that may ascribe to particular political affiliations and regional and tribal allegiances— as the true Libyans. Accordingly, I primarily examine the communicative practices of using an iconic figure to mobilize publics, and claiming that those publics represent "the Libyan people,"

particularly during turning points in Libyan history. Furthermore, I argue that the way different political groups resorted to using Al-Mukhtar for their own purposes has exacerbated his symbol's status as a floating signifier in the Libyan public sphere— reflecting and contributing to the country's fractured politics.

While officially meant to be used as a symbol of anticolonial defiance and sacrifice, and as a marker of the unity of Libyan peoplehood, territory, and history, Al-Mukhtar has been thrust into Libya's revolution and unstable politics. The symbol of Al-Mukhtar acquired new meanings that metamorphosed as it navigated a labyrinth of local, tribal, regional, and national politics. In this chapter, I explore how the signification of a national hero figure, while remaining a defining and indispensable symbol of collectivity, can, within a short period of time, acquire new meanings that mobilize a population in revolutionary fervor. In the 2011 uprising, the communicative practices that claimed Al-Mukhtar as a symbol of revolution— in public culture, mass media, graffiti, and online memes— played a significant role in the mobilization against the former dictator Colonel Mu'ammar Al-Qadhafi, who ruled the country for 42 years. However, the projection of new meanings onto Al-Mukhtar, which once again dispossessed his symbol of much of its historicist legacy, placed his memory in the midst of the fractured Libyan political environment and discursively contributed to the near-collapse of the Libyan nation-state.

Omar Al-Mukhtar, a figure long-used in Al-Qadhafi propaganda, was a leader in the armed struggle against the Italian colonial army in Libya in the 1920s. In September 1931, Al-Mukhtar was captured and hung by the Italian forces— becoming one of the legendary heroes of Libya and the wider Arab, Islamic, and third world struggles. He was

hailed as an iconic hero since the Nahda by intellectuals and poets. For example, the great Egyptian poet, Ahmad Shawqi (1868-1932), who is known as "the prince of poets," wrote a poem mourning Al-Mukhtar's death in 1931. Al-Mukhtar hails from the Libyan eastern Cyrenaica province, the eastern province of modern-day Libya (*Arabic*: Al-Barqah), which has a distinctive collective identity and a history of uneasy relations with the west of the country, where the largest city and the national capital, Tripoli, is located. Al-Mukhtar's words, image, and an epic narrative about resistance against brutal colonialism are engrained in Libyan and Arab collective memories as they continue to reverberate in the Arab public sphere.

During the Libyan 2011 revolt against Al-Qadhafi, the cooptation and mobilization of the symbol of Al-Mukhtar was one of the first communicative practices of the Libyan rebel movement and its supporters. Armed rebel groups, supported by NATO forces, eventually laid control over Libya's territory and succeeded in toppling and killing Al-Qadhafi in October 2011 as he was found hiding in his hometown of Sirte in a failed escape attempt. In tandem with its takeover of power, the new fractured Libyan ruling establishment also sought to control the country's historic symbols, mainly Al-Mukhtar. As a contested symbol that holds contradictory meanings upheld by political actors, whether along the fault lines of Al-Qadhafi supporters versus the rebel movement, or within post-2011 politics, Al-Mukhtar is a rich battleground in the Libyan mnemonic disputes. Following 2011 politics, debates about his signification centered on his identity as Libyan and/ or Cyrenaican, on his burial site which has long been subject to national contestation, and on his historic relation to the former monarchy in Libya.

Within my larger framework of mnemonic battles, this chapter's analysis of the Al-Mukhtar iconic historic symbol, explores the relation between collective memory and the mobilization of publics and counter publics in revolutionary times. While Al-Qadhafi used Al-Mukhtar to claim continued legitimacy based on anticolonialism, the rebels' use of Al-Mukhtar in 2011 signaled their renewed attempt of national liberation after 'the failure' of the first – because of Al-Qadhafi's postcolonial authoritarian rule. The rebels' claim of Al-Mukhtar seeks to rhetorically anchor their uprising back in the 1930s in order to discursively erase Al-Qadhafi all together from Libyan national consciousness. The attempt to break from the past is an act of temporal erasure that enables Libyans to revisit the question, which was first articulated during the anticolonial struggle, about homegrown modernity and identity. In this way, the anticolonial struggle is portrayed as an originary moment for the Libyan national community. The designation of the 2011 uprisings were portrayed as parallel to the anticolonial struggle.

As for my method, I conducted a search for the term "Omar Al-Mukhtar" in two post-2011 Libyan news media outlets, *Libya Almostakbal* (Libya Future) and the *Libyan News Agency* (LANA). *Libya Almostakbal* is a London-based news website, launched in 2003, as an opposition outlet against Al-Qadhafi. The search yielded 110 articles from February 2011 to July 2015, which I have included in my analysis. As for LANA, it is the official Libyan news agency, which was previously called JANA (Jamahiriya News Agency) under Al-Qadhafi's rule. Formerly the mouthpiece of the Al-Qadhafi regime, the rebranded LANA is seeking to modernize and rehabilitate its news gathering and writing practices in a way that reflects the diverse Libyan political landscape (el Issawi, 2013).

The search yielded 260 entries from July 2012 to July 2015. My analysis of the two news media included memes that their websites have shared. I have also analyzed historical statements by the Omar Al-Mukhtar Association (active from 1943 to 1951) as included in the book *The documents of the Omar Al-Mukhtar Association* (Arabic: *Wathai'c Jami'at Omar Al-Mukhtar*) by Muhammad Bashir Al-Maghirbi (1993). I have also examined the Facebook group of the re-launched association in 2011. I have read all their statements as posted on the group since their launch. Furthermore, I have analyzed two speeches given by Al-Qadhafi— his first speech announcing his coup on 1 September 1969 and one of his last speeches on 22 February 2011. In addition, I conducted a YouTube search for the term "Omar Al-Mukhtar," which led to relevant videos. In this next section, I begin my analysis by engaging with the question of how the creation of publics relates to the concepts of memory and history in a postcolonial space and at times of political change.

Publics of memory and revolutionary icons

Narratives about shared history are not only an intrinsic part of collective identity and nationalism but are also important for the formation of publics. As there are publics and memories, there are counter publics and counter memories. Instead of only discussing public memory then, we can think about 'publics of memory.' The plurality of these publics signals to the centrality of power dynamics that determine how narratives and symbols from the past form and disintegrate publics. The exchange of ideas about shared past narratives shapes public memory and is at the heart of how publics are addressed, imagined, and invoked. According to Bodnar (1993), public memory is a body

of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society locate itself in temporality. "The major focus of this communicative and cognitive process is not the past, however, but serious matters in the present such as the nature of power" (p. 15). Public memory and popular understandings of collective pasts are typically shaped through state-led commemorative narratives, and often expressed in education, archeology, journalism and media (See: Zelizer, 1992, Zerubavel, 1997, Abu El-Haj, 2001, Van Dijk, 2007). As no version of the past can achieve total hegemony, memories and popular understandings of history are always, to different degrees, contested and challenged.

Like all publics, publics of memory come into being "in relation to texts and their circulation" (Warner, 2002, p. 50). As mentioned, many kinds of texts about the past contribute to the formation of publics of memory. As Warner contends (2002) "it is not texts themselves that create publics, but the concentration of texts through time" (p. 62). Al-Mukhtar is one text which has acquired powerful signification because of the history of its circulation within Libyan society. Since it is agreed that Al-Mukhtar expresses Libyan patriotism, political actors are keen to claim that their positions correspond to Al-Mukhtar's legacy.

Two important aspects of publics are relevant here: the prospective temporality of publicness and its totalizing capacity. Concerning temporality, as Warner (2002) explains, "public discourse is contemporary, and it is oriented to the future" (p. 66). To address a public is also an exercise in creating and strengthening the "stranger-relationality" amongst the purported members of that public (p. 56). Warner adds that a public is a "subjunctive-creative project" (p. 82). In claiming membership to a

public, a group of people function as "virtual projections" of that membership's social and political relationality. While this relationality is being produced and consolidated as it is being addressed, the act of addressing it as a public masquerades as a mere acknowledgment of an already-formed community (See Warner, 2002, p.82). Accordingly, in the use of Al-Mukhtar, the Libyan rebels and their supporters sought to signal that they are liberating the Libyan public from the grip of Al-Qadhafi into its original self. However, in the same act, what they are doing is the creation of a new public around their prospective political project. This process demonstrates then Bhabha's (1990) concept of "double-time" as the meanings of Al-Mukhtar under Al-Qadhafi have to be forgotten and erased from temporal discourses in order to remember/ construct another meaning to be used as an orignary signification for the people of Libya. Intrinsic within this process is how publics are formed and others disintegrate through communicative practices that alter the meanings of important texts. Through the production and consumption of new meanings of texts, such as Al-Mukhtar, certain publics attempt to represent "the people."

Subsequently, the second relevant aspect of publics is their totalizing capacity. As Warner argues (2002) the public "is a kind of social totality." Its most common sense is that of "the people in general" often organized as the nation (p. 49). In Libya, I am arguing, the invocation and interpretation of certain meanings within the legacy of Al-Mukhtar is a main way that signals how different publics are addressed and how one interpretation may come to signify "the people" through its mediation and institutionalization. Under Al-Qadhafi, Al-Mukhtar, as a symbol of anticolonialism,

was monopolized and mobilized in the service of his power and authority. Al-Mukhtar and the notion of Libyan peoplehood were invoked in public discourse only in relation to Al-Qadhafi. During the 42-year rule of Al-Qadhafi, Al-Mukhtar, and other anticolonial symbols were key to how Al-Qadhafi explained his Jamahiriya political system. The word *Jamhiriyya* in Arabic is based on the word *jamaheer*, which is the plural of *jumhur*— meaning "public" or "mass." Al-Qadhafi theoretically conceived his system as a permanent institutionalization of "revolutionary publics." Al-Qadhafi's publics were defined as revolutionary because of their purported understanding of his anticolonial legacy, which is publically manifested through the reproduction and consumption of anticolonial texts and symbols, such as Al-Mukhtar.

However, since the 2011 uprising, Al-Mukhtar was used by the rebels and their supporters to mobilize a new anti-Al-Qadhafi public, as "the Libyan people." In 2011, both Al-Qadhafi and the rebels summoned the figure of Al-Mukhtar to address the Libyan people and to claim the people's support. However, in the new Libya, to put it in Bhabha's (1990) terms, the performative tactics of invoking Al-Mukhtar by new political actors in Libya revealed the difficulty of stabilizing his new pedagogical signification within the nation-building process. In post-2011 Libya, a myriad array of political actors invoked Al-Mukhtar to project power onto their political programs. The result is that the floating signification of Al-Mukhtar in Libyan politics exacerbated political divisions and weakened the notion of Libyan peoplehood through the fracturing of its publics. As Laclau (2005) contends "the need to constitute a 'people' arises only when that fullness is not achieved, and partial objects within

society (aims figures, symbols) are so cathected that they become the name of its absence" (p. 117). This has been the function of Al-Mukhtar, a symbol whose shadow is meant to cover all the physical and temporal spaces of Libyan identity. Controversies over his signification have not only intensified during the 2011 uprising but also during other turning points in Libyan modern history.

Since the colonial era, Al-Mukhtar has served as a powerful symbol of Libyan, Arab and Islamic identity— while continuing to embody local and regional belonging for Benghazi and the Cyrenaica province. Omar Al-Mukhtar is a site of memory (Nora, 1997) for Libyans' capacity for collective action and a surrogate of Libyan collectivity and patriotism. In relation to postcolonialism, the mythologization of heroes from the precolonial or anticolonial eras is a common nation-building strategy from the Caribbean and Latin America to Africa and the Middle East. In fact, national heroes are especially amenable to projects of identity construction as their lives become "playgrounds of imagination" (Cubitt, 2000, p.3), so much so that national histories are often written in celebration of heroes (Lambert, 2007). In his analysis of how heroes are implicated in postcolonial memory, Lambert theorizes the concept of a surrogate to capture how national heroes are meant to stand for those lost in the history of colonialism (p. 359). As Roach (1996) warns surrogation is rarely successful because the intended substitute for the colonial trauma "either cannot fulfil expectations, leaving a deficit, or actually exceeds them, creating a surplus" (p. 2). Certainly, a figure like Al-Mukhtar has monopolized the imaginative investment of Libyans over the past decades. The imaginative weight projected onto Al-Mukhtar

leaves a surplus— in the sense of an ideal that cannot be met. In this way, the use of Al-Mukhtar, while seeking to represent all Libyans, expands existing cavities within Libyan society through its excessive presence and destabilizing performances (See Lambert, 2007, p. 367). In this way, Al-Mukhtar is a typical example of the "troubled production of memory and history" that characterizes the postcolonial geo-historical space (See Lambert, 2007, p.370).

In the following sections, I discuss three turning points in Libyan history to argue that the circulation of the symbol of Omar Al-Mukhtar was central to the formation of Libyan publics of memory. The three major postcolonial political turning points, which I discuss, are the achievement of independence in 1951, the 1969 Al-Qadhafi military coup, and the 2011 NATO-supported popular armed uprising. During each of these historic junctures, political actors turned to the anticolonial era and the figure of Al-Mukhtar to address the Libyan public(s) and rhetorically and symbolically signify a break from the recently-lived past and gesture towards the future. As Carlson (2010) argues, collective memories "offer guidance for present and future actions, dictate norms and expectations, and provide a measure from which to mark progress or deviance" (p. 237). Accordingly, at each historic turning point, Libyan political actors used Al-Mukhtar to mobilize publics through signaling that their project shall be faithful to the postcolonial dream of liberation. Stated differently, anticolonial symbols, such as Al-Mukhtar, are invoked every time the nation, construed as the ideal that anticolonial heroes fought for, was imagined to have gotten separated from the state because of authoritarian and unjust rule.

Al-Mukhtar in Libyan history

Omar Al-Mukhtar (1862-1931) was a tribal and religious leader in the Libyan Cyrenaica province. He is known for espousing a patriotic and Islamic anti-colonial disposition as a main protagonist "of a protracted guerilla war waged against the Italian fascist colonial armies between 1922 and 1932" (Ahmida, 2009, p.67). After years of fighting, the Italians managed to capture 69-year-old Al-Mukhtar in 1931. After a short trial, the Italian fascists executed the aged charismatic Al-Mukhtar by hanging him in front of 20,000 people in the town of Slouq in his province of Cyrenaica (See Ahmida, 2009). In many ways, his execution is believed to have marked an end to Libyan armed resistance against the Italians.

One of the most contested aspects of Al-Mukhtar's symbolism is in relation to regional Cyraniaican versus Libyan national identity. In fact, the richness of Libyan history and the complexity of its national identity formations are often forgotten. The country's image in the world has been dominated by decades of totalitarian rule by an eccentric dictator. However, Libya has a long history, a particularly brutal colonial experience, and a fraught national identity building project. The Arabs invaded Libya in year 644, twelve years after the death of Prophet Muhammad. It was a land inhabited by Amazigh tribes and influenced by its Roman, Greek, and Phoenician past. The coastal cities of Tripoli and Benghazi played important roles in successive Arab ruling dynasties as ports and urban centers connecting Egypt, the Maghreb, and Al-Andalus (See St. John, 2012). The Ottomans ruled over what is now Libya from 1551 to 1911. They divided the

territory into two main administrative units, Tripolitania (capital Tripoli) in the west and Cyrenaica (capital Benghazi) in the east (in addition to the southern desert areas of Fazzan). Libyan provinces were mostly granted considerable autonomy. For example, the Ottomans acknowledged the Al-Sanusi Order rule and influence within Cyrenaica (St. John, 2012). Founded by Sayyid Muhammad Bin Ali al-Sanusi (1787 – 1859), an Algerian scholar who settled in Cyrenaica, the Al-Sanusi Islamic order was a revivalist cultural and political movement that advocated the practice of orthodox and Sufi Islam (St. John, 2012).

With the short-lived Napoleon-led French occupation of Egypt in 1798 and the durable occupation of Algeria in 1830, and the wider context of the European conquest of Africa, the Ottomans sought to maintain the territorial integrity of what we now know as Libya (St. John, 2012). However, the designation of "Libya" to refer to the three mentioned Ottoman provinces was introduced by the Italians, who conquered the territories in 1911 (Ahmida, 2009). The word "Libya" was used by the ancient Greeks to refer to most of North Africa. It was revived by the Italians "as an integral part of an imperialist policy aimed at justifying colonialism" by linking "Libya" to Greco-Roman heritage and empire (St. John, 2012).

The legacy of colonialism lives on in Libya for two main reasons. The first is that Libya, like much of Africa and the Middle East, is itself a colonial construct, which continues to struggle for achieving national unity and a sustainable governing system. The second is the extent of the violence Libyans endured and resisted during the colonial era. As Ben-Ghiat and Fuller (2005) argue, common stereotypes of Italians as more

congenial and less martial than other European peoples, in addition to the difficulty of accessing colonial archives, have contributed to the Western academy's neglect and underestimation of Italian colonial aggression. Italy was the first European country to use gases in warfare (in Libya and Ethiopia) and to "employ genocidal tactics outside of the context of world war" through its policy of setting up concentrations camps in Cyrenaica (Ben-Ghiat & Fuller, p.4). More than 110,000 people, two-thirds of the population of east Libya at the time, were placed in concentration camps and up to 40 to 70 thousand people perished (St. John, 2012).

In the 1920s, the Cyrenaican elite were split in how to deal with Italian rule. While some members of Al-Sanusi family called for diplomacy out of their exile in Egypt and Turkey, others, led by Omar Al-Mukhtar, who comes from a lower-status tribal background, called for persistence in the anticolonial struggle (St. John, 2012, p. 65). As mentioned, the Italians captured Al-Mukhtar and publically executed him in 1931. Libya later gained independence through political means after the defeat of Italy in World War II and through an agreement between world powers that paved the way for a United Nations-sanctioned declaration of Libyan independence in 1951. The three provinces of Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, and Fazzan were declared as the United Kingdom of Libya headed by King Idris of the Al-Sanusi family. The position that King Idris took in relation to Italian colonialism remains a thorny issue in Libyan historiography and memory. While Al-Qadhafi's historiographic narrative portrayed the monarch as a colonial pawn, others stress that he played a central role in securing Libyan independence. In any case, Libyan national identity remained weak following its

independence due to the historic split between east and west and also the division of the political elite in general. One reflection of this fractured identity was the contentious debate in the 1940s on whether Tripolitania and Cyrenaica regions should be independent states or constitute a single country, which may have a unitary or federal system (Al-Mufti, 2012). Another divisive issue was about choice of capital city. The initial decision was to have two joint capitals of Libya, Tripoli and Benghazi. This was later annulled to the favor of Tripoli because of the logistical and financial burden of having two capitals in a country that was, before the discovery of oil in the 1960s, one of the poorest in the world (St. John, 2011).

Al-Mukhtar in an independent Libya

As mentioned, the Al-Mukhtar symbol has a rich history of circulation in the Libyan public sphere. Al-Mukhtar was claimed and reclaimed by different actors throughout national Libyan history. Prior to independence, in the 1940s, the use of Al-Mukhtar was pervasive. In this section, I focus on one of its main manifestations, which is the formation in 1941of the political and civil society association and sports club in Cyrenaica under the name of "Omar Al-Mukhtar Association." As I will discuss, the association was banned in 1951 and relaunched in 2011.

