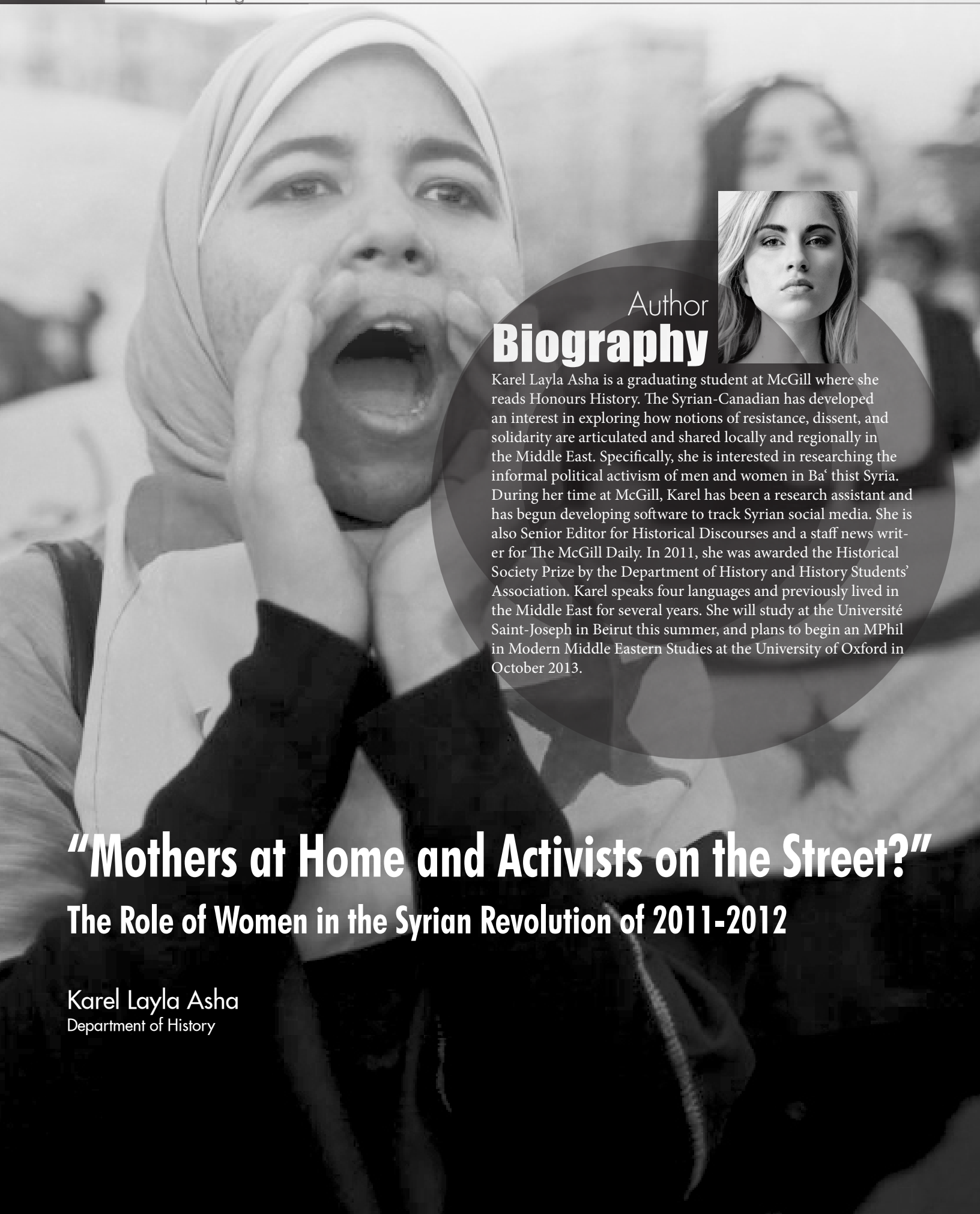

Author Biography

Karel Layla Asha is a graduating student at McGill where she reads Honours History. The Syrian-Canadian has developed an interest in exploring how notions of resistance, dissent, and solidarity are articulated and shared locally and regionally in the Middle East. Specifically, she is interested in researching the informal political activism of men and women in Ba' thist Syria. During her time at McGill, Karel has been a research assistant and has begun developing software to track Syrian social media. She is also Senior Editor for Historical Discourses and a staff news writer for The McGill Daily. In 2011, she was awarded the Historical Society Prize by the Department of History and History Students' Association. Karel speaks four languages and previously lived in the Middle East for several years. She will study at the Université Saint-Joseph in Beirut this summer, and plans to begin an MPhil in Modern Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Oxford in October 2013.

"Mothers at Home and Activists on the Street?"

The Role of Women in the Syrian Revolution of 2011-2012

Karel Layla Asha
Department of History

Abstract

Beginning in December 2010, the Arab Revolutions have swept the Middle East and North Africa with demands for freedom, dignity, and justice. They have highlighted the failure of corrupt and autocratic regimes in establishing legitimacy. Millions of participants have vocalized a renewed demand for political change and have proven wrong academic theories of "authoritarian stability" in the region.

Some regimes responded by acquiescing or promising elections. In Syria, the Ba'th regime has responded with brute force, escalating what began as peaceful demonstrations to a two-year military conflict. In February 2013, the U.N. estimated there were at least 70,000 dead and over 1 million refugees.

When constructing narratives of these revolutions, journalists, historians, and political scientists often marginalize the role of women play in making the social movements successful. This has especially been the case in Syria where the militarization of the conflict has put aside the role of women and children in media activism and non-violent protests which continue to this day. This paper argues that women and gender are central to the Syrian Revolution, drawing on case studies of female activists, particularly Suhair Atassi, and their use of social media as a tool to narrate the revolution on their own terms.

Introduction

Gender is a crucial analytical category when studying the Syrian Revolution, ongoing since the winter of 2011. This is because women have had a distinctive gendered experience as activists in the revolution and as victims of the regime's repression. Active in organising protests, heading coordinating committees, providing humanitarian aid, going on undercover missions, and supporting male family members when they join armed combatant forces, women have been systematically targeted by pro-government forces for rape and other forms of sexual violence. These are not distinct or mutually exclusive experiences for different women. Rather, the roles of activist and of potential victim of sexual violence coexist as part of a gendered experience of revolution. Furthermore, female activists have to a remarkable extent reconciled tensions between their roles as mothers, wives, daughters and revolutionaries. Most of the female activists discussed in this paper have diligently been reaffirming and renegotiating the roles of women and children in the revolution,

and are consciously attempting to inscribe them as key protagonists in its evolution in their social media posts or interviews with Western and Arab media and institutions. This is clear in the repeated emphasis on these actors, and by their tendency to situate the beginning of the revolution with women's and children's protests. In doing this, they are consciously participating in the discourse and history of the revolution by providing a narrative in which women are complex protagonists rather than caricatured onlookers.

Although this paper relies extensively on the use of social media by these activists, here is it considered a tool of revolution and not a cause. Syrians did not demonstrate en masse because Facebook told them to. The revolution would have happened without social media. Pamphlets, word of mouth, and radio broadcasts, among other tools, have helped spread revolution in the region in the past and have also been used in the Syrian Revolution of 2011-2012. One would not argue that the ability to produce pamphlets causes revolution, and one ought not argue that the ability to tweet does either. Revolutions have spread rapidly before the advent of social media in the Middle East and elsewhere. Examples include the First Intifada in Palestine and the revolutions of 1989 in East-Central Europe. One should also not overestimate the percentage of the Syrian population that has regular access to the internet outside of middle and upper class urban neighbourhoods. Given that this has been a a "revolution of the peripheries," popular mainly among those who were disadvantaged economically by the Bashar al-Assad reforms, this is an important point to make. Facebook was banned in Syria until the winter of 2011, but many young people had previously accessed it through a Virtual Private Network (VPN). I do not argue that there is a difference between "cyber" activism and activism on the ground in Syria. Publishing dissenting material on Facebook could be as dangerous for the activist as demonstrating in the street. Social media was sometimes used because it facilitated the organisation of protests, but mainly it was used as a media platform that bypassed official media networks. Notably, it allowed Syrians to share what has happening inside the country with the Syrian diaspora and the rest of the world without an intermediary filter. This is where the importance of social media lies, rather than in causing the revolution.