Established by middle class and educated Cyrenaican young men, the group reflected and promoted new ideas about citizenship and political agency in Libya. Politically, the association was firmly based in Cyrenaica with limited and fluctuating ties with western Libya (Al-Mufti, 2012). It opposed British influence and occupation of the country in the 1940s, particularly the Anglo alliance with Al-Sanusi family (Pargeter,

2012) – promoting instead pan-Arabism and close ties with Egypt (Al-Mufti, 2012). The association was met with suspicion by the powerful pro-British Idris Al-Sanusi, who in 1951 became the first leader and monarch of a united Libya. Even though the association called for the unification of Libya and accepted the monarchy's rule, it was subjected to escalating pressure. In 1950, Al-Sanusi forced the association to change its name to the "The National Association" under the pretext that Al-Mukhtar is no longer a symbol that belongs to one political association but should belong to the entirety of the new Libyan nation (Al-Mufti, 2012, p. 198). Later in 1951, the year of Libyan independence, Al-Sanusi banned the association (Al-Maghirbi, 1993).

The book, *The Documents of the Omar Al-Mukhtar Association* (Arabic: jami'at Omar Al-Mukhtar), which contains a collection of original press releases, in addition to articles published in the association's newspaper *Al-Watan* (The Nation), provides a fascinating window into the nationalist rhetoric of the time and the centrality of Al-Mukhtar's figure within it. For example, in 1947, the British army, which had occupied parts of Libya following the allies' victory over Italy in World War II, shut down the association's publication *Al-Watan* for three weeks. The ban was in response to a hostile speech by the association's board member, Mohammad Al-Sabiri, at an event on 16 September to commemorate the anniversary of the martyrdom of Al-Mukhtar in 1931 (Al-Maghirbi, 1993, p. 45). Al-Sabiri addressed Al-Mukhtar by saying:

> Tell us Omar, what would you have done if you were with us, body and soul. You have carried arms against invaders who told you 'let us share power.' You refused their demand because you believed that only the free can rule their country. Now

> we face the same situation but with allies that we happily allowed to enter our country. We find ourselves strangers in our own homes… While some, who falsely claim nationalism, tell us to choose between silence and death.

Al-Sabiri's vivid invocation of Al-Mukhtar on the anniversary of his execution offered a scathing criticism and incitement against the British and their supporters in Libya. The comparison of Great Britain to Italy proved too strong a criticism that it prompted the British to close down the association's paper. The speech also implicitly criticized the allies of the British, mainly the future monarch of independent Libya Idris Al-Sanusi.

The association's use of Al-Mukhtar against Al-Sanusi foreshadowed the latter's crackdown against it during the formative years of Libyan independence. Indeed, Al-Sanusi steadily sought to oppress revolutionary anti-colonial rhetoric and began to establish his control over the memory of colonial symbols. In reaction to the crackdown by Al-Sanusi, the association issued a statement lamenting that "Benghazi returned twenty years back to the rule of (Italian fascist commander) Graziani" (Al-Maghirbi, 1993, p.166). When the monarchy also forced the association to drop the name of Omar Al-Mukhtar from its title – in an apparent attempt to ban the opposition's use of the symbolic ammunition of Al-Mukhtar— the association issued a statement addressing the Libyan people: "the Omar Al-Mukhtar Association announces that, due to the deviant circumstances that the nation is going through, the name of this institution has become 'The National Association,' May God preserve this nation and have mercy on Omar Al-Mukhtar" (Al-Maghirbi, 1993, p.52). The use

of the word ‘deviant’ signifies a claim that history has begun to take a ‘wrong’ turn. Its postcolonial trajectory has deviated from Libyan anticolonial dreams, it is suggested, which are embodied within the name of Omar Al-Mukhtar. The statement continues:

> We bid the name Omar Al-Mukhtar farewell as our hearts ache. The separation between our association and Al-Mukhtar’s name is reminiscent of the pain we felt when we said good bye to Omar Al-Mukhtar himself. That dear name was the source of our spiritual strength, which pushed us forward in firm steps in pursuit of this nation’s dignity and prosperity.

The quote demonstrates the emotional investment in the name of Al-Mukhtar. More importantly, this episode shows the attempts to control Al-Mukhtar and the kind of publics it may form and strengthen. Al-Sanusi, like Al-Qadhafi later on, sought to manage the use of Al-Mukhtar as a way to monopolize who gets to use his name in claims of representing Libyan peoplehood and nationalism. An article in opposition of the association’s name change also stated (Al-Maghirbi, 1993, p.168):

> We want to point out the injustice that this decision has inflicted primarily on the name of the martyr rather than (this) institution. We have not chosen this name as a slogan in pursuit of gain but rather to ensure the rebirth of the martyr’s name as a national project… Unfortunately, conspiracies have suffocated the name of the martyr Al-Mukhtar.

The statement personifies and humanizes Al-Mukhtar’s legacy as a living being who is getting ‘suffocated’ and is dying because the Libyan national dream is getting betrayed. More importantly, while the association claims that the injustice is to Al-Mukhtar and not

to itself, it actually implies that there is a dangerous encroachment on its interpretation of Al-Mukhtar and its use of him against Al-Sanusi. The association's lament is concerned with the fate of its public – that is those who publically adhere to the association's interpretation and use of Al-Mukhtar. Unsurprisingly, Al-Sanusi's decision to force the association to change its name was only a prelude to banning it. His policy towards the association was an important step in his monopolization of the use of Al-Mukhtar. As an indication of his reclaiming of Al-Mukhtar as a symbol of Libya, the body of Al-Mukhtar was located and moved amidst a state funeral, and with the participation of many veterans of the anticolonial struggle, into a memorial in the city of Benghazi, which became a main site where foreign dignitaries paid their respects (Najm, n.d.). The site of the memorial, and the fate of Al-Mukhtar's corpse, became physical embodiments of the ebbs and flows of Libyan leaders' endeavors of controlling the collective past.

Al-Qadhafi's revolution

While Libya was ruled by the pro-Western Al-Sanusi monarchy (1951-1969), in the Arab world, the 1950s and 1960s saw the pinnacle of anticolonial Arab nationalism, led by Egypt and its charismatic president, Gamal Abd-al-Nasser (in office: 1956-1970). By virtue of geography and population size, it was particularly difficult for the Libyan monarchy to resist the spillover of that ideology from its neighbor to the east. At the time, Libya was a largely illiterate country and needed to import school teachers and textbooks from Egypt, which expectedly glorified the idea of Arab unity and the Arab struggle against imperialism (Obeidi, 2001) — not to mention the impact of media, such as the *Voice of the Arabs* radio which broadcast Arab nationalist revolutionary fervor at a time

when media were neglected by Libya's rulers (Boyd, 1999). The authoritarian nature of the Al-Sanusi monarchy, its Western alliance, and its corrupt economic system led a number of Arab nationalist officers in the Libyan army to launch a coup d'état. On 1 September 1969, Colonel Mu'ammar Al-Qadhafi, who led the coup, read the officers' statement broadcast on national radio ("4Gaddafi", 2011). He said, addressing "the great Libyan people":

> In one fatal and awesome moment, the darkness of the ages was dispelled – from the Turkish domination, then Italian oppression and finally the era of the reactionary reign, the reign of bribery and personal favors, the reign of treachery and transgression. From this moment, Libya is considered a free and sovereign republic, under the name of the Arab Libyan Republic. God willing, it shall head towards freedom, glory, unity, and social equality… (Libyans,) unite and stand together against the enemy of the Arab nation, of Islam, and of humanity, the enemy that has burnt our holy sites. We shall relive the glory, revive the heritage, and regain our rights and our dignity. You know Omar Al-Mukhtar and his legacy of nationalism, Arabism, and Islam… The clock has struck. It is time for work. It is time to move forward.

In his speech, Al-Qadhafi is explicit in portraying himself as the bearer of Libyan nationhood and the leader who will re-orient Libya into the right path. He describes his coming to power as a response not only to the monarchy but also to the Italian colonial rule and the four hundred years of Turkish domination. He calls for unity against the enemy of the nation, which is not named – perhaps to indicate that the

enemy is obvious, and whether it is Israel, Italy, or the US, it comprises Western imperialism.

Al-Qadhafi made sure to frame his first speech as leader in terms of anticolonial struggle, which is why he mentioned Al-Mukhtar. His use of the national hero signaled that he was the one to continue the legacy of Al-Mukhtar. He offered a new interpretation of history and signaled the creation of a new public of memory around it. His coup then was also a rebellion against his predecessor's Al-Mukhtar and its public. The new Al-Mukhtar became the symbol of the new Libya, which was claimed be the original Libya of pre-Ottoman times. Al-Qadhafi's first speech sought the temporal erasure of prior history as it framed the actual coup in temporal terms – as a defining moment that responded to the injustices of the preceding era by rhetorically erasing it and making new promises for the future.

However, in the case of Al-Qadhafi rhetoric, as his 42 years in power demonstrate, the future never arrived and the binary between the past and the future continued to be reproduced throughout his reign. Al-Qadhafi had never moved on from referring to 1951 as a "false independence" and to 1969 as the true independence of Libya (Vandewalle, 2012) with its promises for the future. As a demonstration of this, and as I will later explain, it is interesting that the same words Al-Qadhafi had stated in 1969 were repeated in 2011 under very different circumstances.

Following his coup d'état, Al-Qadhafi initially sought a political system ideologically inspired by Egypt's Arab nationalist leader, Gamal Abd-al-Nasser. Nasser pursued an anticolonial, pan-Arabist, and socialist policy. He also established a

military-controlled authoritarian state in Egypt. He began his time in office with the triumph of the nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956 and ended it with a devastating defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. With the death of Nasser in 1970, Al-Qadhafi saw himself as continuing Nasser's legacy of seeking Arab unity and promoting anticolonialism. In fact, Al-Qadhafi had come to power with the intent to unite Libya with other Arab countries. He had first sought unity with Egypt, which did not work as its then president, Anwar Al-Sadat, reversed Egypt's Arab nationalist policy following the 1973 war with Israel. Al-Qadhafi then pursued unification projects with each of Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, none of which materialized. Following the failures of Arab unity, Al-Qadhafi turned towards Africa. Since the 1990s, and bolstered by vast oil revenues, he began to expand the Libyan role in African affairs and to call for African unity. Anti-colonialism was also used as the rhetorical basis and justification for a shared African identity and a pan-African political space. Whether it was the Arab-Israeli conflict or his opposition to the white-dominated governments of South Africa and Rhodesia, Al-Qadhafi portrayed his policy as part of a single anticolonial struggle (St. John, 2012).

Libyan-Western tensions in the 1970s and 1980s also fueled anti-imperial rhetoric. In 1970, Al-Qadhafi declared a day of revenge against Italy by confiscating Italian-owned property and expelling 20,000 Italian residents. Also, American and British troops stationed in the country departed in 1970 (St. John, 2012). In the following years, there were a number of contentious issues between the West and Libya including its support for the Palestine Liberation Organization, its interventions

in pro-Western countries in North and Sub-Saharan Africa, and close political and military ties with the Soviet Union (St. John, 2012). The United States, under the presidency of Ronald Regan, banned the import of Libyan oil and in 1986, and after Libya was accused of involvement in the bombing of a nightclub frequented by US soldiers in West Berlin, the US attacked Libya. Its aircrafts bombed Benghazi and Tripoli, including a residence of Al-Qadhafi's. The residence, known as Bab Al-Aziziyah, became a memorial of anti-imperialism. Al-Qadhafi never renovated it as he wanted it to remain a memorial to commemorate his anticolonial legacy. He also built a statue of a fist crushing an American military aircraft to represent his 'victory.' Even in 2011, in the last days of his rule, he delivered his speeches from Bab al-Aziziyah in a desperate attempt to portray himself as an anticolonial hero.

Another example of how Al-Mukhtar, his image, his story, and his family act as a site of memory is the film that narrates his life story. In 1981, Al-Qadhafi produced a Hollywood film, "The Lion of the Desert," starring American actor Anthony Quinn as Al-Mukhtar, to tell the world the hero's story. The film celebrated Al-Mukhtar and his dignified leadership of the armed resistance. Controversially, it portrayed the Al-Sanusi family as having worked alongside the Italian occupiers. Regardless, the epic production was a success. Banned in Italy, it was only shown after Al-Qadhafi went on an official visit to Rome in 2009 (Vivarelli, 2009). In fact, as relations between Libya and Western countries began to significantly improve in the 2000s, perhaps Al-Qadhafi's use of the image of Al-Mukhtar became more theatrical. In a highly orchestrated visit to Italy, the first visit by a Libyan leader, Al-Qadhafi

arrived at the airport wearing a military uniform with a picture of Al-Mukhtar attached to it. The iconic picture shows Al-Mukhtar handcuffed and surrounded by Italian officers before his execution. Al-Qadhafi also brought the 90-year-old son of Al-Mukhtar with him. The son, Mohammad, participated in the welcoming ceremony that the Italian prime minister at the time, Silvio Berlusconi, organized for the Libyan leader. Berlusconi shook the hand of Mohammad Al-Mukhtar and bowed in respect – an image that was used by Al-Qadhafi to claim victory for the legacy of anti-colonialism. Upon their return, the leading Libyan newspaper, *Al-Jamahiria* daily (2009), published an interview with Mohammad Al-Mukhtar about the visit, which he described as a "victory for our fathers and grandfathers and for Omar Al-Mukhtar." Mohammad Al-Mukhtar described the visit as a "historic apology… a source of pride for the entire Arab and Islamic nations" ("Hiwar," 2009).

While anti-colonialism was the rhetorical focus of Al-Qadhafi's foreign policy, his domestic policy, as mentioned, sought to strengthen tribal identities and local allegiances in order to prevent any potential opposition against him**.** Al-Qadhafi's strategy exemplified the common divide-and-rule tactics deployed by most Arab authoritarian regimes. While state rhetoric continued to discuss third world anti-imperialism, pan-Arabism, and later pan-Africanism, domestic policies sought to build relations and institutionalize political activity between the state local chiefs, tribal leaders, and representatives of ethnic groups etc. As Zubaida (2012) points out in the case of Iraq, these identitarian configurations were precisely what the modernizing Arabs from the 19th to the mid-20th centuries sought to dispel (p.572). Their revival by

authoritarian regimes was useful for consolidating power. Al-Qadhafi went a step further as compared to the Ba'thist regimes in Iraq and Syria. He rejected all conventional state institutions such as the parliament, the council of ministers, and the presidency. He declared Libya a Jamahiriya (massocracy), in which "sovereignty was said to reside in the Libyan people who exercised full authority over the "stateless state" through direct popular democracy" (Joffe, 2013, p. 24). By law, Al-Qadhafi transferred state power to "revolutionary committees" that allegedly represented the Libyan people. This enabled Al-Qadhafi to have absolute power over Libya without even hypothetical accountability to any government body—while claiming that he has no authorities.

This is the rationale of Al-Qadhafi's Jamahiriya of "revolutionary publics," which, in reality, was used to empower Al-Qadhafi's allies, whether from his kinship, tribal, and/or ideological circles. The same logic was applied to the Libyan mediascape, which was tightly controlled by Libyan authorities. As opposed to the hyperbolic declarations of direct democracy and revolutionary politics, there was minimal, if any, room in Libya for public deliberation or contestation over political and cultural life. In Al-Qadhafi's Green Book, in which he laid out his philosophy, he explained that "the press is a means of expression of society and is not a means of expression of a natural or a corporate person. Logically, and democratically, the press, therefore, cannot be owned by either of these" (as quoted in el Issawi, 2013, p. 2). The result is that "all public organizations, including the media, were linked to the "People's Committees," which were comprised of Al-Qadhafi loyalists (el Issawi,

2013, p. 2). Even in 2006, when Al-Qadhafi's son, Saif al-Islam, attempted to modernize Libyan media through the project of Al-Ghad (Arabic for Tomorrow), which involved launching a new television station, two newspapers, and a news agency, the endeavor ended as "a total fiasco" as it was shut down due to pressure from the old guard of the regime, who could not tolerate any criticism against the Libyan system on national media (el Issawi, 2013, p. 4).

As Al-Qadhafi controlled the handful of Libyan media outlets and used them for state propaganda, he also controlled the public use of national symbols, not least Omar Al-Mukhtar. Although, as mentioned before, Al-Qadhafi claimed and celebrated the cause of Al-Mukhtar, he also monopolized its use and made sure that the legacy of Al-Mukhtar is not used by other political actors. This was clearly reflected in the politics of space and memorialization within the story of Al-Mukhtar's gravesite. Al-Mukhtar's burial site is a good example of a site of memory (Nora, 1997) as it is used to give meaning to the Libyan recollection of its plight in achieving independence. It is also a setting to enact invented traditions as a set of practices that "inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition" to imply continuity with the past (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2012, p.1).

As briefly mentioned, the history of Al-Mukhtar's burial site goes back to King Idris Al-Sanusi, who constructed a memorial for Al-Mukhtar in Benghazi in 1960, to which Al-Mukhtar's body was moved after a grand burial ceremony. The memorial became one of the most important national sites in Libya where official state visitors paid their respects. It, however, continued to carry the tensions inherent in Libyan

national and regional identities. It simultaneously evoked meanings of national unity, anticolonial resistance, and Islamic power and dignity. It also remained a symbol of the identity of Cyrenaica and its important position within the Libyan nation-state. When Al-Qadhafi came to power following his 1969 coup d'état, as discussed, he immediately sought to associate himself with the anticolonial legacy of Al-Mukhtar and others. One of his first speeches was delivered in front of the Al-Mukhtar memorial in Benghazi. However, Al-Qadhafi, like his predecessor Al-Sanusi, sought to tame Al-Mukhtar's symbolic richness. His grip on power was reflected in the repertoire of symbolism. In 1980, and in a surprise move, Al-Qadhafi invited then Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad and Palestine Liberation Organization chairman Yasser Arafat, in addition to Al-Mukhtar's son, Mohammad, to a ceremony to move the body of Al-Mukhtar from the memorial site in Benghazi to the remote village of Slouq, the site of his hanging (Al-Rashed & Al-Husseini, 2011). Many interpreted the move as aimed against the people of Benghazi and Cyrenaica. Al-Qadhafi, who hailed from the western town of Sirte, had an uneasy relation with Cyrenaica, particularly because its elite sensed a loss of influence when Al-Qadhafi dramatically shifted the country's powerbase to the west following his coup. The Benghazi memorial eventually turned from a primary national site to a neglected and destroyed site. In 1980, riots followed a football match between Benghazi's local team, Al-Ahli, which was incidentally established by the Omar Al-Mukhtar Association, and a team owned by one of Al-Qadhafi's sons. The victory of the latter prompted accusations that the match was rigged and led to anti-Al-Qadhafi riots. It is believed that in order to punish

the people of Benghazi, the memorial site was then taken down (Ben Ghalboun, 2008).