I will begin by contextualising the role of women in the Syrian Revolution and providing a short history of Syrian women's activism in the twentieth century. Then, I will discuss the state of civil society and dissidence under the Ba' th between 1972 and 2012. The next section of the paper outlines the structure of the Ba' th Party, followed by a discussion of the Party's role in education. The main focus of the paper begins with a discussion of women's rights under the Ba' th Party and the Emergency Law, in place from 1963 to 2011. I argue that the Ba' th Party used the term "revolution" to legitimise its rule and that this made it crucial for activists to re-appropriate it. Following this, I will present the main opposition groups in the Syrian Revolution and their operational methods. I will then recount the perspectives of a few expatriate and local Syrian female activists on the role of women in the Syrian Revolution. Central to this paper is my analysis of Suhair Atassi's experience. She is an eminent Syrian human rights activist who was briefly imprisoned by the regime in March 2011, and later became coordinator for the Syrian Revolution General Commission and vice-president of the Syrian National Coalition. My analysis is based on interviews she gave to Western and Arab media, and on her social media contributions. In this paper, the voices of Syrians revolutionaries are represented in order to provide an *emic* perspective on the role of gender in the revolution, rather than impose external interpretations.

Female Activism in Syria

To contextualise their role as dissidents in the Syrian Revolution, I will briefly discuss the women's suffrage movement, the participation of women in civil society, and the role of women in the Syrian quest for independence in the twentieth century. From 1900 onwards, urban women in Syria were active in establishing literary salons and charities addressing reform, education and poverty. This marked the start of women's involvement in Syrian civil society. These institutions acted as a space for dialogue among women and were also a vehicle for them to participate in an era of burgeoning civil discourse. Dozens of women's societies were established with varied objectives,

including: advancing the cause of the Arab women by encouraging them to participate in intellectual and public life, helping the poor, promoting the education of women, and inspiring artistic development.[1] The Society of Graduates of Teachers Colleges embarked upon its project of providing women with both traditional and vocational education in 1928. The Society of Arab Women, founded in 1955, had chapters providing women with healthcare and education located in all the Syrian governorates. Multiple women's organisations provided humanitarian aid during the Second World War.[2]

Importantly, Syrian women were crucial participants in the struggle for independence from French colonialism. They smuggled weapons and supplies, led demonstrations and even fought on the battlefield. One even consolidated a leadership position: Nazek al-Aabed, a combatant in the Maysaloon battle of 1920 between Syrian and French forces near Damascus, was awarded the rank of military captain.[3]

Although other women's societies organised demonstrations advocating women's suffrage in 1929 and 1942, it was not until 1953 that women finally obtained the right to vote. The United Arab Republic (1958-1961) saw the first female member of parliament. However the two women who sat in parliament during the UAR period, Jihan Al Mosli and Widad Haroun, were appointed by higher authority rather than elected by the people.[4]

The Ba' th Party

The Ba' th regime maintains its hold on power in Syria via three main structures: the Party, the military-police, and the bureaucracy.[5] The Ba' th Party operates by means of a hierarchy of cells that serves to limit the number of people with access to information. As such, members of one cell of the Ba' th Party do not necessarily know the members of another and communication between cells is vertical rather than lateral.[6] These cells are integrated into schools, workplaces, public institutions, villages and neighbourhoods. Within the party apparatus, the Regional Command is the committee with the most power. Its members are top-ranking military commanders, leading cabinet ministers and the most important members of the bureaucracy. They are elected at general assemblies of all voting members of the Party. Those elected then appoint the leaders for the lower branches of the Party.[7] The Party is, in theory, responsible for approving policies that bring together elite objectives and the public will. In that sense, it must create popular support for these policies.[8] To maintain its grasp on power and some degree of legitimacy, which has allowed it to survive until quite recently, the regime uses the Party apparatus to "recruit 'popular' elements from society to replenish the government elite."[9]