Both assaults on the site continued to be condemned by exiled opposition members. The removal of Al-Mukhtar's body was referred as the "disemboweling of Benghazi" (Al-Raqi', 2007), while the destruction of the memorial site was termed "the decrowning of Benghazi" (Ben Ghalboun, 2008). As Ben Ghalboun (2008) has argued the state's actions against the memorial site fall within the context of the annulment of all symbols and cultural sites that may strengthen the relation between the citizen and the nation. Ben Ghalboun accused Al-Qadhafi of seeking to link his rule to the nation and redefine nationalism as loyalty to him. According to the Libyan dissident, this is the intent behind the assaults on Al-Mukhtar's memorial and also in changing Libya's flag by Al-Qadhafi, "the symbol of its sovereignty and independence," to a green rag "that means nothing to the citizen and has no relation to the nation and its history."

Later on, in 2009, and in a move that reflected Al-Qadhafi' s economic liberalization policy during the last decade of his rule, he announced plans to build a tower consisting of a trade center and shopping mall at the site of the former memorial, which prompted exiled intellectuals and opposition figures to circulate an online petition, which stated that "the collective memory captured by Al-Mukhtar's symbolism is the link that connects generations and joins the past with the present" (Al-Buri, 2010). It added:

> Those who planned this have no regard to the value of symbols of struggle in collective memory. They act to satisfy their narcissist desires to sell the nation and its symbols to corporations and funders. Libya has vast territory. Hundreds of towers can be built in Benghazi and other cities under the name of the Shaikh of Martyrs (Omar Al-Mukhtar). There is no logical justification to build the tower in the location of the memorial out of all places.

These plans and the situation in Libya in general dramatically changed following the sudden eruption of the 2011 uprisings. As I will examine in the following section, however, Omar Al-Mukhtar, remained a central figure to galvanize publics of memory in Libya.

Al-Mukhtar and the 2011 Uprising

On 15 February 2011, four days following the ousting of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak due to riots in Egypt, protests began in Benghazi. Two days later, 17 February, was declared a day of rage against the rule of Al-Qadhafi across Libya. Quickly thereafter, what began as peaceful protests became an armed uprising as young men took up arms and some army units in eastern Libya defected from the army. On 5 March, the opposition National Transitional Council met in Benghazi and declared itself the sole representative of the Libyan people (St. John, 2014). On 17 March, the UN Security Council authorized a no-fly zone over Libya, paving the way for launching a NATO military campaign in support of the rebels' efforts to topple the Al-Qadhafi regime. Unlike Tunisia and Egypt then, the Libyan uprising turned into an armed civil war within days of initial protesting. With the indispensable NATO

military backing, the rebels moved westward and eventually captured the capital Tripoli and caught Al-Qadhafi near his hometown of Sirte on 24 October, killing him on the spot.

Within days, if not hours, of the start of the initial protests in Libya, activists began to reclaim national symbols. They opted for symbols that gestured towards a new future by reclaiming symbols of the distant past. For example, in a huge rally in Benghazi on 24 February, immediately after a halt in fighting, tens of thousands of men and women celebrated in a main square on the shore. Amidst chants of "the people want the fall of the regime" and "we shall remain here until the pain is gone," Libyans carried the official flag of their country that was used prior to Al-Qadhafi's coup and also carried signs with quotes by the anticolonial hero Al-Mukhtar (See CNN, 2011). Al-Mukhtar immediately became a central symbol that circulated in the revolutionary public sphere. In the uprising, the Libyan national hero took on new meanings, which signified hopes for a new beginning in Libya after the defeat of Al-Qadhafi's tyranny.

Initially, and as Al-Qadhafi battled to remain in power, Al-Mukhtar was used by both the regime and its opposition in their competing claims of nationalism. Rebels claimed that in fact Al-Qadhafi represents colonial authoritarianism, while they are the ones who represent the Libyan people, the country's history, and the legacy of its heroes. As one Libyan commentator wrote in *Libya Almostaqbal* in celebration of the opposition, "There he is!" Al-Mukhtar "has returned to Benghazi. His picture is on every independence flag and every map of Libya. This (communicative gesture) has

happened so spontaneously and without planning or coordination amongst the rebels… this is how nations are reclaimed and this is how the filth of Al-Qadhafi shall be cleansed" (Ben Ghalioun, 2011). He added that Al-Mukhtar "has returned and his eternal words "we do not surrender. We are either victorious or we die" have become the slogan of rebels in the east of Libya and its west." In the commentator's framing, the notion of return is important. It implies that Al-Mukhtar, like Libya, has been kidnapped by Al-Qadhafi and only with the tyrant's ousting can he return to signify his original meaning. The same way that Libya has taken a deviant path under Al-Qadhafi's rule, the symbol of Al-Mukhtar had also been deviated from its nationalist significance when it was subjected to his control.

It is difficult to overstate the ubiquity of Al-Mukhtar's popular resurgence during and in the aftermath of the uprising. Al-Mukhtar's image immediately appeared on social media, street billboards, graffiti, murals, car bumper stickers, amateur YouTube videos, and later on the logos of news media outlets and television stations. Al-Mukhtar's name was sung in revolutionary songs and anthems. One of the main rebel groups, which eventually joined the army, was named "the Omar Al-Mukhtar brigades." Al-Mukhtar was also the only symbol to remain displayed on Libya's monetary bills before and after the uprising ("Libya tatakhallas," 2013).

Libyan and Arab media showed a lot of interest in Omar Al-Mukhtar as well, with many major news networks interviewing Al-Mukhtar's elderly son, Mohammad, who became an avid supporter of the rebels. Though Mohammad Al-Mukhtar was previously forced to make public statements in support of Al-Qadhafi's rule, and as

mentioned even accompanied Al-Qadhafi on his state visit to Italy in 2009, in 2011, he declared his disdain to the Libyan dictator, describing him as worse than colonialism. In August 2011, Mohammad visited the rebel group that carries his father's name. In an Al-Jazeera report about the visit, the aged son of Al-Mukhtar stated: "In 1911 the Italians invaded Libya and in 2011 Al-Qadhafi launched a war against the Libyan people, which is worse than World War Two."[9] In another interview, he stated that had he been young, he would have fought alongside the rebels. "The whole world knows what Omar Al-Mukhtar did. That's where they (the rebels) get their energy from. Ask the youth, they'll tell you they are all the grandsons of Omar Al-Mukhtar," he added (AFP, 2011). In another interview with an Egyptian channel, Mohammad Al-Mukhtar answers a question about the use of his father as a symbol of the revolt by saying "all of Libya is Omar Al-Mukhtar, the young and the old, the men and the women" ("webadmin," 2011). As one commentator noted "since 17 February his name became like a magic word or a password in the Libyan revolutionary scene" (Al-Zigiby, 2011). He adds that Libyans began calling themselves "the grandchildren of Omar Al-Mukhtar and the whole of Libya became 'Libya Omar Al-Mukhtar' (Al-Zigiby, 2011).

On social media, Omar Al-Mukhtar's popularity surged. Whether it is through using hashtag Omar Al-Mukhtar on Twitter, uploading YouTube videos, or sharing memes, Al-Mukhtar became one of the main symbols of the Libyan uprising and armed rebellion. Memes were one of the main ways to visualize and verbalize the role

[9] The video uploaded on YouTube by "aljathab99" in 2011 has been deleted.

of Al-Mukhtar in political mobilization for Libya's opposition. Below are two examples of memes that have been circulated on Libyan pro-revolution Facebook groups and shared by *Libya Almostaqbal* news website:

Fig. 4.1

Fig. 4.2

The first meme shows Al-Mukhtar draped in the rebel-reclaimed Libyan flag of independence, with the caption of the infamous Al-Mukhtar quote "we do not surrender, we shall either be victorious or we shall die." Of course, the "we" that Al-Mukhtar referred to is used as signifying the same collectivity in 2011. It refers to Libyans, past, present, and future. These words, which Al-Mukhtar purportedly said during his battles against the Italian army, are today recycled in the fight against Al-Qadhafi, who has come to represent the enemy. Similar to the way that Libyans had to get rid of the obstacle of colonialism in order to achieve independence, it is implied that today Al-Qadhafi is the obstacle that precludes a better future for Libya. The deviant path in which he took the country must be corrected, it is suggested. The invocation of Al-Mukhtar, the pre-Al-Qadhafi anticolonial symbol, is one expression of that desire for a new beginning.

The second meme, Fig. 4.2, attributed to Libyan political activist Salim Al-Raq'i, a frequent contributor to *Libya Almostaqbasl* news site, shows Al-Mukhtar addressing the Libyan rebels in a caption. He says: "My children, as you are honored by me, I am honored by you. Today you raise Libya's head high. Yesterday I resisted the Italians and today you resist tyranny. We shall either be victorious or we die." Visually, Al-Mukhtar is represented as a transtemporal mythic figure – as if he is history writ large. The text demonstrates his symbol as a Janus-faced revolutionary figure. Through him, the Libyan past addresses the future, and the future the past. Al-Mukhtar becomes a symbol of prospective memory and history. The children of Libya, which represent the present-day rebels and their future aspirations, give honor to Al-Mukhtar as they are honored by his memory. In fact, the design of the *Libya Almostaqbal* (Libya Future) news website prominently shows the picture of Al-Mukhtar as well. There is a juxtaposition between the textual reference to the Libyan future, with a picture from Libyan past history.

While the opposition and rebel movement sought to mobilize Libyan counter publics to revolt against Al-Qadhafi, the Libyan ruler held on to his interpretations of historic symbols and of Libyan nationalism to rouse his supporters. Until the last days of his rule, Al-Qadhafi continued to invoke anti-colonialism as he struggled to maintain his authority. On 22 February 2011, one week after the initial protests and prior to NATO's intervention, Al-Qadhafi gave a speech in front of a crowd in Tripoli's main square, known then as the Green Square. An angry Al-Qadhafi used the speech to threaten his opponents and dispel rumors at the time that he had escaped to

Venezuela. In a neurotic tone, Al-Qadhafi started his speech by saying: "good evening to the youths in the Green Square and good morning to tomorrow's revolution… I salute those who are giving the world the true image of the Libyan people as totally committed to the revolution." Of course, the revolution that Al-Qadhafi is referring to is not the 2011 uprising but his 1969 revolution, which he sees as ongoing. That revolution's public is the one that Al-Qadhafi addressed and acknowledged. Al-Qadhafi continues his speech saying that he was not a president but "the leader of the revolution" of anticolonialism. "We made Italy bow its head and kiss the hands of Mohammad Al-Mukhtar, the son of the Shaikh of martyrs, Omar Al-Mukhtar," said Al-Qadhafi in figurative language that was also literally referencing his 2009 official visit to Rome, in which Italian officials paid their respect to Mohammad Al-Mukhtar, who was accompanying Al-Qadhafi.

He angrily added that the Libya he "liberated" had been occupied by British and American forces and that he won't accept today any "setback or any regression back to the humiliation and shame" of Libyan subjugation. His concluding remarks were "the clock has struck. It is time for work. It is time for fighting. It is time for victory. There is no way back. Onwards! Onwards! Revolution!" His calls on Libya and Libyans to move onwards and to take part in the revolution are the very same words he uttered when he came to power in 1969. Through the attempt to always anchor rhetoric at an originary moment of anticolonial liberation, Al-Qadhafi institutionalized and repetitively sought to recreate that moment of change when he came to power. Throughout his 42 years in power, he positioned himself as the leader

who will set Libya on its postcolonial path dreamt and sacrificed for by its anticolonial heroes. He portrayed himself as the leader that embodied the aspirations of the anticolonial generation. In Al-Qadhafi's case, the reproduction of this temporal binary between a past of colonial oppression and a future of national promise and prosperity became a rhetorical trope to claim political legitimacy. It was also used to equate his designation of a revolutionary public, which is a public that supports and celebrates his rule, with the very definition of Libyan peoplehood. The implication is that if one does not adhere to Al-Qadhafi's historiography, he or she cannot be Libyan.

In his speech, Al-Qadhafi lashed out at the new revolutionary public calling for the fall of his regime. He attacked protestors, at points by denying their existence, at other instances through hurling insults at them and calling them rats, drugged youths, and viruses. He also specifically addressed the people of Benghazi and Cyrenaica. Claiming he had liberated the country from colonialism, he said in a bitter tone "this is what things have come to, Benghazi? Is this the end of it, Benghazians? Who are you? You cannot be the people of Benghazi!" His panicked question reflected his failure and refusal to recognize the emergence of a new 2011 revolutionary public. Despite his brutal and totalitarian monopolization of revolutionary discourse over the course of four decades, Al-Qadhafi found himself facing an armed rebellion whose supporters have turned the same anticolonial symbols he relied on against him.

One answer to Al-Qadhafi's question "who are you?" came from a relaunched Omar Al-Mukhtar Association, which, as mentioned, was banned in 1951 by King Idris, and was re-established in May 2011. The new association announced its

formation by addressing a new public, while claiming that its public has always existed but was silenced by Al-Qadhafi. In a press release announcing its relaunch, which was shared on its Facebook page on 15 October 2012, the new organization said it aimed to "continue the legacy of the historic association, which had been active in the 1940s." The statement reiterated the association's commitment to Libya's territorial unity, defense of the rights of Libyans, and the strengthening of national consciousness. Furthermore, it vowed to "protect the principles and goals of the glorious 17 February (2011) revolution." On 19 May 2011, the association hosted a ceremony to announce its reopening. Its new leader, Fathallah Sarqyouh, gave the opening speech, in which he speculated what Al-Qadhafi's question "who are you" actually meant to say. Sarqyouh argued that in fact Al-Qadhafi was meaning to ask and say "'where have you been' because I thought I destroyed you a long time ago, didn't I slaughter your fathers and sons, dishonor your men, place you under siege, and promote divisions amongst you."

In addressing a new public in May 2011, Sarqyouh implied that Al-Qadhafi had failed in controlling who gets to speak in the name of Libya. He taunted Al-Qadhafi further by saying: "your filthy life story, your foul reputation, along with your family and companions, can only find their place in the garbage dump of history." He added "in these fateful moments, we are regaining the path of Libyan history, which has been forged by the tyrant's regime" (Sarqyouh, 2011). In his speech, Sarqyouh neither mentioned King Idris nor the fact that the association was banned under the monarch's rule. Rather, he told the story of how the association sought a permit to

reorganize in 2003, a request which was rejected by the Al-Qadhafi regime. He also does not mention the historic legacy of the association's anticolonialism, particularly its defining anti-British political orientation in the 1940s. Rather, and in gratitude for NATO's crucial military role in support of the Libyan rebels in 2011, he expressed "thanks to the free world… as represented by NATO." Clearly, the Omar Al-Mukhtar of 2011 is a new symbol that differs not only from the political project of Omar Al-Mukhtar in the 1920s, and from the way the hero was used under Al-Qadhafi, but also from the way he was invoked by the association carrying his name in the 1940s.

Following the fall of Al-Qadhafi, and the beginning of the struggle over power in the new Libya, the country faced dire challenges. Rival militias sought to enforce their control over their regions of influence, often through assassinations and kidnappings of politicians. Divisions based on place origin and tribal affiliation, in addition to economic interests, dominated the new political and military situation. Economic clientalism flourished as local militias were often more efficient in promoting the interests of their localities as compared to the weak Tripoli-based central government (Pack, 2013). By 2015, Libya became wracked by violence as two rival governments, parliaments, and prime ministers claim legitimacy**.** One side is the Islamist-dominated Libya Dawn coalition in Tripoli, the capital. The other camp, the internationally-recognized Dignity, is based in Tobruk and Bayda in Cyrenaica (See Murray, 2015). Dozens of rival militias have sprung up across the country including the notorious Islamic State jihadist group. Libya, unlike Tunisia and Egypt, had the added challenge of establishing new political and economic institutions because Al-

Qadhafi's Jamahiriyya system was structured in order to serve his and his allies' authority (Pack, 2013). Old debates about the form of national governance, particularly in relation to the struggle between the Libyan center and periphery, reignited amidst calls for the implementation of a federal system.

Within this context of political conflict and civil warfare, the invocation of Al-Mukhtar became a way to signal political power, ambition, and legitimacy. Al-Mukhtar became a divisive symbol. Perhaps the clearest indication of how divisive the symbol of Omar Al-Mukhtar became is in the commemoration of Al-Mukhtar's execution and martyrdom on 16 September, which became a national holiday called "Martyrs' Day." In 2013, two competing celebrations were held to commemorate the execution's anniversary— one in the location where Al-Mukhtar was hung, Slouq in Cyrenaica province, and the other in Tripoli. Mohammad Al-Mukhtar, Omar's son, along with a number of other sons of anticolonial fighters, attended the Slouq event, a recording of which has been uploaded on YouTube ("SuperStormWave", 2013). The speeches of officials, delegates, and community representatives clearly reflected the tensions between Cyrenaican and Libyan identities. Although there was variation in how strongly speeches gave voice to regional identity as opposed to Libyan national identity, most seemed to call for more power for Cyrenaica within a united Libya— rather than outright independence and self-rule. The figure of Al-Mukhtar, however, was clearly invoked as a symbol of Cyrenaica rather than the whole of Libya. For example, the representative of "the youth of Cyrenaica", Abd-al-Jawad Al-Bdair, stated that "Omar Al-Mukhtar is the symbol of the struggle of the people of

Cyrenaica." Citing the massacres and the concentration camps that the Italian fascists inflicted on the province, Al-Bdair asserted that Cyrenaica's sacrifices for the sake of national liberation surpass those of any other region in Libya. He said the day "should be a day to remember the sacrifices of the people of Cyrenaica. It is the day when the symbol of Cyrenaica's decades-long struggle was hung." For his part, the representative of Cyrenaica Military Council, Al-Hasan, expressed his gratitude to Mohammad Al-Mukhtar for attending the Slouq commemoration and not the one in Tripoli. "It should be held here in this place so that we don't lose the meaning of the occasion," he said. Another speaker, a representative of the sons of anticolonial fighters, delivered a defiant speech in reaction to the parallel event in Tripoli. He said "we have never and we will never celebrate the anniversary of Omar Al-Mukhtar's martyrdom outside Cyrenaica." Clearly, these examples demonstrate the instability of how Al-Mukhtar is used and the importance of tracing the circulation of Al-Mukhtar in Libyan politics, particularly in relation to the formation of publics and counter publics.

In 2015, the Omar Al-Mukhtar Association issued a statement addressing and apologizing to Al-Mukhtar (Al-Balazi, 2015). We apologize, the statement said, because "there is a group of our Libyan people that has deviated from the principles that you fought for… they have disappointed you as they hide behind their weapons as if they are enemies and not brothers." The statement continues:

> The moment our uprising to get rid of four decades of enslavement ended, internal fighting and rivalry began amongst the sons of the nation over power and wealth…

> We are ashamed and can barely get ourselves to address you on a day like this because things have gotten so bad that we had to ask those who you, along with your companions, fought for two decades to liberate Libya from—the occupiers—to enter our country and stop the fighting amongst us.

This apology perhaps best expresses the symbolic weight Al-Mukhtar is asked to fulfill. Al-Mukhtar's new divisive status is an indication of the extent of the fracturing in Libyan politics, as the most fundamental historic symbols are subsumed in mnemonic battles. Another example of the Al-Mukhtar controversies is again in relation to his final site of burial. After 2011, the people of Benghazi demanded his body be moved back to the city so that a new memorial can be built in its former location (Al-Sisi, 2011). However, the people of Slouq rejected moving the hero's body from its territory. This controversy clearly shows how the use of Al-Mukhtar to address various publics in Libya has both reflected and contributed to the fractured political scene.

Conclusion

As I have discussed, in the Libyan 2011 uprising, one of the first communicative practices of the rebel and opposition movement was the reclaiming of pre-Al-Qadhafi symbols, such as the Libyan flag under the Al-Sanusi monarchy, and anticolonial symbols, such as Omar Al-Mukhtar. Similar to the way Al-Qadhafi invoked Al-Mukhtar in his 1969 coup, the 2011 opposition movement used Al-Mukhtar to claim that it is, in fact, the genuine representation of Libyan identity and the true carrier of its anticolonial patriotic legacy. Through Al-Mukhtar's memory, the

opposition has created a counter public that shares a new interpretation of Libyan history in the spirit of its revolt against Al-Qadhafi.

Several components and extensions of Al-Mukhtar's symbolism operate as sites of memory whether it is his name, image, statements, sites of burial, or his family members. They all have been used as signifiers of Al-Mukhtar— a malleable nationalist political symbol. However, his malleability has its limits because Al-Mukhtar's personal history is known. No one can change the fact that he is from Cyrenaica and the he hails from a lower-status tribe. Also, the fact that his son is still alive and politically active further grounds the meanings projected onto Al-Mukhtar. That said, Al-Mukhtar continues to function as a floating signifier that is pulled in several opposing directions that seek to serve particular political agendas.

The weakness of the Libyan national formation is inherently related to the Al-Qadhafi regime's failure to institutionalize a just and legitimate form of national identification. Because Al-Qadhafi hijacked Al-Mukhtar's symbol to bolster his authority over Libyans, as did the previous regime of King Al-Sanusi, Al-Mukhtar was placed on a path of instability. As I have demonstrated, Al-Mukhtar can simultaneously consolidate a nationalist public and disrupt it through mobilizing counter publics that amplify different aspects of his legacy. In the words of Al-Mukhtar's son "everyone in Libya is Omar Al-Mukhtar." Taking these words into account, if everyone is and can claim Omar Al-Mukhtar in times of political

fragmentation, the significance of the symbol is eroded by the very force of the signification it is asked to sustain.

This chapter also reveals that the rhetorical and symbolic turn to the colonial past is not an anticolonial statement as evidenced by how anti-Western rhetoric was not defining of the uprisings. Rather, as I have been arguing, it represents a return to an originary national moment as an act of temporal erasure of the preceding phase of national history. The invocation of Al-Mukhtar signals the desire to construct a new form of governance and to project new political orientations and ideologies. However, the mobilization of the "Libyan people" through Omar Al-Mukhtar, and the struggle to portray different publics as constituting "the people," shows that the uprising is steeped in postcolonial politics. The rhetorical tactics used by Libyan protestors are inspired by its anticolonial and postcolonial history, and reflect the Enlightenment telos, by way of the Arab Nahda, of always seeking a new history of collective fulfillment.

The case of Al-Mukhtar shows then the limits, constraints, and contradistinctions of revolutionary rhetoric because totalizing tropes and symbols cannot represent the whole population— "the people." While the protestors' and rebels' use of Al-Qadhafi's anticolonial repertoire against him was a powerful maneuver of political dissonance. The risks within that revolutionary move have become clear through the way Al-Mukhtar has become a floating signifier that further destabilizes the imaginative and discursive unity of the Libyan people, history, and nation-state identity. In the next and final case-study, I discuss how Al-

Andalus, the name of medieval Muslim-ruled Spain, has also been used as a floating political signifier within the mnemonic battles of the Arab uprisings.

Chapter V: The mnemonic battles of Al-Andalus

Introduction

This chapter examines the collective memory of Al-Andalus— the name that Arabs give to the era of Muslim rule in the Iberian Peninsula roughly from the 8th to the 15th centuries. It examines how the symbol of Al-Andalus was mobilized on social media within the context of the contentious post-2011 Arab political struggles. I argue that the renewed engagement with Al-Andalus serves as an example of the prospective use of history that construes the past as the desired future and harnesses it in order to contemplate and articulate current political positions. The imagined Al-Andalus is also a site of retrospective futurity in the way it reflects aspirations for a new future by means of nostalgic discussions of past history. Given the overwhelming political change and uncertainty experienced in the post-2011 Arab world, I argue that it is convenient to embed discussions about current politics and collective identity within nostalgic representations and narratives about cultural memory, in this case Al-Andalus. The new imagination of Al-Andalus on social media reflects a dual yearning in political rhetoric in the way it links the past and the future. Al-Andalus is deemed the answer to the search for a usable past within the present and for the future.

Al-Andalus represents a lost but aspired-for Arab and Muslim civilization and modernity. It is not only a symbol of Arab modernity and progressiveness but also of comparative Western backwardness during the middle ages. Al-Andalus has been a favorite symbol of Arab collectivity since the Nahda, and it continues to

reflect the Nahda framework about resurrecting an Arab golden age. Al-Andalus is perhaps the most important historic symbol, on to which discourses of Arab-Islamic backwardness (takhaluf) and forwardness (taqadum) are articulated. As Massad (2007) points out both notions "posit an *other* in front of whom or behind whom one is located in time and space" (p.17); that *other* of course is Europe and the West more generally. The popularity and usability of Al-Andalus, as an Arab-Islamic territory with a cosmopolitan population at the heart of Europe, is in its enduring ability to rhetorically re-inscribe contemporary geopolitical relations with the West, including Israel. The lure of this trope is in relation to the feeling of subjugation and inferiority that many Arabs and Muslims feel in relation to European colonial histories and contemporary advancement.

In this chapter, I examine two case-studies that engage with and imagine Al-Andalus anew on social media platforms. The first case is an online campaign on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to promote the history of Al-Andalus and commemorate the anniversary of its final "fall" out of Muslim rule in 1492. The campaign was initially started as a Facebook page, "Al-Andalus," by a Palestinian activist, Mona Hawwa, in 2010. In August 2015 the page has more than 300,000 followers from across the Arab world and the diaspora.[10] The campaign to remember Al-Andalus becomes most active annually on 2 January, the anniversary of the final Muslim defeat in Spain. The second case is a web and television series, "The Story of Al-Andalus," starring Egyptian television Islamic preacher, Amr Khaled. Broadcast in Ramadan 2013 on the pan-Arab

[10] The Facebook group can be accessed on https://www.facebook.com/Andalusn

Saudi TV channel *MBC* and the Egyptian *Al-Nahar*, and launched on YouTube and shared across Khaled's immensely popular social media pages, the series is a genre best-described as a religious travel show. It features Khaled on site in Spain nostalgically narrating and discussing the history of Al-Andalus and extracting lessons from it.

Both cases claim Al-Andalus from Arab secular historiography by focusing on its Islamic legacy. While both construe Al-Andalus as an originary time for Arab-Muslim collectivity, they differ on how to interpret its place in the present and what lessons it offers the contemporary Arab political landscape. Khaled promotes conservative politics centered on political stability and the interests of the upper class, particularly in Egypt. He portrays protests as a form of civil strife and unwelcome social and political division. On the other hand, Hawwa is an advocate of a revolutionary politics that aims to empower youths who seek a radical social and political regional transformation. She uses Al-Andalus to promote values of revolution, voice support for the Arab uprisings, and call for resistance and defiance in Palestine.

Against the backdrop of the Arab uprisings, I analyze both cases as forms of ordinary media engagement in times of extraordinary social and political transformation— arguing that they are important sites for the analysis of Arab politics. Amidst the dramatic events that took place in Arab countries in 2013 such as the raging civil war in Syria and the political conflict and upheaval in Egypt, Al-Andalus is an appealing discursive terrain. Al-Andalus acquired political signification at times of overwhelming change, in which the articulation of clear positions vis-à-vis complicated

situations and circumstances is increasingly difficult. Ordinary engagement with historical symbols, such as Al-Andalus, helps individuals and groups to articulate political positions vis-à-vis current events and rethink collective identity imaginings. It is also a convenient way to circumvent control and surveillance of social media by authoritarian governments. Discussions about Al-Andalus seem apolitical at the surface, and thus give online Arabs living under authoritarian governments more leeway to engage and interact with each other. Though masked within the past, the two cases can be described as future-oriented experiments about emerging political identities and orientations in a changing Arab world. They invite their publics, through nostalgic affect, to share ideas about emerging political orientations. The renewed inspiration provided by Al-Andalus has not occurred despite the upheaval in the Arab world then. Rather, it has gained political potency because of the experiences of social and political transformation. By constructing the rise and fall of Al-Andalus as a result of the choices of its people, Hawwa and Khaled invite their followers to urgently reflect on their political opinions from a historical perspective that links the individual to grand narratives about the status of Arab and Islamic civilization. In fact, Al-Andalus easily lends itself to the different contexts of its invocations. It can stand to represent all Arab-Muslim countries and each of them singularly. As I show in this chapter, Al-Andalus can serve as a metaphor for the entirety of Islamic civilization, or for Egyptian politics in 2013, or for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Both media cases construct the collective "we" that is imagined to have existed since Al-Andalus until today; and is strategically portrayed in contradictory

terms. That notion of collectivity is resilient as it is said to have withstood the test of the passing of centuries but it is also construed as fragile enough to be in danger of collapse and defeat if Arabs and Muslims make the wrong choices today. Both cases entail communicative practices that invoke Al-Andalus and link it to the present. These practices include storytelling, tweeting, updating profile pictures on social media pages, writing Facebook status updates, and discussing the history of Al-Andalus on online forums.

In regards to the method of my study, I have conducted a textual analysis of the social media campaign, primarily of the status updates, memes, videos and Twitter hashtags shared by the administrator. Though I have been closely following the campaign since its launch in 2010 until 2015, in this chapter I focus my analysis on the year 2013 (from December 2012 to December 2013). As for the web and TV series, I have watched and analyzed the entire thirty episodes of the show, which are uploaded on *YouTube*. Each is about twenty minutes long. In both analyses, I conducted thematic coding of any comment or visual representation that mentions or represents current affairs or contemporary culture and politics. I focus my analysis on 2013 because it was the year that the campaign gained considerable popularity and the year that the web and TV series was broadcast. The campaign's following on Facebook surged and it received attention by mainstream Arabic news and entertainment media. In 2013, Hawwa was interviewed on a number of pan-Arab TV channels. She also launched a radio show about Al-Andalus, "Andalusiat," on the Jordanian radio station *Al-Hayat*. Supporters of the campaign also organized a sit-in

in Cairo in January 2013 as a public form of remembrance of Al-Andalus.[11] In the next section, I analyze the role of nostalgia in the popularity of the two media cases that call for practices of remembrance of Al-Andalus.

Nostalgia and structures of feeling

Through enabling mnemonic practices on social media, both cases contribute to the destabilization of previously hegemonic meanings of history. As a symbol of a long and distant history, Al-Andalus is particularly amenable to widely different interpretations that dispossess it from its historicist basis. Al-Andalus represents a Muslim territory that no longer exists. As opposed to other eras of Muslim achievement such as early Islam or during the Umayyad Empire, which happened on territory that is still inhabited by Arab-Muslim populations today, the territory of Al-Andalus is now part of Europe and Western civilization. Its lost territory corresponds to its lost history. The defeat and expulsion of Muslims out of the Iberian Peninsula in the 15th century has long ceased to be an Arab political project in any explicit way.[12] Needless to say, Spain has traditionally had good relations with most Arab and Muslim countries. With territory lost, and history obscure, Al-Andalus in modern Arab imaginary has been collapsed into a symbol of Arab-Muslim

[11] In 2015, Hawwa also launched a web series that aims to connect academic researchers with a wider audience interested in the history of Al-Andalus. The format of the series allows audience members to ask questions about Al-Andalus history, the answers to which are researched and presented in an episode of the YouTube series. She also helped organize an academic conference about Al-Andalus in Qatar in April 2014.

[12] A possible exception is the case of Moroccans who trace their lineage to Al-Andalus, the Moriscos. Many have been encouraged to demand recognition of their historic status by a recent Spanish law to grant citizenship to Jews who trace their lineage to Spain.

civilization. Its invocation conjures ideas and images of an Arab-Muslim golden age that speaks of cultural achievements and political importance.

A crucial aspect of the mediation of Al-Andalus relates to the politics of nostalgia. The force of nostalgia collapses the 800 years of the existence of Al-Andalus, its fluctuating borders, and complex history into a single symbol of Arab and Muslim civilization. Boym (2001) argues that nostalgia is a form of resistance to temporal linearity because it directs its gaze sideways rather than only backward and that its manifestations are side-effects of the teleology of progress (p. 10). For his part, Bradbury (2012) speculates "perhaps nostalgia is not so much a longing for the way things were, as a longing for futures that never came or horizons of possibilities that have been foreclosed by the unfolding of events" (p. 341). I am suggesting that nostalgia is both about the past and the future. It reflects a dual historical yearning. In the context of my project, I am interested in the nostalgic communicative practices that turn the past into the aspired future. The present nostalgic practice turns the yearning for history remembered into a yearning for history to be pursued.

The nostalgia through which Al-Andalus is invoked portrays it as an enactment of Arab modernity and civilizational progress that can be recreated. The invocation of Al-Andalus is a future-oriented attempt to imagine a hopeful political future in a radical departure from the dire choices available today. In 2013, the political divisions in many Arab countries have either led to full-fledged civil wars or to perilous political confrontations— making it increasingly challenging to imagine a viable political future outside the current chaos and its politics of confrontation. Nostalgia offers a "means of

maintaining a collective sense of socio-historic continuity, a source of resistance to hegemonic influence and a defense against anxiety" (Brown & Humphreys, 2002, p.141). Subsequently, nostalgia towards Al-Andalus affectively contemplates and calls for new expressions of politics. For example, in a status update on 5 July 2012, Hawwa writes:

> Who knows what is happening now in Homs (the rebellious central Syrian city). Who knows how many villages (in Syria) have been cleansed by chemical weapons. Who knows what the future holds for Egypt following this wave of violent spite. We are saddened by our weakness and inability to do anything. We are saddened by our division and humiliation and all our misery. I do not want to talk about anything. We will listen to the chirping of birds. We will drink apple juice. We will continue to talk about Al-Andalus… even if all this pain kills us and all these tears blind us.

In this example, the fantasy of having a drink of apple juice becomes a way to protect collective identity and resist the bleakness of the current political situation. Hawwa's use of the future tense also indicates her sentiment of persistence despite the present perilous times. Her nostalgia for the pristine image of the past is also nostalgia for a desired future that is constructed through fantasizing about the past. It is prospective nostalgia because it seeks to persuade others of a particular political orientation that is cloaked in a language and aesthetics of passive temporal longing.

A related concept that explains the political function of the nostalgic mediations of Al-Andalus is Raymond Williams' (1977) notion of structures of feeling. The concept lies at the intersection of residual and emergent politics, and

combines affect and thought. As Papacharissi (2014) writes, in her explanation of the use of Twitter in collective action, the term "structures of feeling" appeals for two reasons: It permits scholars "to examine forms of engagement that exist within and beyond the structured sphere of opinion expression." It also "suggests how spontaneous and organic responses accumulate into formed yet volatile structures that envelop an ever-developing habitus" of political agency (p. 115). Accordingly, the engagement with current affairs by way of Al-Andalus reacts to dominant understandings of the past but invites fresh political interpretations and imaginings. Al-Andalus simultaneously expresses emergent and residual politics by voicing deep-rooted cultural memories, while at the same time inviting commentary on current affairs. The concept of structures of feeling captures political expressions which are "pressing but not yet fully articulated" and thus different from "the evident emergence" of political voice "which could be more confidently named" (Williams, 1977, p. 127). It is about "characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone: specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought but thought as felt and feeling as thought" (p. 132). The structures of feeling concept is particularly relevant in narrative forms, whether literature, television or social media, which all share what Papacharissi (2014) has termed "storytelling infrastructure" (p. 37). Indeed, Al-Andalus sheds light on Arab cultural practices and affective styles and rituals that were incorporated into online activism and how digital technologies – as a 'cultural form' have impacted its narration (Yang, 2009). The contemplative practices that bring Al-Andalus to the present enmesh affect and

thought, whether textually or audio-visually through digital written texts, images, videos and music.

Like Hawwa, Khaled narrates his story of Al-Andalus nostalgically. The nostalgic affect is projected in multiple ways. As the show is shot on site in Spain and features Khaled traveling from one Andalusian site to the next, there is a sense of a homecoming, as if Khaled and his viewers have been exiled and that now through the show they are returning to "their" history.

Fig. 5.1

The show rarely includes any footage depicting life in Spain today. Most of the footage shows archeological and touristic sites or empty landscapes, which amplify the sense that the Muslim Al-Andalus is a site suspended in time and place. Khaled is also a skilled narrator and orator— constantly addressing his audience and talking about why Al-Andalus is relevant to his followers' lives today. He portrays Al-Andalus not as a foreign area or as a forgotten time in history, rather it is at the heart of Muslim-Arab identity. When touring archeological sites, Khaled makes sure to tell his viewers that they should be proud of their historical achievements. In episode 10, he dedicates part of the episode to telling the history and expressing admiration for the

architecture and structure of the Mosque of Cordoba (See "alhudaish, 2013). The music, which is reminiscent of medieval Islamic prayer chants, intensifies the nostalgic mood.

Comparing this web and TV series with a social media campaign, highlights the similarities between the two as alternative nostalgic sites of political engagement. As mentioned, during and in the aftermath of the 2011 Arab uprisings, most of the literature in the field of communication, focused on the question of how social media are used in short-term political mobilization. My project broadly, and this chapter specifically, asks the alternative question about how are media used for long-term identity-building and collective action processes. The use of Al-Andalus fortifies the media habitus of publics that share similar political inclinations and cultural and aesthetic sensibilities. The everyday ordinary engagement with media strengthens the connective and trust-building ties between participants and builds transnational networks of solidarity— mnemonic communities that engage with current affairs through the allure of history and memory.

The social media campaign and the web series: A comparison

Both the social media campaign and the web and TV series adhere to the worldview that considers Islam the central node of collective identity and political affiliation. Their invocations of Al-Andalus are examples of media and popular culture projects that re-imagine Arab history and reclaim it from the previously dominant historiography endorsed by both secular Arab dictatorships and a secular and nationalist intellectual class of novelists, poets, filmmakers, and artists, an aspect I will

elaborate on later in this chapter. Amr Khaled, the star of the series, is described as a tele-Islamist, not too different from televangelists in the US. He has been popular in the Arab world since the late 1990s because of his lectures and television shows— and later on his social media activities— that use storytelling and preaching to promote an Islamic lifestyle to his affluent and young target audience. Hawwa, on the other hand, is not a famous celebrity. As an online activist and the administrator of a popular social media campaign, she has a strong following online and has received increasing attention by mainstream Arab television and news media.

Both are the narrators and protagonists of their media productions. Although they invite the participation and interaction of their followers, they are the ones entrusted with telling the story of Al-Andalus. They are the gatekeepers of the past. They express their opinions and worldviews through repetitive daily media engagement and interactions, while also interpreting history and collective identity. Khaled, like Hawwa, derives his authority not from a mastery of the textual canon of Islamic traditions "but rather from his projected status as an "ordinary Muslim" who struggles to lead an Islamically correct life in a world where it is manifestly difficult to do so" (Moll, 2010, p. 13).