The cells are integrated into all spheres of public life. They reflect the means by which the Party recruits future leaders from rural areas to replenish the ranks of its elite. Until now, the army has been the most important arbiter in establishing the succession to the national elite. However, they have always chosen among active members of the Party. They select among those who have military, bureaucratic, academic and even professional careers.[10]

Two years after the Ba' th Revolution in 1963, the Revolutionary National Assembly held its first parliamentary meeting in which it appointed eight women and eighty-seven men to the National Assembly. This was later expanded to twelve women out of 134 members. However, when the February 23 movement seized power during a period of internal instability in Ba' th Party, the Assembly was prorogued. Finally, when Hafez al-Assad took power in 1970, he instituted the Correctional Movement and established a new permanent Constitution, which he enacted three years later.[11]

Emergency Law

Under the Emergency Law, which had been in effect since 1963 and was only nominally lifted to appease protestors on April 21, 2011, most constitutional rights were suspended. The Emergency Law was justified by the regime on the basis of the conflict with Israel over the Golan Heights and threats of related "terrorism." While the Law was nominally lifted in April 2011, the regime continued to use force against civilians and imprison citizens without charge.[12] The Syrian security apparatus has four main branches: Air Force Intelligence, Military

Intelligence, the Political Security Directorate (PSD)—which operates under the Ministry of the Interior (MOI)—and the General Security Directorate (GSD)—which operates autonomously. The four organisations act independently of each other and largely outside of the rule of law, targeting internal dissent and monitoring individual citizens, while the Ministry of the Interior remains in charge of the four police branches (emergency police, traffic police, neighbourhood police, and riot police).[13] They effectively enjoy legal impunity: the General Command of the Army and Armed Forces—in this case, the President—is the only person who can have a military officer, member of the internal security forces, or customs police officer arrested. President Bashar al-Assad enacted this law himself in 2008.[14]

Even prior to the 2011-2012 uprisings, political prisoners were regularly held without trial and without informing their relatives.[15] Although the Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and the press, under the Emergency Law these were severely restricted. An example of this is the case of a 19-year-old female blogger from Homs, Tal al-Mallouhi, who was arrested and detained incommunicado and charged with espionage in 2009. The Emergency law also forbids distributing "false information that opposes the goals of the revolution."[16] In this light, the Syrian Revolution of 2011-2012 is perceived by the regime as counterrevolutionary. This is why it is so important for activists to re-appropriate the term "revolution" in their discourse. [17]

Freedom of assembly is also restricted by the Emergency Law, which considers any assembly of more than seven people protesting a decision taken by public authorities, or of more than twenty people if they "appear in a way that can threaten general quiet," to be a riot. Article 288 also establishes that any assembly of a "political or organisation or international group without the permission of government" constitutes a riot. [18]

Civil Society and Resistance under the Ba' th

Under the Ba' th, civil society could be described as a "wasteland." An exception is the Damascus Spring, which took place when President Bashar al-Assad came to power replacing his father Hafez. Bashar al-Assad briefly allowed for looser application of the censorship and freedom of assembly regulations. The Damascus Spring was the name given by Western observers. The movement, which "started hours after [Hafez al-Assad's] death"[19] in June 2000 and ended in the autumn of 2001, was described at the time by local participants as the Civil Society Movement (*harakat al-mujtama' al-madanī*). One of the most influential dissident manifestos released by the movement was the *Statement of 99* published in September 2000 in the London-based Arabic newspaper *al-Hayat*. The main demand was that political reforms should accompany Bashar al-Assad's economic reforms, which had offered a greater role to the private sector. The statement called for "an end to the State of Emergency and martial law in effect since 1963," the release of political prisoners, and the "establishment of a state of law; the granting of public freedom; the recognition of political and intellectual pluralism, freedom of assembly, the press and expression," and the end of censorship. [20] The authors, who were mostly well-known writers, intellectuals, and professionals with no particular history of resistance against the regime, carefully avoided making any clear demand for a multiparty political system or for the Ba' th party to lose its special position in Syrian politics.[21] It also forbore from attacking the Assad family or questioning Bashar al-Assad's effective inheritance of power. *Statement 99* can thus be described as a self-limiting manifesto. Bashar al-Assad even met some of the intellectuals' demands, for example by releasing 600 political prisoners on November 15, 2000.