In fact, Amr Khaled, as Jung et. al (2014) explain, is part of a larger movement that distinguishes itself from both official Islam propagated by Arab states, particularly Egypt, and the political Islam of Islamist parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood (p. 109). He particularly targets middle and upper classes with his message that revolves "around notions of morality, individual empowerment, and

social responsibility" (p. 109). Khaled "emphasizes a type of piety, which does not simply stress ritual obligation, but incorporates personal success and affluence" (el-Nawawy and Khamis, 2009, p. 14). He considers that Arab-Muslim revival and modernity can be achieved through a new engagement and practice of Islam and he propagates his vision in "simple ethical messages about everyday life" (Jung et al., 2014, p. 121).

An often neglected aspect in the scholarly analysis of Khaled and other celebrities of religious preaching, which I seek to highlight here, is how they re-invent the Islamic past and strategically narrate it in relation to the future choices of their affluent followers. Khaled's television programs mostly focus on simplifying and repackaging religious history in programs such as "On the path of the beloved" (2005) and "The Stories of the Quran" (2008), about the lessons that can be learnt from the life of Prophet Mohammad and from the verses of the Islamic holy book. Others such as "Journey to happiness" (2010) and "Tomorrow is more beautiful" (2011)— both of which were also launched on social media and television— are more explicit in their focus on the future and how, through what can be described as neo-liberal piety, it will be better than the present. As Khaled says in the first episode of the latter series, which was broadcast in Ramadan 2011 months after the Egyptian January revolt, "many say we don't know where we are going and we are afraid… (but I am confident that) tomorrow will be more beautiful (because of our) productivity, labour, and unity. It will be more beautiful by our efforts, our faith, and the enthusiasm of the youths" (Khaled, 2011). As one opinion editorial on the pan-Arab daily *Al-Arabi Al-Jadid*

stated, Khaled "transforms historical, religious, civilizational, and human accounts into entertaining fairytales" (Abu Fakhr, 2014). The aim is to give religious blessing to the values of the affluent. It is within this context that his 2013 production "The Story of Al-Andalus" narrates the story of one of the most inspiring periods of Arab-Islamic history in order to invoke a "better" future.

Though Khaled has consistently steered away from directly discussing politics even after the 2011 Egyptian uprising, his vast popularity has rendered him suspicious in the eyes of both the state and Islamist political movements and figures. He had left Egypt in 2002 because of political pressure by the authorities only to return in 2007 (Jung et al, 2014). With the 2011 uprising, he became more involved in politics—leading a new political party unsurprisingly called "Egypt's Future," which opposed the Muslim Brotherhood, whose candidate Mohammad Morsi became president-elect in 2012 (Al-Makhlafi, 2013). Despite his opposition, Khaled continued to promote "unity" by avoiding fiery statements against Morsi. With the popular military coup d'état against the Muslim Brotherhood in July 2013, Khaled voiced support for the Egyptian military and the new president Abd-al-Fattah Al-Sisi. Many Islamists interpreted Khaled's position, particularly his silence over the military crackdown against the Brotherhood, which led to the killing of hundreds of the party's supporters and the imprisonment of its leaders, as a betrayal of Islam.[13]

[13] On the other hand, and despite several statements in support of the president, army, and constitution, Khaled was eyed with suspicion by Egypt's ruling establishment. In 2014, he resigned from the "Egypt Future" party and from the board of trustees of the international Islamic development organization he helped found, the "Makers of Life," to be replaced by a former general. As Egyptian commentator, Tamer Wajih speculated many of Khaled's followers may have become staunch supporters of President Al-Sisi.

In fact, Khaled is a remarkably popular figure on Arab social media and he continuously calls for the participation of his followers. As of April 2015, his Facebook page had more than 15 million followers, his Twitter 3.5 million, and his Instagram 45 thousand. He also runs a web forum with an active discussion board. "The Story of Al-Andalus," which was broadcast and launched on social media in 2013, was shared and commented on across these social media accounts. Khaled also hosted Q&A sessions about his Al-Andalus program on his web forum to answer his followers' questions and further discuss the contents of the program. It is difficult to give an exact number of views for the online episodes because each has been uploaded on YouTube multiple times and some pages have been deleted since the show was first launched in 2013. On some pages, the show's episodes have more the 30,000 views, while on others the numbers are fewer. In the series, the narrative takes shape over the succession of the thirty episodes that explain the history of Al-Andalus and focus on particular themes within it.

In contrast to Khaled's conservative version of Islam, which sides with the politically powerful and the economically affluent, Hawwa's position is unambiguous in its support for revolutionary politics across the region. She represents a youthful and ambitious political impulse that considers the fall and ousting of Arab regimes a necessary step for political empowerment and for the advancement of the Arab-

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Wajih argued that Khaled's rhetoric about "human development and self-actualization" lost much of its appeal because the public he targets sees its economic interests threatened by instability and revolutionary politics ("Baheth," 2014).

Muslim civilization and culture. To her, the uprisings are a historical corrective movement that would bring Muslims back on track in their pursuit of modernity.

The social media campaign is active mostly on Facebook but also on Twitter and YouTube. The Facebook page is updated on a daily basis through the posting of status updates, pictures, memes and videos about the general theme of Al-Andalus, each of which generates interactions by group members who comment on those postings. The administrator shares these materials, many of which are produced and designed by group members. Most of the shared material consists of historic anecdotes about the political, cultural, and scientific history of Al-Andalus. Sometimes, the anecdotes are presented in consecutive posts that narrate a particular event, such as a battle or a rebellion. As mentioned, the social media campaign becomes most active early January of every year, when its activity revolves around commemorating the anniversary of the end of Muslim rule in the Iberian Peninsula and the beginning of the persecution of Muslim Andalusians in Spain. For example, the following image, shared in December 2013 and January 2014, demonstrates the kinds of communicative practices that campaign followers are expected to partake in.

Fig. 5.2

The image states: “Dedicate at least one day a year to Al-Andalus. Change your profile picture on your social media pages; Write and blog about Al-Andalus on web forums and social media networks; Read and research the history of Al-Andalus; Introduce others around you to Al-Andalus.” In status updates, the administrator made such rallying cries as: “Al-Andalus has fallen off the map once; do not let it fall once again out of memory. On 3 January we shall tweet about Al-Andalus on the 521st anniversary of its fall.” The following day another call on Facebook read “Al-Andalus was behind your glory and has held high the name of Islam for so long. Hold its name up today on your profile and give it life in defiance against those who think it dead.” These calls give a sense of urgency to the need to remember and reflect on the history of Al-Andalus.

As for the media platforms of the campaign versus the web and TV series and their impact on communicative practices, the two cases have differences and similarities. Of course, there also considerations related to the constraints determined by the technological affordances of the platform. As with social media in general, the Al-Andalus campaign presents itself as a series of texts but these texts, as I indicated before, “are only brought into existence through users’ communicative practices” (Lomborg, 2014, p. 80). For example, when Hawwa, the Facebook administrator, writes a new status update, it engenders comments that range from support, disagreement, pushback, comparison to another situation, or prayer. These comments may influence the administrator’s future updates. Many times images and memes are designed by group members. Though in this chapter I only analyze comments and

images shared by the administrator, I recognize that they are articulated as part of an online habitus that the community of Al-Andalus fans shares. As Papacharissi (2014), in applying the Bourdieusian concept, states, the habitus, as a product of a set of objective regularities, "informs the manner in which the capabilities of a particular platform are utilized and thus informs the texture of digitally enabled forms of expression and connection" (p. 123). As for the web series, it is more of a text because its content is already produced and does not change with the interaction of viewers. However, the series is only the latest of dozens of similar media productions, whether television series, online interactions on social media, and lectures that Khaled has been giving since the 1990s. My point is that the analysis of the single text of "The Story of Al-Andalus" series must be analyzed within a broader context of media activity and in relation to a group of followers that can be described as a community of fandom. As Moll (2010) notes, the phenomenon of Islamic 'televangelism,' of which Khaled is a prime example, "can only be productively understood within the context of regimes of mediated technology and celebrity" (p.9). The Al-Andalus program is consumed as only the latest installment of Amr Khaled productions and as part of ongoing social media interactions with him.

In this way, despite the differences, both media cases are similar in the way they engage their publics as mnemonic communities defined by their interpretations and imaginations of Al-Andalus. They are both multiplatform and interactive operations that negotiate top-down interventions by the narrator with bottom-up interaction by

followers. They both rely on mnemonic narration and imagination, which is anachronistic, non-linear, and politically usable (Zelizer, 1995, Keightley & Pickering 2012). In the words of Fortier (1999), "practices of group identity are about manufacturing cultural and historical belongings which mark out terrains of communality that delineate the politics and social dynamics of 'fitting in'" (Fortier, p. 42). Thus, by interacting on a daily basis with statements, images, and videos of Al-Andalus, the social media user and TV viewer is initiated into a collective practice of 'remembering' and constructing an identity based on linking the past to the present. Al-Andalus is used as a peg to discuss a wide array of events. For example, Hawwa describes the campaign in an interview with *Al-Jazeera* in January 2013:

> It includes an analysis of history and the reasons behind the end of Muslim rule and an association with the present… When we talk about Al-Andalus … we are talking about the Judaization of Jerusalem, about the massacres against our brothers in Syria, and the struggles in Egypt. We are talking about all the *Ummah* from Burma to Turkey.

Hawwa's explanation makes of Al-Andalus and the anniversary of its 'fall' an opportunity to connect to and comment on the contemporary situation of Muslim and Arab communities. The campaign constructs and defines the "we," the imagined community, as it invokes Al-Andalus and argues for its symbolic relevance today. Similarly, the web and TV series, as Khaled explains in the show's trailer (See

"Mohamed Tarek," 2013), relates Al-Andalus to the situation of Arab countries today:

> The "Story of Al-Andalus" is a story of lost history or a lost treasure. Muslims spent 800 years in Al-Andalus. Between the glorious story of their entrance and the sad story of their exit, there are many events that range from victory to defeat, heroism and treason, unity and struggle, coexistence and fragmentation. However, it is amazing how history repeats itself. Al-Andalus is a mirror to our lives. We will see ourselves in it. It comprises the same (current) events under different names.

Both media cases then are collective memory projects in that they are firmly in the present looking back on Al-Andalus to strategically use it for their political vision. Despite the way they extract different political lessons from history, they both project religious values onto Al-Andalus and appeal to similar publics— a mainstream Arab-Muslim public, which is Sunni, young, religious and connected to online networks. Both cases also build on a broader and older modern history of the politically-usable Al-Andalus symbol. Before I elaborate on the media cases, I will give a historic background of the use of Al-Andalus in the modern Arab world.

A history of Al-Andalus as modernity

The depictions of Al-Andalus in Arab culture have a history that spans the modern era. Al-Andalus has been a valuable memory for a wide scope and range of political and cultural actors. In the 19th century and the period of the Nahda, Arab writers and public intellectuals sought to construct a past narrative that inspires different sectors of Arab society— one that joins Muslims and non-Muslims in a national project with a

new relationship to its collective past. There were of course different projects in search for a usable past. Some, especially in Egypt, were focused on the nation-state as the unit onto which to project a unique history and cultural memory (See Di-Capua, 2009). Others focused on religion and sect. In the Levant, many thinkers and writers contributed to the production of memory for a more regional communal configuration which became the cultural basis for pan-Levantine or pan-Arab nationalism. A prominent example is the writing of the Lebanese Nahda movement author, Jurji Zaydan (1861-1914). Zaydan wrote a series of fictional historical novels set in various historical times and spaces in areas historically ruled and inhabited by Arabic speakers. One of his most successful books was about Al-Andalus. Zaydan's books secularized Islamic history and made it something that all Arabs can have access to and be inspired by (Ouyang, 2013). Similar to experiences in Europe at the time (as explained by Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, Lowenthal, 1985, and Nora, 1997), the construction of the past became an active project in the Arab world and memory was projected onto space, images, objects, and rituals. Al-Andalus was referenced in high culture of Arab poetry and music, and also in popular culture. Its memory was also invoked through public space, such as in the naming of urban quarters, main squares, sports clubs, and commercial stores.

Though the ways Al-Andalus is imagined and represented has varied widely since the 19th century and across the geography of the Arab world and the diaspora, its powerful allure has persisted for similar reasons, which is the ability of Al-Andalus to re-inscribe geopolitical relations with Europe and the West. Al-Andalus has consistently been remembered as an example of Arab and Muslim advancement at a time of European

decline and backwardness. It flips the geo-temporal imaginary of the distribution of political power between the Arab world and the West. It represents a possible alternative world, where the Arab and Muslim is a symbol of civilization within European territory. The Al-Andalus memory induces powerful contradictory sentiments of pride over past achievement and of an overwhelming sense of failure in juxtaposing history's glory against contemporary dire political, cultural, and economic performance of Arab and Muslim countries. Analyzing depictions of Al-Andalus in Arab literature, Gana (2008) contends that "in the history of Arab consciousness, Al-Andalus reverberates like a melancholic wound, fissuring chiastically between narcissistic cultivation and elegiac vulnerability." On the one hand, "it is a distant utopia of inimitable Arab Muslim achievement," on the other hand, it persists as a "legacy of cultural and political devastation" (Gana, 2008, p. 237).

Examples of how the grandeur of Al-Andalus is brought up in relation to current Arab-Western relations abound. In the words of Palestinian historian of Al-Andalus, Adel Bishtawi (2000), Cordoba was the "third largest city in the world after Baghdad and Constantinople" and "its Muslims, Christians and Jews walked safely on its cobble stone streets… at a time when London's houses were made of wood and its alleyways muddy" (p. 9). This narrative indicates that the significance of Cordoba's advancement is amplified through its comparison to London's backwardness. In this case, the European other is what gives meaning to the Arab-Muslim self. And also, the European backwardness is what makes Al-Andalus progressive. The sense of pride over Al-Andalus is felt mostly in relation to Europe's perceived inferiority at the time. Often this

is expressed when discussing the cultural life in Al-Andalus. In a status update on 10 April 2013, the administrator of the Al-Andalus social media campaign, Hawwa wrote that in 1624, a German prince wrote an invitation for dinner to the princes and noblemen of Europe. She added that he had written instructions for etiquette:

> The dear guests are asked not to dip their hands in pots, not to throw bones behind them, not to lick their fingers or spit in the plates or wipe their noses at the edge of the table.' This happened 150 years after the fall of Al-Andalus, where the highest forms of etiquette and high taste were practiced. (In Al-Andalus) people had a religion that taught them to eat with their right hands, to wash their hands, and be clean and behave while eating.

This example uses Al-Andalus to claim that even in relation to the highest forms of European modernness, such as in the art of etiquette and cleanliness, Arabs were more advanced. Arabs had allegedly proper eating etiquette habits centuries before Europeans. Cleanliness and etiquette are used in this passage as a marker of civilization. The statement implies that basically Arabs were the Europeans of the time. There are many other examples that address the superiority of Andalusian Arabs in the domains of science, women's rights, tolerance of other religions (particularly the Jewish community), and military might. The web and TV series ran a similar line. In episode 13 (See "alhudaish," 2013), Khaled tells the story of Abd-al-Rahman III (caliphate of Al-Andalus from 912–961). He says:

> Al-Andalus was like a global metropolis. I am not kidding. Do not tell me New York or Washington. In the reign of Abd-al-Rahman III, Al-Andalus was the

> strongest state in the world. The world's kings came here whether for medical care or academic learning. They used to come here in the very location where I am shooting.

Again, the glory of Al-Andalus is expressed in terms that affluent Arabs would relate to personally. They are told that as you today seek education and medical care in Western countries because you know that they are better and more advanced than in your countries, the situation was reversed in Al-Andalus.

While this is the main politically useful aspect of Al-Andalus, the historic symbol also softens other kinds of tensions in contemporary Arab-Muslim collective identity. It addresses a time when a vibrant and sizeable Jewish community prospered, politically, economically, and culturally under Muslim rule— an aspect often juxtaposed with perceived Israeli subjugation of Arabs and Muslims today. Al-Andalus is also popular because it is an example of Arab advancement as opposed to the accomplishments of other Muslim peoples such as the Turkish Ottomans or the Persians. It thus serves as a symbol of Arab-Muslim superiority to all other collective identities against which Arabs are defined, whether Western Christians, Jews, or Muslim Turks and Persians. The history of Al-Andalus is also used to bridge the gap between the Maghreb (North Africa) and the Mashreq (the Middle East). Al-Andalus was first occupied by the Damascus-based Ummayads but with the indispensable help of Moroccan and North African armies and leaders. Relatedly, it constructs a shared history between descendants of the Amazigh ethnicity in North Africa and the Arabs

of the Arabian Peninsula and the Levant. These are some of the factors that make Al-Andalus a central node in the imagining of Arab-Muslim collectivity.

Most academic literature about the memory of Al-Andalus in Arab public discourse is in the field of musicology and comparative literature, as Al-Andalus has been an enduring source of inspiration for Arab novelists, poets, and composers. The work of the late Syrian poet, Nizar Qabbani (1923-1998), exemplifies the sense of melancholic nostalgia stimulated by Al-Andalus. Qabbani writes in a poem entitled "The sorrow of Al-Andalus": "What has been left in Spain, from us [Arabs] and our eight centuries [of rule/ presence] is like what little wine remains at the bottom of an empty bottle, and eyes… wide eyes, in the blackness of which still sleeps the night of the desert." Palestinian poet Mahmud Darwich (1941-2008) has also written extensively about Al-Andalus, which became a symbol for his native Palestine. Darwich wrote about Al-Andalus from two standpoints. One is to criticize Arab (ruling elites) passive nostalgia that obsesses over Al-Andalus and ignores Palestine; as for example, in the verses "In every minaret a con artist and rapist preaching Al-Andalus should Aleppo fall under siege" (Jarrar, 2011, p. 364). The poem portrays Al-Andalus as a distraction from lived Arab catastrophes. Another standpoint sees Al-Andalus as a metaphor for personal exile from Palestine and from Lebanon when the poet, along with members of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), fled following the Israeli invasion of Beirut in 1982 (Jarrar, 2011). One of his main poems about Al-Andalus, entitled "11 planets" and written in 1992 to commemorate 500 years since the fall of Al-Andalus (1492), expressed the poet's opposition to the Oslo peace process between the PLO and Israel through his

nostalgia over the loss of Al-Andalus. He wrote: "I hear a rustling of keys in the door of our golden history, bidding farewell to our history, Am I the only one who will close the door of the last sky? (Jarrar, 2011, p. 377). Darwich's words suggest there are multiple 'Al-Andaluses' in different times and spaces, which nonetheless express the pains of Arab defeats.

In the field of music studies, Shannon (2007) compares the meanings projected onto music deemed 'Andalusian' in both Morocco and Syria and notes the differences in the meanings projected onto Andalusian music. While in Morocco, references to Al-Andalus are associated with Moroccan national identity, a pan-Islamic culture, Andalusian ethnicity (known as the Moriscos), and transnational connections with European culture (p. 326), in Syria, the discourse is much more focused on pan-Arab identity and culture. Clearly, Al-Andalus conjures different meanings depending on the context; however, there remains a powerful common nostalgic sentiment in the ways it is remembered.

In cinema, the Egyptian director, Youssef Chahine (1926-2008), directed the popular film *Destiny* (Arabic: Al-Masir) (1997), which tells the story of the Andalusian polymath Averroes (Arabic: Ibn Rushd). Averroes wrote about Greek philosophy and Islamic thought and jurisprudence. He was banished by the then caliphate of Al-Andalus, known as Al-Mansur (ruled from 1184-1199). Averroes had his books burnt in a public square due to his controversial rationalist approach to Islamic thought. Chahine's portrayal of Averroes and Al-Andalus were very much in line with Arab secular and nationalist imagination. Chahine's film depicts a

cosmopolitan multi-religious Andalusian society that leads a socially-liberal lifestyle, where men and women socialize and people drink alcohol and enjoy listening and dancing to music. Chahine attributes the fall of Al-Andalus to radical and intolerant Islam, whose rise and influence on the caliphate leads to the persecution of Averroes and other critical thinkers and exemplifies how Islam followed an enduring historical path of decline. In the film, Al-Andalus is portrayed as a historic juncture, after which Islam took the wrong historical path of radicalism and backwardness.

The film is a good example of the Arab secular imagination of Al-Andalus. Produced in the 1990s, it reacted to a time of decline of secular thought and lifestyles in the Arab world and to the rise of a wide spectrum of Islamist groups. It is an example of the kind of invocation of Al-Andalus that the media cases I am examining react against and reclaim Al-Andalus from. Despite the differences in the political meanings of the two case-studies I examine, they unmistakably conceive themselves as expressing an Islamic political and social identity, especially in terms of piety. Hawwa (2012), for example, has stated in an interview with Al-Jazeera that one of the campaign's aims was to distance Al-Andalus from "images of a *oud* playing, a woman dancing and of rulers fornicating," which she sees as a common image in socially-liberal Arab imaginaries. On Averroes, she reacts to secular historiography by saying that he is "talked about as if he were an enlightened secular, whose books were burnt by *takfiris* (radical Muslims who accuse others of apostasy) and his science and legacy were banned prior to his exile." "This is simplistic," she

claims. “Though he was treated unfairly, he remains an Islamic judge and not a secular philosopher (personal communication, 2013).

Hawwa, like Khaled, expresses her identity as a Muslim first and foremost, whether on the personal level of piety and religiosity, or at the political level. As the description of her group’s Facebook and Google Plus accounts say: “At dawn, I pray in Jerusalem and in Cordoba I listen to the call for prayer. The Islamic ummah (community/ nation) is my land, and to its community of believers, I belong. My country’s borders are, from east to west and north to south, a minaret.” Similarly, Khaled’s background as an Islamic preacher (*da’iyah:* one who calls in the name of Islam) defines how he narrates history from an Islamic perspective. However, as I mentioned, Khlaed’s religiosity lends support to conservative politics, while Hawwa’s Islam is in support of revolutionary politics.

Al-Andalus and the 2011 Arab uprisings

Against the backdrop of the Arab uprisings, the new engagement with Al-Andalus demonstrates the notion of forked historical consciousness. Al-Andalus is imagined as an originary time in Arab and Muslim collectivity. It is claimed that Al-Andalus was prosperous, advanced, and tolerant— values that purportedly reflect the genuine Arab and Islamic civilizations. Al-Andalus is deemed a symbol for a political and social system that works: a time when people had political agency and led fulfilling lives at the economic, cultural, and intellectual levels. However, the two media cases posit that when rulers and people took wrong political choices, Al-Andalus collapsed and Arab-Islamic civilization was put on a deviant path of historic

trajectory. Accordingly, when Al-Andalus is invoked today, both possibilities are summoned. The utopian portrayal of Al-Andalus conjures sentiments of pride and glory and signals that a better future is possible. It lends itself to claims that one's political orientation is associated with the prosperous Al-Andalus. The second contemporary invocation, which relates to the history of its collapse, is rhetorically used as a way to blame opponents that they are responsible for political deviance. Al-Andalus is used to accuse them of pushing history into again taking a wrong turn and a deviant path.

As Al-Andalus is a floating signifier, the reasons for its collapse are also subject to presentist political considerations. For Khaled, it was, as it still is today, political divisions, lack of unity, and political radicalism that paved the way for the collapse of the Arab-Islamic dream of Al-Andalus. His route to redemption is in cutting losses and consolidating national unity in support of rulers. On the other hand, for Hawwa, it is authoritarianism and the corruption of rulers that destroyed Al-Andalus. The lesson to be learnt for the Arab uprisings is that one must support protestors, dissidents, and anti-regime forces in pursuit of a revolution that empowers Muslim believers. Each uses Al-Andalus in the service of their political orientation.

To begin with, the social media campaign's commemoration of the departure of the last Muslim ruler out of the Iberian peninsula in 1492, or "the fall of Al-Andalus," is a prominent example of portraying Al-Andalus as a historical juncture— a symbol of both success and failure. One example from the social media campaign is the Twitter hashtag that translates into "has Al-Andalus ended"

(هل_انتهت_الأندلس). The use of the hashtag is a communicative practice that bridges the past and the present. More accurately, it transports the historic past into the current political environment by asking the rhetorical question whether Al-Andalus "has ended." Clearly, Al-Andalus then is not only a historic past era, rather it is a usable cultural and political memory. For instance, both images below were shared on Facebook to encourage participation in the campaign in late December 2013/ early January 2014.

Fig. 5.3

Fig. 5.4

In the image to the left, the Arabic text reads: "Tweet with us in the anniversary of the fall of Al-Andalus" with the hashtag "has Al-Andalus ended." The tweets using the hashtag mostly consist of material from the campaign whether videos, images, or text statements. In the image to the right, the pictures of fictional characters from history including a Muslim woman who is holding the keys to her lost Andalusian home are ways to create a human connection between followers of the social media campaign and the cause of Al-Andalus. These communicative practices project an

imagined history of Al-Andalus into the political imaginary of the followers of the social media campaign.

Hawwa brings Al-Andalus into the current events and portrays it as a reminder of the choice her followers should make over where they want history to go. The social media campaign uses Al-Andalus to persuade its followers to support the Arab protests, promote the values of revolution, defiance, and resistance against authority. In early January 2011, in the midst of the Tunisian uprising and prior to the regional spillover of the protests, Hawwa enthusiastically writes in support of the Tunisian revolutionaries:

> This is the Tunisian revolution! The Tunisian people are beating the drums of revolution! This is the only way to make history! There is one lesson to be learnt: if people want life, they will break out of their chains! ... No one can protect Arab regimes anymore! We hope today is the true beginning of change in the region! We hope this is a historical juncture!

The unbridled support for the Arab uprisings continued as protests moved to Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen.[14] This support was expressed through status updates, pictures, and memes. The following images are a sample of profile pictures of the group which are meant to mobilize support for protests across Arab countries.

[14] The campaign remained silent over the protests in Bahrain. This is perhaps in reflection of mainstream Arab Sunni public opinion, which viewed the Bahraini uprising with skepticism and feared it would lead to Shi'ite empowerment and Iranian geopolitical influence. In the case of the Al-Andalus campaign, it may also be related to security considerations. In many Arab countries, primarily in the Gulf, the issue of Bahrain is considered a national security priority with no tolerance to any form of public support for its uprising.

Fig. 5.5 Fig. 5.6 Fig. 5.7 Fig. 5.8

The image on the left shows the Tunisian flag and the face of a protestor covered with the *Kufiyya* (Arab headwear). At the top of the image, the Muslim *shahadah* (testimony) is written: "There is no god but God, Mohammad is the Messenger of God." Under the Tunisian flag, the word 'freedom' is inscribed. The image not only lends support for the Tunisian protests but frames it as an Islamic movement. The second image is in support of the Egyptian uprising. It shows the eagle in the Egyptian flag rising. The Arabic words read "25 January is a revolution for freedom." The third image shows the new Libyan flag of the uprising against a background that purportedly shows a protest in Libya. The Arabic reads: "free Libya." The fourth image shows the Syrian opposition's flag to the background of an Andalusian archeological structure and the Al-Andalus banner. The image connotes that the Syrian revolution is uncovering the history of Al-Andalus or is a direct continuation of the history of Al-Andalus. Clearly, it is a direct statement of support by Al-Andalus to the Syrian uprising.

Hawwa makes clear that the Al-Andalus campaign is not an escapist project to avoid the current conflicts in Arab countries. One example is what she wrote in December 2013: "some say that they will not interact with the Al-Andalus campaign for the sake of their (dedication to) the Syrian revolution, others say they will not commemorate the anniversary of Al-Andalus because Jerusalem is the priority. I say that I will continue to talk about Al-Andalus for the sake of Syria and Jerusalem and a thousand forgotten others." The political relevance of Al-Andalus then is amplified when imagined in conjunction with current Arab problems. Among the different Arab uprisings, the campaign's support for the Syrian uprising has been the most vocal.[15] The theme of comparing Al-Andalus to Palestine has been prominent on the social media campaign.

As discussed, the use of Al-Andalus in poetic and romantic nostalgic yearning to Palestine has been common in Arab art and poetry. The metaphor of Al-Andalus— juxtaposed on the memory of Palestine— invokes feelings of sadness and melancholic loss. In the social media campaign, themes about Palestine oscillated between melancholia about the loss of the two places and defiance that Muslims shall prevail and return to both Palestine and Al-Andalus. As Boym (2001) states "it is always important to ask the question who is speaking in the name of nostalgia" (p. 17) and for what purposes. The Palestine-Al-Andalus comparison serves as a good example of the tension within nostalgic sentimentality. While the invocation of

[15] This may be due to political considerations. Arab political activists are savvy in maneuvering authoritarian communication systems, particularly in knowing what are the political redlines. While the issues of Syria and Palestine may be less controversial (in most Arab countries), the issue of Egypt is trickier, particularly because President Abd-al-Fattah al-Sisi has the strong backing of many Arab states.

Palestine makes the cause of Al-Andalus more urgent, the summoning of Al-Andalus can also be read as an exercise to come to terms with and to mourn the loss of Palestine. And here it is important to differentiate between media text and practice. While the meanings of nostalgic texts vary and range from defiance to escapism or melancholy, the practice of mediating history in order to express political positions is empowering and strategic. Within the ubiquitous metaphor of Al-Andalus as Palestine, both memories merge into a single mode of engaging with the past that is simultaneously nostalgic and defiant but, most of all, politically useful in bolstering political-Islamic sensibilities. The most common example of how the comparison is established is the popular hashtag on Twitter—"The Andalusian Nakba." Al-Nakba (Arabic: catastrophe) is the term that refers to the expulsion of Palestinians and the declaration of the state of Israel in 1948, which is commemorated by Palestinians and Arabs as a catastrophe that befell them. Referring to Al-Andalus as a 'nakba' as well draws a direct link between the two historical 'calamities.' For Palestinians, *Al-Nakba* was mostly about fear, helplessness, violent uprooting, and humiliation (Sa'di & Abu-Lughod, 2007). Al-Nakba conjures a consciousness of what is imagined as a sharp and traumatic turn in history from a time of normalcy and belonging into a life of hardship, exile and homelessness. In the case of Al-Andalus, the symbol of Al-Nakba was used to describe another turning point in the geopolitical history of the Arab and Islamic civilizations. The fall of Al-Andalus signaled the end of the era of Arab self-rule, (imagined) good governance, and cultural advancement. Similarly, Al-Nakba in recent Arab history refers to a colonial/postcolonial defeat that Arab

countries faced in their war against the new Israeli state in 1948. It embodies Arab geopolitical subordination and the crushing of postcolonial aspirations and dreams of sovereignty and prosperity. Both events are portrayed as geopolitical traumas, two turning points in history, one medieval and one modern.

In this way, the Al-Andalus-Palestine comparison is a statement of defiance by asserting that Palestine will not be another Al-Andalus. At the same time, it has an aesthetic of loss and mourning that conflates two melancholic events in Arab history, which produce discourses of exile and fantasies of return. For example in a posting on 5 October 2013, Hawwa shared a historic text "that will make you tear up," as she said. It was a quote by a scholar of Andalusian origin living in Marrakesh in Morocco. He optimistically wrote in 1598 (more than a hundred years after the expulsion of Muslim rulers from Iberia) about the prospect of returning to Al-Andalus and claimed that Muslims have the resources to fight once again for Al-Andalus if they so choose. "I pity him" like all Andalusians "suffering from the disease of hope. I pity him like all the Palestinian refugees," Hawwa wrote.

Fig. 5.9

Fig.5.10

Fig. 5.11

Memes that compare Palestine and Al-Andalus, such as those above, were also shared to comemorate the fall and Al-Andalus. They are characterized by their rhetorical hybridity, with a defiant text but an aesthetic of mourning and loss. They carry the slogan: "So that Palestine wont be another Al-Andalus." The image on the upper right corner shows a series of maps representing the intensifying Israeli annexation of Palestinian lands from pre-1948 to the present. The image on the right from 2011 adds the text "We shall return to Al-Andalus… – the 519th anniversary of the fall of Al-Andalus 1492-2011" juxtaposed over a picture of the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. Below we see the words "Only God is the victorious" in a historic and artistic Arabic font. That slogan connotes that no matter how painful the loss of Palestine feels, it does not matter because at the end of the day only God is victorious. Finally, the third meme on the bottom visualizes the loss of Palestinian identity with a drawing of a ghost-like Palestinian wearing a traditional scarf, the *kaffiya*, the design of which is dispersing by transforming into the form of birds flying away. Visually, the two images of the disintegrating map and the disintegrating *kafiyya* invoke the melancholia assocaited with both Al-Andalus and Palestine. I mention these examples to show the malleability of nostalgia in the way

that it can be used to simeltaneously express loss and defiance. This example clearly showcases the need to pay attention to how nostalgic politics are deployed in rhetoric and how malleable they are in serving political goals. Indeed, the nostalgic bond of Al-Andalus and Palestine may be utilized for different purposes both radical or conservative.

The practices of bringing history to the present are also deployed by Khaled on the web and TV series, mostly through storytelling. In Khaled's use of Al-Andalus, the issue of Palestine, and the history of its comparison with Al-Andalus, is ignored. It was mentioned in passing in episode 2, in which Khaled said that one of the early rulers of Al-Andalus is originally from Hebron. He laments that "unfortunately Al-Andalus is gone and Palestine is gone" (See "IslamicRamadan," 2013). However, his main focus is on the values of "co-existence," "national unity," and peaceful tolerance, which can be interpreted as applicable to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In fact, that is precisely what Hawwa accused Khaled in an op-ed she wrote attacking his interpretation of Andalusian history. Hawwa (2013) wrote in the Palestinian news website *Quds* that the tolerance of Andalusian culture emerged because none of the Andalusian communities considered Al-Andalus as a colonial project, which, according to her, is not the case with how the Palestinians feel about Israel.

Rather than the case of Palestine, Khaled is more concerned with the uncertain situation in his native country, Egypt, where at that point in time President Mohammad Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood was ruling amidst widespread popular

opposition and army resentment. In episode 17, Khaled related what he called the "beginning of the collapse of Al-Andalus," which is the fall of the city of Cordoba out of Muslim rule in the 13th century, to Egyptian politics (See "alhudaish," 2013). Against the backdrop of the struggle for power between the Muslim Brotherhood, the army, and a youth-led protest movement in Egypt, Khaled used Al-Andalus to voice support for the army. He did so through narrating the story of Cordoba, a city estimated to have been the most populous and one of the most prosperous cities in the world during the 10th and 11th centuries. Different Muslim rulers and political factions, in addition to Christian Europeans, struggled over its rule. He said:

> People may ask: if you are saying they knew that Al-Andalus is on the path of collapse, why didn't they stop and do something? "Well, I ask you the same today. We are aware of the situation in our countries, why don't we stop it? It is about will, vision, and the unity of the people and their insistence to reform. I wonder will we learn from the Spanish lesson from the lesson of Al-Andalus. Will we learn when we see our mirror image in past events?

Here, Khaled presents the history of Al-Andalus as directly relevant to his followers. As if, he, like the Twitter hashtag of the social media campaign, is asking the rhetorical question 'has Al-Andalus ended.' In his statement, there is no chronological understating of historical progression. The only stable factor is the notion of an Islamic community moving through history. As it faced challenges in Al-Andalus, it faces them today in Egypt. His use of Al-Andalus is to emphasize the question, which is urgent in the context of current Arab affairs, when you know that

your country and community is on the path of destruction and decline, what do you do? Khaled suggests that Andalusians did not respond properly and thus contributed to their country's collapse. And he then hints that his followers have a choice to make as well, within the current historic juncture, between the rise or fall of Arab and Muslim countries as well, particularly Egypt.

Khaled continued to narrate the history of Cordoba in episode 17 by focusing on the role of political divisions that extended its weakness (See "alhudaish," 2013). He described a chaotic situation "with no security" but protests and counter protests. People protested a regime, and then when another ruler came to power, they lamented the previous regime, he said. "Here, what are we really talking about? What era are we discussing? In Cordoba or where," Khaled rhetorically asked. He warned that "in any functional state, there should be a process of handing over power. A country will not function under the mentality "let us oust (the leader) and then we will see." The final blow to Cordoba, he added has been when the army and security forces became an object for meddling and contestation. "O how I fear when the army is meddled with… There was no process of handing over power. And so the whole state collapsed." With this narrative, Khaled's anachronistic use of history to comment on Egyptian politics is most explicit. The mention of the army in this context is a clear endorsement of the military's role in Egypt.

Throughout his series, Khaled has focused on the values of national unity and the perils of political divisions. "The prophet said may God damn those who awaken the dormant *fitna* (the Quranic concept of civil strife). Indeed, may God damn those

who awakened it in Al-Andalus. And may God damn those who awakened it in 2013" he said in episode 17. In episode 21, in discussing Islamic radicalism in Al-Andalus, Khaled preaches that "moderation is what will protect our countries. Unity is what will protect our countries. The unity of Muslims is more important than rejecting un-Islamic behavior. These are very important lessons in our lives" (See "alhudaish," 2013)

In his presentation of Andalusian history, Khaled also promoted neoliberal values, in his celebration of the entrepreneurial self and the value of economic growth and production. In discussing leaders of Al-Andalus, he typically framed their success in terms of "following their dreams" and pursuing "self-fulfillment." In praising an Andalusian leader in episode 13 he reiterated the message that individuals can alter the fate of a country. Khaled turned to the viewer and asked what he or she will do for their country. How will they change its future? He dedicated episode 23 to what he called "the recipe for civilization," which is in "education, innovation, production in agriculture and industry that yields surplus, export and trade." Similarly, he stated, in episode 26, that without an economically productive youth, no country can survive. He put the responsibility for that productivity on his young followers, whom he addressed by saying "beware of sitting around without work; each of you, look for a profession. Learn anything. Beware of unemployment" (See "alhudaish," 2013). Thus, his focus on national unity, moderation, and the entrepreneurial self is quite different from the revolutionary politics of the Al-Andalus social media campaign. Though both

emerge out of a context, in which Islam is playing a more public political and social role, the political usefulness of Islam in each case is very different. Each case mobilizes Islamic history to the benefit of a certain constituency with its particular political aspirations.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined the renewed engagement in the Arab public sphere with the memory of Al-Andalus by focusing on nostalgic communicative practices. I argued that Al-Andalus is used to orient collective identities and to help articulate political opinions in times of overwhelming transformation. Al-Andalus is implicated in the mnemonic battles of the Arab uprisings. In the two cases I examined, Al-Andalus is utilized as a prospective tactic that justifies current political positions through a narrative about the past, whether with the intent to support the Arab uprisings or oppose them. What these depictions have in common is their future orientation. In a recent interview with an Iraqi channel, *Baghdad TV*, Hawwa (2014) explains the rationale behind the campaign as such:

> We are talking about the return of the self, the regaining of identity, the humanization of history, and the structuring of consciousness. These are the basic themes we discuss… we are not stuck in history. We are the sons of today… The true return to Al-Andalus is a return to the self. Our countries are there. We can transform all our countries to a new Al-Andalus if we so choose. We can create a new civilization and culture. The first task is to get rid of dictatorship.