Hundreds of informal discussion groups and organisations formed during these months in Damascus, several under the banner of "Committees for the Revival of Civil Society in Syria" (*al-mujtama' al-madani fi Suriya)*. The meetings usually took place in private homes.[22] During these months, the government refused to officially recognise those forums which were overtly dissident and instead turned a blind eye to their existence. More radical groups, who did not believe in the model of gradual reform, had begun speaking up in 2000. One thousand Syrian intellectuals signed the *Statement of 1000,* published in January 2001 as a response to the unambitious *Statement of 99.* This manifesto explicitly

asked for the end of one-party rule, the reintroduction of multiparty democracy and an independent judiciary, the end of legal discrimination against women, and the lifting of censorship laws and restrictions on the freedom of association. The intellectuals argued that "civil society constitutes the very substance of the modern state, while the state is civil society's political expression." The statement made a direct parallel to the end of Soviet Communism, which had been a model for Ba' thist Syria, as proof of the "consequences of coups against political democracy in the name of socialism."[23] Regime hardliners, with Bashar's support, used the *Statement of 1,000* as a justification to crack down on the Civil Society Movement as a whole. Discussion forums and meetings were shut down by the regime, and independent newspapers that had emerged in the previous year were closed.[24] By the autumn, the regime had moved to arrest prominent figures in the various organisations.[25]

In this historical context of near total repression of civil society — here defined as engagement in public affairs independently of the state and the party[26] —civil society ought to be studied through the lens of *dissent*. Dissent is a specific form of resistance. Resistance, as a broader political category, can include missing work, avoiding Party-sponsored events, or visiting a banned website, whereas dissent and specifically open dissent, on the other hand, is a more direct or active form of resistance.[27] Dissent under the Ba' th encompasses, among other examples, the production and distribution of visual and written materials, public protests and the generation of movements and actions. Participating in civil society, defined as groups outside the control of the party-state, [28] is thus itself an act of resistance in the form of dissent. Dissent is what the female activists I discuss later are engaging in.

Women's Rights Under the Ba' th

External observers sometimes raise the issue of women potentially losing rights they have enjoyed under the Ba' th regime if the regime falls. In this context, it is important to clarify that although the Constitution guarantees equality between men and women, in practice there is systematic discrimination towards women entrenched in family, criminal and citizenship law. Article 45 of the Syrian Constitution[29] does indeed state that:

> The state guarantees women all opportunities enabling them to fully and effectively participate in the political, social, cultural, and economic life. The state removes the restrictions that prevent women's development and participation in building the socialist Arab society. [30]

However, Syrian citizenship is only passed on by the father to his offspring. Thus, a Syrian woman married to a non-citizen cannot give her children citizenship. The Penal Code furthermore allows for less harsh jail sentences for murders that qualify as 'honour killings'. Finally, family law privileges male guardianship. A woman must have the permission of a male guardian to be married, or to travel (unless the marriage contract eliminates this requirement), and if she becomes a widow the father's family obtains financial rights over the children, though not necessarily guardianship.[31]

These are discriminatory practices entrenched in the law that reveal women's equality in Syria to be myth rather than reality. The Syrian Penal Code even states that:

> Rape is considered to occur when a man forces a woman who is not his wife to have intercourse. If there is a contracted marriage between the man who commits rape, sexual abuse, kidnapping, [or] sexual harassment and the victim, then there is no charge and the punishment is stopped. If the individual who commits the crime agrees to marry the victim, he faces no punishment. [32]

There is extremely strong social stigmatisation for rape victims. The 2010 Human Rights Report on Syria states that: "the majority of domestic violence and sexual assault cases went unreported; victims have traditionally been reluctant to seek assistance outside the family." They report that "when some abused women tried to file a police report, the police did not respond to their claims" and that there were even incidents at

police stations of "sexual harassment, verbal abuse, hair pulling, and slapping by police officers when attempting to file police reports."[33]

A telling example of this stigma was the experience of a young Syrian female activist arrested during a demonstration in March 2012. She was beaten, interrogated and raped in prison. She describes being raped as "the worst nightmare a young girl can undergo."[34] When she was released, she experienced the harsh judgement of fellow protestors who had assumed she had been raped and inspected her for signs of assault: they had "completely forgotten that she was arrested for the same noble cause."[35] To preserve her anonymity, the city and name of the activist are not provided by the Al-Jazeera article.

Revolution as a Trope in Modern Syria

For activists, the term *thawra (*revolution) has served a legitimising function as a linguistic trope. The first Syrian revolt against the French mandate in 1919 was considered as a revolution, and the Great Syrian Revolt against the French in 1925-1927 was also named a revolution. Using the word again in 2011 allows the activists to borrow some of the legitimacy of past revolutionaries. They are re-appropriating the term that the Ba' th used in order to gain legitimacy of their own in the 1960s and 1970s. What is labelled the 1963 Coup d'État in most English language scholarship is known as the "8th of March Revolution" (*thawrat al-thāmin min Azār*), even though, as Raymond Hinnebusch argues, this took on the character of a "revolution from above" through land reform and nationalisations.[36] The anniversary of the 1963 Ba' thist takeover is celebrated on March 8 every year as the "Festival of Revolution and Independence." The regime would usually announce improvements to workers' labour conditions or wage increases on this day, in an attempt to associate the anniversary of the revolution with increased standards of living in the popular consciousness.[37] Furthermore, the 1970-1971 Hafez al-Assad takeover is called the corrective revolution *(al-thawrat al-tashīhiyya*). The "correction" from the Ba' thist perspective was to "realise for our people the most marvellous patriotic unity, the most solid internal front and the greatest victories."[38] The Ba' thist regime under Hafez al-Assad also emphasised the expressions "our masses" (*jamāhīrunā*) and "the masses our people" *(jamāhīrunā sha' banā*) in its official communications, state television, and newspapers. A typical phrase used in the context of the March 8 Festival was: "Our masses continue their celebrations marking the anniversary of the sublime March Revolution." The use of the words "our" and "masses" was intended to convey the notion that the revolution was popular and that the Ba' th leadership represented the mass of the people, although it in fact emerged from the minority Alawite community.[39]

The significance of the re-appropriation of the term revolution was recognised by the government when the recent uprisings first broke out. The government banned certain keywords such as "demonstration" and "revolution" from state television, which shows that the regime had lost ownership of the term "revolution." "When we used the word 'conspiracy,' we were referring to the conspiracy against the regime and against Syria; we used to refer to demonstrators as terrorists or armed gangs or insurgents," says Ola Abbas, a defecting TV host who told CNN about the rules she had to follow as a presenter on state television.[40]

Organising the Revolution

The structure of the opposition inside Syria during the Revolution of 2011-2012 (so far) is complex. Among the different organisations, two of the most important national ones are the Syrian Revolution General Commission (SRGC) and the Syrian Revolution Coordinators Union (SRCU). The SCRU has activities on the ground in Syria, and in London with the Syrian Network for Human Rights.[41] The SRGC was established in August 2011 as a coalition of forty opposition groups in Syria. Its headquarters are in Istanbul, Turkey. They mainly monitor and report the uprisings, defend human rights, and publish press statements.[42] Both groups are very active on Facebook and Twitter, rather than on traditional media networks or via official websites.