Clearly, Al-Andalus here is deployed as a site of retrospective futurity and as a future project for political change rather than a passive fixation over past history. Al-Andalus is construed as a key transhistorical setting that gives meaning to the collective— "the self." The choice of Al-Andalus is because of its importance in Arab and Islamic political culture. Al-Andalus is politically seductive as a source of inspiration for future politics and as a contemporary way to discuss the present. Its invocation seeks to rhetorically set the imagined collective community on the 'right path' of historical progression and trajectory. Dictatorships are deemed as the obstacle. They are portrayed as what stands between young Arabs today and the future they should have built but were never allowed. The uprisings are the opportunity to begin to build that history. They are history in the making and Al-Andalus is what is to be made.

In a similar structure but through different interpretations, Khaled portrays Al-Andalus as a project. In the conclusion of his program in episode 30, he rhetorically asked "Is history repeating itself? Will we learn from its lessons? Will we succeed in repeating the glories? Or have we become skilled in repeating the mistakes of history?" The answer is definitely that history is repeating itself and Arabs must learn from Al-Andalus. To him, the lesson is to avoid political struggles. He added "I hope the days of Al-Andalus will be repeated through the efforts of youths who love to build and stay away from struggles." The Arab uprisings and the divisive politics they produce are Khaled's enemy. *Fitna*, or political conflict, which

the uprisings have brought about, is what he designates as the obstacle standing in the way of achieving the suppressed transhistorical glory of Islam.

The 2011 Arab uprisings have then seen fresh interpretations of the symbol of Al-Andalus, which has been reverberating in Arab public discourse since the era of the Nahda in the late 19th century. As much as Al-Andalus can connect and re-inspire young Arabs, as much as it reflects the complex and contentious politics of projecting the imagined Arab-Muslim collectivity onto the past— what Hawwa calls "the return to the self." Al-Andalus then vividly represents an aspired Arab modernity. It evokes retrospective futurity and prospective remembrance— notions that encapsulate the temporally Janus-faced contemporary Arab political controversies that I have been analyzing as the mnemonic battles of the Arab uprisings. The next concluding section offers final thoughts and remarks about this dissertation.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

Summary of chapters

My dissertation has examined the mediated political controversies that centered on competing imaginations of history during the 2011 Arab uprisings and the contentious political conflicts that ensued in the Arab region. Against the backdrop of the uprisings, I examined four case-studies, episodes of contention in Arab media and public discourse, which I defined as mnemonic battles about the place of the past and the future in the present. I have argued that the renewed engagement with conceptualizing collective affiliation can be understood as a reiteration and renewal of the Arab project of modernity that started in the late 19th century. I suggest that there is analytical value in studying public and media discourse on a regional level during the uprisings in light of the major differences among Arab countries. In the Arab world, there is a distinctive and pervasive tension between the mediation of a transnational revolutionary narrative and its projection onto different countries and contexts. The Arab revolutionary repertoire assumes a collective pan-regional body politic with a history that spans centuries. It reproduces collective memories about a powerful but evasive "we" that clashes with the complex political terrain across the Arab world and in individual countries. And while the articulation of politics through tropes about shared history was crucial to produce a forceful revolutionary narrative in 2011, it inadvertently amplified the impact of protests, hastened instability and exacerbated political divisions within and across Arab countries.

In this dissertation, I applied a collective memory approach to the study of politics and communication at times of crisis— arguing for a historically-cognizant analysis. I

have analyzed how history was invoked in relation to the Arab uprisings and the transformation of "essentially unstructured series of events into seemingly coherent *historical narratives*" (Zerubavel, 2003, p. 13). I selected particularly controversial episodes of contestation about history. I analyzed symbols and tropes through asking what political affiliation they are supposed to represent and what originary times in history have they claimed to continue. Subsequently, I have engaged with the question of how political actors communicated mnemonic configurations and what political implications did these different quests of remembering and forgetting have. I explained the resulting situation within the frame of mnemonic battles.

In the first case-study, I considered the "garbage dump of history" trope, tracing how it was used as a communicative tool against authoritarian regimes. It connoted a mobilization to oust ruling regimes out of temporal narratives, in addition to ousting them out of their posts. The trope communicated a level of urgency in bringing about a sweeping change in the Arab political environment. It deemed dictators as the obstacles that stand in the way of Arab progress, development, and modernity— intensifying the historic meaning of the protest movement and the scope of expectation of what comes after the era of authoritarianism. Following the 2011 protests, and as the momentum in anti-authoritarian activism slowed down under the weight of political problems and divisions, the "garbage dump" trope both reflected and contributed to this fractured environment. The metaphor of ousting a figure into a metaphysical and metatemporal site of trash became more violent when used against political opponents in warring countries. The trope echoed figures of speech that have historically accompanied ethnic cleansing

and was often used to anticipate or to justify violence and killing of supporters of rival political groups.

In the second case-study, I discussed a history of a symbol, the national flag, since the start of the Syrian uprising. Similar to the garbage dump trope, the initial move of the Syrian opposition to carry a flag different from that of dictatorship was meant to communicate a sharp break from the authoritarian regime— in this case that of President Bashar Al-Assad and the Ba'th Party. The flag was meant to signify a more inclusive Syria and bring back a more pluralist time when it was the official flag of the country (1932 to 1958). Syrian flags soon became subsumed in warfare between the armed opposition and the Syrian army. The public controversies over the meanings of flags were consumed by accusations of treason. The actual histories of the official status of the flag were brought to the present and thrust into contentious disputes. The ideas that represented the fundamental pillars of national history, such as independence from colonialism, and the first decades of postcolonial rule, became implicated in the controversies about the flag. What represented colonial subjugation to some Syrians, became the banner of freedom and pluralism to others. The symbolic foundations of the nation-state were shaken as battles raged around the country. The heterotopic media of flags summoned snippets of Syria's long history, which haunted the political milieu with their historical force. In addition to the regime and main national opposition flags, armed groups opted to use Islamic banners in a rebellion on the notion of a secular nation-state. The move brought to the fore the debate, which has its origins in the 18th century Arab

world, between notions of collective identity that centered on Islam versus on national formations.

Like the Syrian war, the civil war and political divisions in Libya took their toll on national symbols. In Chapter IV, I analyzed one of the main symbols of Libyan national identity and cultural specificity that of the anticolonial hero, Omar Al-Mukhtar. I specifically foregrounded one aspect of the mobilization of Al-Mukhtar by different political groups, which is how his symbol is used to signal the formation of publics and counter publics. In the hands of the powerful, Al-Mukhtar was used to claim that there is one single interpretation of history, colonialism, and nationalism in Libya. Former rulers— whether the monarchy of Al-Sanusi or the regime of Al-Qadhafi— monopolized Al-Mukhtar's public use in the service of their authority. In 2011, protestors and rebel groups reclaimed Al-Mukhtar as a symbol of freedom from oppressive authoritarian rule. Al-Mukhtar went through another process of subversion that distanced him from his anticolonial legacy and used him to evoke the originary national time of anticolonialism. Following the fall, and later the killing of Al-Qadhafi in late 2011, the struggle for power intensified in Libya. In parallel, a struggle erupted for the control of the Al-Mukhtar symbol. However, unlike flags in Syria, the symbol of Al-Mukhtar refers to the legacy of a person, who has a living son, a tribe, and a place of birth and burial. Subsequently, these facts of history impose limits on the range of meanings Al-Mukhtar can signify. Following 2011, the controversies around Al-Mukhtar centered on whether he is a political symbol of Cyrenaica, his province of birth, or Libya as a whole.

Al-Andalus, the focus of Chapter V, was a more amenable site to different interpretations. As a symbol of an Arab-Islamic golden age, which is historically detached from current politics, and physically outside the geography of the Arab world, Al-Andalus conjures a wide range of meanings as used by political actors in places as different as Morocco and Palestine. During the Arab uprisings, Al-Andalus was deemed as an originary time for Arab culture and as a convenient symbol used to articulate present and future-oriented political positions. Al-Andalus became the site of prospective history and retrospective futurity in the ways it was portrayed as a utopian past and the mirror image of the desirable future. Like this dissertation's other case-studies, it reflected a forked historical consciousness. Al-Andalus was the past to be resurrected, while its fall represented cultural and political decline. Al-Andalus makes possible the conception of a past that should have been versus a past that had deviated from where it should have gone. The political impact of this schema is in the mobilization of nostalgic cultural remembrance in the service of long-term contemplations about the collective future. Cloaked in nostalgia, discussions and practices actively projected meaning onto Al-Andalus. Within the fractured Arab political environment, many Al-Andaluses emerged. In the chapter, I focused on two cases, a social media campaign about a radical Al-Andalus clearly mobilized for anti-authoritarian revolution, and a web and TV series about a conservative Al-Andalus that prioritizes stability, unity, and the acceptance of authority. My analysis of these four case-studies has traced a whirling movement of ideas about the past that contribute to shaping and communicating politics in the present.

A whirling memory

In this dissertation, I have highlighted the motion in memory. As a society is not a static concept, its memories are not. The collective understanding of the past's meanings is characterized by the contradictory processes of accumulation and loss, retention and change. What has transpired from my analysis is that the social construction of past narratives is determined by a complex network of variable nodes that connect and disconnect based on power configurations, conceptions of collective identities, and historic determinations.

Power dynamics explain who we exactly mean when we discuss the social. How does the process of interpreting and disseminating ideas about history emerge? What dynamics control how the past is explained? In my case, I analyzed the change in the way the collective past was interpreted in Arab countries through the decline in authoritarian control over public discourse, including how the past was interpreted and history invoked. Furthermore, I have focused on how that shift in authoritarian control is related to historical power structures, since the 19th century and through the colonial and postcolonial eras, and how it has impacted Arab popular imaginations of history.

As for collective identity conceptions, they are best understood as intersectional because political actors engage with multiple histories that relate to different facets of their contemporary geographic, ethno-religious, and socio-economic positionality. This is a key point of contention that illuminates how the past was mobilized in the service of the Arab uprisings. Symbols and tropes, which were meant to be inclusive in their invocation of a shared national and transnational Arab-Islamic history and collective memory, clashed with political agendas that put forth different interpretations of the past—

resulting in a crisis of meaning-making. As for historic determinations, they are basically the parameters of actual past events as supported by recorded evidence that shape contemporary understandings of the past. These determinations may limit the range of possible reinterpretations of the past. For example, the memory of a national hero, such as the case of Omar Al-Mukhtar (Chapter III) is bound by the accepted facts of his life that limit the meanings his symbol may acquire. While on the other hand, a trope that invokes history in general (such as the garbage dump of history in Chapter I) or a symbol of a bygone era and civilization such as Al-Andalus (Chapter IV) may be more variedly invoked and interpreted.

These variations and complexities point to how the study of collective memory overtime induces a sense of vertigo. Collective memory is a whirling phenomenon because political communities are in a constant process of formation and disintegration. Political actors strategically conceal their socially-constructed and inherently volatile claims of collective belonging by falsely alleging that the identity they perpetuate is characterized by continuity, stability, and rootedness in history. In claiming to have long-existed and moved through time, a body politic fails to recognize its novelty and the freshness of the memories it asserts. A history that spans centuries, which may have already been long collapsed into an idea, acquires new meaning in the service of contemporary aims. That meaning itself becomes a rendition of a bygone interpretation. Accordingly, monitoring that process overtime and navigating the chameleonic nature of collective identity expressions in relation to the past induces a sense of temporal dizziness. This is particularly true in a politically-unstable region such as the Middle East,

whose last century has seen dramatic changes in political maps, regimes in power, spheres of geopolitical influence, and claims on collective belonging.

It is well-known that memories are shaped by the group's unique but changing position in relation to contemporary circumstances. The pace of change in expressions of memory corresponds to the speed and extent of circumstantial developments. Collective understandings of history may seem stable for a long time but may suddenly take a turn to a fresh interpretation. Accordingly, the present –as a determinant of how the past is interpreted— is not static. The present is constantly cannibalized by the past. This process is experienced on the individual level, as consciousness of a lived moment already turns it a bygone memory. On the collective level, the past is also ever expanding as it accumulates a growing mass of social and political experiences. A society's reservoir of usable memories grows with time and offers a plethora of possibility in mnemonic renewal.

Like the past, the future also has a pulling force on our lived experiences, as we, individually and collectively, act based on hopes and fears that haunt our imagined futurity. So when theorizing collective memory, it is important to stress that the relevant objects of analysis are not static concepts or independent variables but moving targets and relational factors. In many approaches to collective memory, the present is reduced to a seemingly stable concept that informs interpretation of the social world and expressions and performances of political agency. The "social" is also often reduced to an ethnic or national identity whose static memories are portrayed as essential to their group cohesion (See Klein, 2000). Thus, it is important to stress that a community's past is not reducible

to what it remembers but also to what it forgets. Popular imaginations of history pluck out snippets of past events. The prominence of one aspect of history ebbs and flows. And every time that aspect of history gains social and political capital, it acquires a new meaning and interpretation. For example, one can only speculate on how the momentous changes in the Arab region from the rise of militant groups such as the Islamic State organization to the refugee crisis that saw hundreds of thousands fleeing to Europe with nothing but their memories will influence future mnemonic configurations.

This contemporary whirling feature of memory cannot be separated from its mediation. Mnemonic activism in the Arab world occurred through practices that dominated the Arab public sphere and media scape. And the focus of my analysis has been on communicative practices rather than media platforms. And I have demonstrated how, in their efforts for collective mobilization, Arab activists and media users deployed their memories in self-expression and in support of their political struggle. Memories were mediated in myriad practices from chanting slogans in protests, designing and circulating social media memes, making signs and posters for protests, spraying graffiti in the urban landscape, writing news article and opinion pieces portraying the uprisings as the making of a new history, raising new flags and disseminating explanations of their political signification. Kieghtly & Pickering (2012) suggest the notion of mnemonic imagination to conceptualize memory as a practice that entangles the past, present and future and "enables us to act intentionally as the past can be used to inspire and inform expectation and possibility and therefore motivate action in the present" (p.78). Conceptualizing memory through the prism of practice foregrounds mediation rather than

media. It helps explain how certain media platforms play important roles under certain political circumstances. In the case of the Arab uprisings, social media played a substantial role in 2011 because they initially enabled a more anonymous use within authoritarian communicative systems as compared with other media. However, the analysis of social media as isolated texts is reductive because that fails to think of them as practices that are relational to other forms of expression on myriad communicative platforms. As Hoskins (2016) argues "paradoxical states of permanence and obsolescence, of empowerment and loss of control, and of stability and ephemerality define remembering and forgetting in today's media ecology" (p.14) and how memory is shaped across media. Accordingly, the question that has driven this dissertation is: what were the communicative practices that mediated history and how did they metamorphose meanings of the past? Indeed, in the Arab world, the 2011 uprisings witnessed fresh interpretations of the past and also a bitter contestation over its meanings.

History in the 2011 uprisings

It is difficult to overstate the extent of the effect and the impact of the 2011 uprisings on the political and cultural milieu in the Arab world, let alone on the lives and livelihoods of millions of people in the region. The examination of the 2011 Arab uprisings in 2015 is a study of unfolding events, the legacy of which continues to unravel. We know that the heads of state in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Yemen have been ousted that year. And since 2011, Tunisia elected two presidents— a change in course in the country's authoritarian rule that saw President Zine El-Abedine Ben-Ali in office since 1987. In Egypt, the legacy of 2011 is more uncertain. The country elected a president,

Mohammad Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood— a party that has been facing successive Egyptian governments' crackdowns since getting outlawed in 1948 (Lefevre, 2013). In 2013, a popular army coup removed Morsi and paved the way for army chief Abd-al-Fattah Al-Sisi to take over the presidency. And in 2015, an Egyptian court issued a death sentence against Morsi.

For its part, the Gulf Arab Kingdom of Bahrain's protest movement was crushed following a Saudi military invasion to subjugate the rebelling population. The other "Arab Spring" countries Libya, Syria, and Yemen are in various states of civil war five years after the spark of peaceful protests. In Libya, dictator since 1969 Mu'ammar Al-Qadhafi was killed by rebels after being chased away and removed from power in an armed rebellion supported by a NATO military campaign. The country has been gripped by armed chaos and political instability. In August 2015, two Libyan governments are competing for political legitimacy and control— as the Islamic State group establishes presence in the country. Yet the country that has suffered the most is Syria, which has been gripped by a devastating civil war that, as of late 2015, has caused the displacement of about half of its 23 million people and the death of more than 250,000 people. Thousands others have been killed, injured, or displaced in the other Arab countries. Even in countries that did not see mass protests as part of the Arab Spring across the geography of the Arab world, from Algeria in the west to Iraq in the east, there has been drastic impact by the waves of revolution and war.

In seeking to make sense of this violent, chaotic, and fast-changing environment, I have been examining how the initial protests late 2010 and early 2011 were

communicated and what implications did communicative practices have on the political situation that emerged following those protests. Since the protests began, history has been a central narrative trope used for mobilization. Following the success of the Tunisian revolution in ousting its authoritarian ruler in 27 days of collective action, young Arabs across the Middle East and North Africa got inspired to emulate the Tunisian model of peaceful protest and civil disobedience.

Arab youths turned the Tunisian experience into a political opportunity by claiming that it was in fact not about Tunisia but about a historic wave of revolutionary action. The transnational mediation of a single revolutionary narrative by myriad political actors is at the heart of the tensions and struggles that the Arab world has faced since 2011. Though their reasons differed, various political actors from across Arab countries propagated the same political narrative as if they formed a unified political community undergoing the same revolutionary movement. Activists' relied on a lot of the same slogans, tropes, and symbols about history for their revolutionary rhetoric— implying shared membership to and affiliation with an Arab body politic. However, that shared rhetoric proved difficult to reconcile with the vast differences in the situations of Arab countries, and more specifically the varying challenges that activists would face in seeking to topple their countries' authoritarian rulers. The spread of the protests from Tunisia to half a dozen Arab countries then was not a passive inevitable process. It was a strategic choice made by activists and opposition parties and figures to contribute to a narrative about making revolution and entering history. Needless to say, the experiences of middle class Egyptian youths in Cairo are different from that of working class Syrians

in the southern town of Daraa, to give just one example. Yet, they both reverted to a cultural repertoire about history. Accordingly, there has been a tension between a simple narrative about a single political community of disenfranchised Arabs revolting against authoritarianism and the inherent geopolitical, economic, institutional, and ethnoreligious diversity in the Arab region.