There are also local coordination committees which principally report to the Syrian Revolution Coordinators Union. The local coordination

committees emerged slowly and organically from local needs. Organisers of early demonstrations in Damascus in March 2011 moved their meetings into mosques in response to rapid repression from the regime. The mosques protected the protestors from the regime's security forces. By early May 2011 the growing numbers of people coming out to demonstrate transformed the informal protests into more organised coordination committees. Each committee would receive a task, for example: media, organisation, medicine or politics. On Fridays, demonstrations would follow the prayers and meetings at the mosque. Each Friday would be given a different rallying name and the demonstrations would occur every week, at least during the early stages of the revolution.[43]

This stage of early violent repression by the regime is important because it created a revolutionary coalition, bridging the goals of the urban intellectuals and the rural masses.[44] The people who joined the revolution at its beginning were for the most part middle-class intellectuals who had suffered from political repression and those who had suffered economically under Bashar al-Assad's neoliberal reforms. They essentially reactivated the networks they had built during the Damascus Spring of 2000-2001. Through crony capitalism and neoliberal reforms starting in 2000, the regime had abandoned the rural and suburban masses who had formed the basis of its support. It had also gone back on its attempt to combine economic reforms with political reforms in the repression of the Damascus Spring and subsequent normalisation policies.[45] The crony capitalists of Aleppo and Damascus remained among the regime's strongest supporters when the revolution broke out. Much of the middle class of these cities initially preferred to see reform—which they still believed Bashar al-Assad could carry out—rather than a revolution, fearing the loss of their "secular modern lifestyle." Those who had benefited from the increase in investment and tourism of the past decade, which were concentrated in those cities, were less likely to oppose the regime. Urban government employees and minorities were also less likely to oppose the government. Nor was there any concern about Alawites and Christians: their religious rights were left intact under Bashar al-Assad, who had also curtailed the role of Islam in the public sphere. These minorities could be rallied by the government by harnessing their apprehension towards Salafi Islam. The suburbs of Aleppo and Damascus and rural regions however did erupt. This is why the uprising has been described as the "revolution of the countryside and the peripheries."[46] Meanwhile, the regime presented itself as the "protector of order" and exploited citizens' fear of civil war in order to defend their repression of protestors.[47]

The Syrian National Council (SNC) was formed as an attempt to unify opposition groups and serve as a "political umbrella for the Syrian Revolution in the international arena."[48] The group was founded in August 2011 as the "National Transition Council," but was renamed the following month. For most of 2011, the SNC did not seek to be recognised as a government in exile as its members were not elected by the people, but instead aimed to "deliver the message of the Syrian people in the field of international diplomacy, with the aim of overthrowing the regime, its figureheads, and the pillars upon which it stands to establish a democratic, multi-party, and civil state."[49] The council initially opposed foreign military intervention, and advocated the overthrow of the regime, national independence and sovereignty, and national unity among minority groups. It initially favoured non-violent tactics. This paper does not focus on the SNC because it is a diplomatic initiative rather than an organiser on the ground.

An interview that aired on National Public Radio (NPR) in the U.S., featuring a Syrian Revolution Coordinators Union leader in Qabon, gives valuable insight into their operations. The interview, which took place on July 7, 2011, was held in Qabon, Syria, a suburb five kilometres from the centre of Damascus. The activist interviewed, a twenty-nine-year-old male with a university degree in English literature, was the leader of the SRCU in Qabon. His parents were bureaucrats and he had spent his entire life in Qabon. He argues in the interview that the revolution started in Qabon, and in the rest of Syria, on March 18, 2012. He explains that the SCRU is organised around Facebook groups. Tasks are divided among individuals who sort videos, news, technical help, and who coordinate protests. At the time of the interview, five people managed the Facebook page

and other online activities, while 150 were organising protests in the city. Facebook and other social media websites are crucial to his work because activists "can't move around at all in the streets, as the security forces are everywhere." "It is very difficult to trust anyone," he says. He explains that the "internet allows us contact with all the other coordinators around Syria, like in Hamah and Homs for example." He also clarifies that:

> No one from the SRCU is going to be a political leader after this. We are organising protests, and are trying to make them understand what might happen next, but no one from the union wants to work in politics. The average person here, to be honest, has no idea what will happen after a regime change. They hope things will be easier for them but they don't really know how. So that is our job in the SRCU, to educate people about what might happen, and warn them against violence. Maybe there could be violence; there could be sectarian war. But we are working everyday to make sure these things don't happen.