From the outset of the uprisings, history was as much about the present and the future as much as it was about the past. History took on several meanings. It was a description of the present in claims that Arabs are living in historic times. It was projected into the future in assertions that Arab dissidents and activists are making history. It was also retrospective as expressed in the desire to resurrect past eras that preceded that of the dictatorships— which protestors were rebelling against. History was also portrayed as a space that you can be inside or outside depending on your political choices. Soon after the initial euphoria of the revolutionary moment, history became a rhetorical weapon. It became an indicator of political affiliation within contexts of sharp political divisions. Tropes and symbols about history reflected mnemonic strategies among political groups in highly contentious situations. History became mobilized in a cacophony of political assertions and accusations. Indeed, accusations of being outside history were often accompanied by acts of violence against political opponents.

These different meanings projected on the concept of history were expressed in contentious debates that coalesced around tropes, sites, and symbols across media. I have argued that an analysis of contemporary Arab communicative practices reveals a forked understanding of an Arab past, one to be ousted as an obstacle in the way of progress, and

another to be resurrected as originary. The rationale for this framework is the desire to start a new promising future. This temporal schema is important because its impact on politics and on the choices of political actors in the contemporary Arab world is substantial. Throughout my chapters, I considered how the use of history to express political aspirations has resulted in the eruption of mnemonic battles.

The premise of this dissertation is that the mobilization of history for revolution in the Arab world advanced the "Arab Spring" narrative and achieved unthinkable political gains, particularly in turning the uprising in Tunisia as a political opportunity for mobilization. To justify why and how 2011 was a historic year, Arab activists and dissidents projected new meanings on historic symbols. This liminal stage of political discourse has been characterized by a revolt against the communicative systems of Arab dictators and the emergence of a new repertoire of symbolism and language. Dissidents communicated new understandings of collective identity and shared pasts. In other words, there was a breakdown in the discursive hegemony of Arab regimes that warranted analyzing struggles amongst various political actors in relation to the interpretation of the collective past.

To contextualize the uprisings, I have suggested, it is important to emphasize that they were "unthinkable" before 2011. The idea that Arab peoples lack the agency for revolt, and that the Arab regimes had ensured such protests would not be able to take place, were for the most part hegemonic. As Lustick (1993) points out, the success of a hegemonic project is indicated by the manner in which "what was problematic becomes given. What was content becomes context" (p. 56). Accordingly, the subjugation of Arab

peoples by ruling regimes prior to the uprisings was considered a political and cultural context of Arab politics. When Arab youths took to the streets in mass protests and enacted what was previously not thought of as possible, the Arab political authoritarian order was shaken. Much of the political discourse set by Arab regimes was challenged in unprecedented ways by activists and political parties.

The struggle for what to remember after forgetting authoritarianism

The 2011 uprisings prompted a liminal stage of meaning-making, which was characterized by aggressive attempts to forget ideas about the collective past that were propagated by Arab dictatorial regimes, and by seeking to portray new meanings about the past as already established memory. As Bhabha (1994) explains the construction of the national present is not simply a question of historical memory but is also about being obliged to forget. "It is the construction of a discourse on society that performs the problem of totalizing the people and unifying the national will" (p. 161). He adds that "being obliged to forget becomes the basis for remembering the nation, peopling it anew, imagining the possibility of other contending and liberating forms of cultural identification" (p. 161). Accordingly, the pursuit of revolutionary change is an aggressive project to forget the legacy of dictatorial rule and to homogenize national time through new interpretations of the past and new promises about the future. Laclau (2005) has also stressed that "even if the aim of the rebellion is the restoration of a previous identity, it has to reinvent that identity; it cannot simply rely on something entirely given beforehand" (p. 121). The stabilization of that new invented identity depends on the propagation of equivential symbols that claim to represent the people, he explains. Laclau

suggests that the processes of projecting meaning on symbols faces an inherent tension in condensing a wide array of demands into those particular symbols. “Totalization requires that one differential element should assume the representation of an impossible whole” (p. 80-81). Without strong institutions to stabilize the meanings of these symbols, an organic crisis overwhelms the system of signification, which becomes dominated by floating signifiers, Laclau suggests.

This has been the case in the Arab world since 2011. Arab activists and dissidents have projected new meanings on historic symbols, which were meant to be equivential and depictive of social and political cohesion. This happened on a country-specific and pan-Arab transnational levels. However, soon after the initial phase of the uprisings, the political fissures nationally and regionally, the result of decades of authoritarian rule and state violence, were reflected in the contestation of some of the core signifiers of Arab modernity and national identities. These episodes of contestation are the mnemonic battles of the Arab uprisings.

As Ryzova (2015) suggests in her analysis of vintage historic photographs on Egyptian social media, the contestation of history and the unstable signification of historic icons proves at once the necessity of revolution in Egypt as well as the reasons why it has faced overwhelming challenges. Unstable historic iconography demonstrates both the opening up of the Egyptian post-2011 public sphere as it gets freed from the shackles of authoritarianism and also points to the difficulty of finding cultural and political common ground within the interpretation of national symbols. Post-2011 media

practices showcase the breakdown of authoritarian hegemony and the subsequent struggle to construct and disseminate inclusive symbols.

Arab discourse at this liminal stage of 2011-2015 can be conceptualized as expressing a new structure of feeling (Williams, 1977). Following the decline of Arab regime's political dominance in narrating the past, there emerged fresh interpretations of the past to correspond to new political actors' pursuit of power. This liminal stage, has been referred to by Williams (1977) as reflecting structures of feeling because it is "pressing but not yet fully articulated" and subsequently not yet a coherent political voice "which could be more confidently named" (p. 127). It is difficult to name the political ideologies, the systems of governance, or the collective identity affiliations that shall dominate the Arab region in the future. However, it remains crucial to historicize how history past and future appeared to political actors in 2011 and the aftermath of that year's uprisings.

While initially dictators were the object of prospective forgetting, opinions quickly diverged in what must follow. Each political decision seemed fateful, as if it relates to the whole of a country's modern history— not least to the ongoing historic debate about the place of the nation-state and secular nationalism in the Muslim world. For example, when the Muslim Brotherhood came to power in Egypt in 2012, following the country's first free elections, many saw that as either a return to the Islamic origin of Egypt or as a deviant turn into Islamist rule. Which is the revolution and which is the counter-revolution? The answer depends on another answer to the question, asked by Agha and Malley (2012), "was the last century an aberrant deviation from the Arab

world's inherent Islamic trajectory?" What was the detour and what is the natural path of Arab history and identity? (p. 2) In analyzing fundamentalist articulations of Islamic identity, Al-Azmah (1993) contends that history "takes place in two registers, one of which has a decided ontological distinction over the other: the authentic, and the inauthentic" (p. 27). The former is imagined as original and natural, while the other is posited as passage of time, "sheer succession and pure seriality, bereft of significance, and therefore of quality" (p. 27). At the moment of rupture during the uprisings, these struggles about the outlines of remembered history intensified in the public sphere.

Protestors and their supporters described themselves as agents of history, the heroes of the future's history. As Koselleck (2004) argues, history in modern revolutions is constituted by the interaction of experience (or memory) and expectation (or hope). The meanings that history takes are determined by "the inner relation between past and future or yesterday, today, or tomorrow" (p. 258). In pro-uprisings Arab media, the agents of history, supporters of the protest movement, were said to have achieved congruence between what was always supposed to have happened, a situation of popular self-determination and home-grown modernity, and what is happening at the moment of protest, which was (hoped to be) a revolution against forms of rule that prevented the previous imagined history from actually occurring. A forked historical consciousness was reflected in communicative practices that pitted an imagined unfulfilled Arab history against the experienced history of Arab colonial sufferings and postcolonial failures. The use of history brings out the memory of unfulfilled hopes of postcolonial liberation and modernity to collective consciousness in public discourse.

This binary between an old history to be discarded and a new history to be achieved has characterized modern revolutions since the French Revolution (Arendt, 1977). In the Arab world, this temporal schema, that conceived the political community in an evolutionist telos, has been central to the fin-de-siècle cultural-political movement known as the Nahda (awakening). Since then, intellectual debates about Arab progress and decline and about locating the obstacles that prevent an Arab civilization from achieving its place in future history, have recurred and reverberated. The desire for a utopian future has gone hand in hand with imagining certain pasts as utopian as well. And this desire has dominated Arab political aspirations since the Nahda and through anticolonial and postcolonial activism. As Watenpaugh (2006) argues, the "acceptance of the underlying logos of Western civilization," while asserting the ability of non-Westerners to resist Western political and cultural hegemony (or assert alternative modernities and nationalisms) "is the quintessential ambivalence at the center of the historical experience of modernity in the colonial and postcolonial non-West" (p. 5). A new iteration of this historic contradiction has been yet again experienced during the 2011 uprisings.

Similarly, Scott (2004) contends that anticolonial narratives have largely depended upon a certain Western-inspired conception of a utopian horizon "toward which the emancipationist history is imagined to be moving" (p. 8). This is what Koselleck (1979/ 2004) terms "the horizon of expectation" and it is a horizon precisely because "it retreats as one approaches it" (p. 261). Scott describes this longing for an emancipatory future "the tragedy of colonial enlightenment" as the title of his book suggests. Massad

(2007) conceives this future desire as an enduring and futile social Darwinism whose telos is integration within European modernity. Both Scott and Massad are critical of scholarly and literary works that reproduce conceptions of emancipation in terms of utopian futures. These are the futures, which are usually compared to a dichotomy within the past between a golden age to be remembered and a dark age to be erased.

However, the temporal conceptions of collectivity and progress cannot be wished away. If the study of public culture is to be taken seriously, the popularity of social evolutionary imaginaries becomes apparent. Ideas about continuously assessing the historic path of an Arab-Islamic community and civilization moving through time, while constantly being compared to a European and Western civilization, are not only common but also crucial sites of political activity. They have been fundamental in propagating the notion that the 2011 Arab uprisings represent history in the making. These notions of history are important to the ways many Arab activists and commentators have communicated their political agency and the intentions behind their collective action. Arab activists have reiterated visions of the past and the future, which have originally been expressed during the Nahda and the region's anticolonial struggles. But in 2011, these aspirations about the future, and interpretations of the past, were mobilized against Arab dictatorial regimes. The study of public culture can only place this evolutionist understanding of collectivity's movement along linear temporality at the center of the unfolding momentous regional uprisings. And while it may be easy to dismiss and accuse Arab writers or intellectuals of orientalism when they speak of an unchanging Arab collectivity moving through the centuries and allegedly facing the same problems of

decline and progress, it is more difficult to do so when those tropes are ubiquitous in the public discourse and the popular imagination. If Arab public culture is orientalist, then orientalism may have to be expanded and classified into different domains or it risks collapsing under the weight that concept is being asked to sustain.

This point of contention is not confined to contemporary politics. Watenpaugh's (2006) work on the history of 19th century Aleppo, during the era of the Nahda, recognized that the force of modernity has "colonized local politics and cultural practices, and everyday life" (p. 8). Watenpaugh highlights how members of the middle class in Aleppo at the time were committed to propagating modernity in their communicative practices. Though they have been "conscripts of modernity" to use Scott's terms, the pursuit of modernity was a driving force in their actions and self-expressions. Similarly, I have argued that dissidents and activists during the uprisings have mobilized and operationalized an understanding of the collective past and a desire for a collective future that has its roots in the Arab Nahda. The Nahda temporal binary between a past to be discarded and a promised future has been retained in symbols and tropes that invoke history at large or particular collective memories. Accordingly, I have investigated controversies that altered and radicalized the ways collective past narratives are understood.

One political and militant organization that took advantage of this temporal binary is the Islamic State (IS) organization. The IS's communication strategy rests on claiming religious and historic authenticity and on concealing the novelty of the ways it applies interpretations of Islamic texts in the 21st century. It claims to be a continuation of

Islamic rule in the 7th century to conceal its much recent origins traced to jihadi groups fighting the US army in Iraq following the 2003 invasion. The caliphate, and the Islamic decrees that were believed to have been practiced in the 7th century, represent the originary inspiration for the communicative and rhetorical strategies of the militant movement. The organization's claim to represent a direct continuation of the caliphate is taken literally. Its pursuit of the discursive temporal erasure of what it considers to be the centuries-long deviance in the path of Islam goes hand in hand with its claim that it represents a true uncorrupted Islam through its allegedly faithful interpretations of religious texts. And this framework informs IS's political and military strategy, its efforts to attract recruits, the implementation of its laws, and the ways that it communicates its goals.

In fact, the rise of IS and its claims of Islamic authenticity has shaken the Arab world politically and culturally. Intellectuals and commentators debated what the emergence of a brutal organization able to recruit thousands of Arabs from Morocco to Iraq means for the Arab and Islamic political community and its historic trajectory. Reactions to IS ranged from rage against a history of Western intervention in the region, to a narrative of complete self-blame. Much of the debate also focused on the question of whether IS actually represents an original Islam or in fact is entirely based on false and misleading interpretations of religion. Is the organization "all about Islam, or about geopolitics" as Ghazal and Sadiki (2016) ask in a piece that argues the both camps in the debate evoke orientalism and sideline voices from the Middle East. They point to a vibrant debate in Arab media and in intellectual circles about the IS phenomenon.

Despite significant differences, many intellectual Arab reactions seemed to agree that the story of IS is a chapter in "our" failure— that is the failure of the collective Arab and Islamic community, culture, and civilization to achieve progress. Syrian author Rosa Yaseen Hasan (2015) argues that IS relies on strategic interpretations not only of religious texts but also of Arab-Islamic history, which needs be historicized rather than consecrated. The IS "is a product of our history and a history of false and narrow-minded interpretations of history… (IS) is the condensation of all the dark aspects in our history," she argues. Some took a harsher stance in self-blame. Kuwaiti former minister and influential commentator Saad bin Tafla Al-Ajami wrote an article entitled "We are all ISIS." He wrote that IS "has been educated in our schools, it has prayed in our mosques, consumed our media, watched our satellite channels, listened to our sermons, read our books, got influenced by our religious figures, followed our fatwas… (IS) is the undoubtable proof that we shall remain in our position and will never catch up with advanced nations." Similarly, Tunisian author Al-Taher Amin evocatively declared that IS is "the miserable outcome of the suffocating environment that our nightmarish backwardness has led us to since the Saljuks took over power in the 11th century"— in reference to the Turkic-Persian Empire that conquered the region and is considered to have stifled Arab culture. For Al-Amin then, that "we" has remained intact for ten centuries as it struggled to find a historical voice. Thus, similar to the way many Arab activists and commentators communicated the Arab uprisings in terms of what they mean for the historic path of the Arab body politic, the rise of IS was treated similarly although as a very grim rather than hopeful historic turn.

Whether the discussion is about the Arab uprisings or the rise of IS, the emplottment of the popular narrative of Arab history has been a rise-and-fall narrative (See Zerubavel, 2003). Since the Nahda, Arab cultural and political discourses reproduced hopes and promises for an "awakening" of the Arab collective— based on a historiography that saw Arab decline when the region was ruled by the Ottoman Empire (roughly from the 16th to the 19th centuries). Similarly, after the Nahda, the anticolonial struggle was communicated as a fight for a collective ascent, which had been averted by colonial subjugation. Promises for a new historic start that would resurrect past glories were made by postcolonial rulers. With this background, during the 2011 Arab uprisings, activists and dissidents have articulated renewed hopes for a return to a history of ascent through reclaiming symbols and tropes of Arab modernity and nationalisms. This relation to the past is not unique to the Arabs. But it can be explained by the Arab world's postcolonial history and authoritarian legacy, both of which are implicated in power relations with the West whether through colonialism, foreign intervention, or the flows of international capital.

The post-2011 Arab mnemonic battles then are the public struggles over the meanings of the past since the uprisings began. The notion of a battle obviously implies that there is a war. However, there can be no winner in mnemonic battles. In 2015, for example, Egypt's new president, former army chief Abd-al-Fattah Al-Sisi, seems to have won the battle against his Muslim Brotherhood rivals. However, if the Arab uprisings have taught us anything, it is that no matter how tight a ruling regime's grip on power is, and regardless of how much policing of public discourse it engages in, counter memories,

identities and aspirations await the political opportunity to find expression. The struggles over memory in all societies represent a continuous crisis that plays out in different ways. Koselleck (1959/ 1988) has explained how the Enlightenment philosophy of history, with its persistent promises of a better future, had sought to disguise the moral crisis within the political struggles of 18th century Europe. Both that philosophy of history that promises utopian futures and the notion of a moral crisis in politics are still with us today. And different societies struggle to make sense of collective communities' journeys through history in the past, present, and future. In the contemporary Arab world, with its legacies of colonialism and authoritarianism, the challenges of stabilizing temporal narratives are immense. Since the 19th century, the notion of Arab backwardness has been a heavy burden that weighed on the present and on the imagination of a better future. As Laroui (1976) suggests, the more a society senses that it lags behind other societies, the more are the goals of revolution diversified and deepened… the more a revolution must be all embracing, the more distant and improbable it seems; such indeed is the situation of the Arab revolutionary" (p. 175). In 2011, millions of Arabs became revolutionaries. And in 2015, the region has been living through the consequences of making history and acting upon historic dreams. After decades of authoritarian rule, and authoritarian assault on society's cohesion, the challenges are undeniably immense.

I will conclude with the verses of a poem that invokes history. The poem was written as part of a poetry collection published in the early 1970s by renowned Lebanese poet Sa'id Aql (1912-2014). It says: "The east is thirsty. O Damascus (Arabic: Sham), pour and nourish. Fill the glass to the brink. Your people are history. Their name is the

medal that decorates eternity." These poetic verses, also sung by the Lebanese diva Fairouz, capture the tensions that I have been analyzing iterations of in this dissertation. They express an emotive density of belonging to historic spaces and thinly conceal the discordances in these spaces and times of belonging. Firstly, the very word "Sham" embodies multiple layers of imagined spaces of belonging. "Sham" is the colloquial name for the city of Damascus. It is also a reference to the whole of the Levant (in Arabic bilad al-sham), which usually signifies the east Mediterranean, mainly contemporary Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel/ Palestine. In the poem's verses, the space and object of pride, Sham, can be simultaneously interpreted to signify the city of Damascus, Syria as a whole, or the Levant in general. The poem exalts the civilizational contribution of Sham and its ability to culturally nourish the imagined geography of the east. The people of Sham embody history, it says. Indeed, it is difficult not to invoke history when discussing Damascus or the Levant. The city is believed to be the oldest continuously inhabited capital on earth. And Syria's fabric of geography is dotted by remnants of successive layers of history. The same goes to other Middle Eastern counties. Egypt is the "mother of the world" as per the popular Arabic expression. Iraq, Lebanon, and Israel/ Palestine also can only be understood and experienced through their histories that span that scope and breadth of human civilization. Furthermore, in the poem, "the people" represent the same community projected onto the past, present, and future. The notion of "the people" is defined by an eternal collective bond.

I chose to conclude with this the poem because in only a couple of verses, it displays the tensions I have been discussing in contemporary Arab popular expressions

and communicative practices, which are searching simultaneously for collective cohesion, for narratives of temporal ascent and development, for defined spaces of belonging, and for memories that invoke a golden age. These quests, I have been arguing, have punctuated public discourse since the 2011 Arab uprisings. Armed with symbols, tropes and metaphors about history, Arab activists and commentators during the Arab uprisings sought to influence present and future politics. However, in resorting to the language, symbolism, and imagery of history, the stakes of the Arab uprisings have been amplified. These uprisings have surely changed the history of the region and its people.

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