He makes it clear that his group's claim to legitimacy is neither religious; rather it is based on a claim to the power of the people.[50]

Women in the Syrian Revolution: an Expatriate Perspective

Farah al-Atassi, who is a writer and commentator based in Washington, has been involved in the revolution mostly through media activism as an expatriate. Previously, she had established the American Arab Communication & Translation Centre, the Arab Information and Resource Centre and Zenobia Lounge, a multicultural Middle Eastern café and bookshop in Washington D.C. She states that, based on her experience with the SRCU as an expatriate abroad, women are "at the forefront of the Syrian revolution" and that they are "paying the highest price in this revolution." She confirmed that more than 120 anti-government demonstrations in Syria have been led by women. Rather than asking their spouses and sons to stay home for safety reasons, they are encouraging them to go out and protest, which she sees as a significant and transformative form of support. She however is worried about the aftermath of the revolutions in other countries of the Arab Spring, where the transitional governments did not "adequately reward women for their efforts in the revolution." Farah argues that "this revolution is not about man and woman, not about Christian and Muslim, it's about regaining our citizenship" but that it would however "be useful to create 'a roadmap' for women's issues in a future Syrian constitution."[51]

Rasha Alahab, who was a founding member of both the Syrian Women for Syria and Syrian Expatriates for Democracy, and an attorney for the Syrian National Council, contends that "Syrian women are equal to their male counterparts in the Syrian revolution in every way." She however fears that she may lose some of this equality when the revolution is completed, although she doesn't "have many rights to lose" in the first place. She says women make a distinction between their roles in the home and outside the home and that there is little tension between activism and the gendered expectations of womanhood. "We are mothers at home and activists on the street," she explains.[52]

Rafif Jouejati is the U.S.-based English-language spokesperson for the Local Coordination Committees in Syria, the National Consensus Movement, and Activists for a Free Syria. She also writes, translates and edits press releases for the SNC. She explains that women actively participate in managing revolutionary coordinating committees and disseminating information on the internet and offline. An example of offline dissidence women that organise consists in leaving "gift-wrapped revolutionary slogans" on people's doorsteps at night. Jouejati emphasises that, although "women have faced the same tanks and live ammunition as the men," post-Assad Syria will have a different gender demographic because "the male population has experienced a higher death toll and disproportionate level of incarceration." And so she predicts "women will need to fill a larger share of the workforce and be the breadwinners of family unit environments" and that they will be "the leaders in rebuilding Syria." However, she explains that "rape has been used as a tool against our people" and suggests "more training and women's empowerment programs be made available." [53]

Female activists in Syria, according to Rajaa Altalli, a political activist for Syrian Christians for Democracy, have been able to benefit from less stringent searches at regime checkpoints. They have thus been able to conceal cameras in their clothing and upload videos that provide evidence for the regime's crimes. Altalli echoes Alalhab in stating that "throughout the revolution, women have been standing equally next to men asking for freedom." They have been "providing humanitarian aid, collecting medical and technical supplies, providing care to the wounded, building support for the cause and handling media and information needs." Contrary to the anxieties some other women have voiced, Altalli believes that "in our new, free and democratic Syria discrimination against women would not be a problem." [54]

Suhair Atassi: An Imprisoned and Exiled Activist

Suhair Atassi is a Syrian human rights activist, born in Damascus in 1971. She participated in founding the Jamal al-Atassi Forum for Democratic Dialogue, the Syrian Revolution General Commission (SRGC), and the Syrian Revolutionary Coordinators Union (SRCU).[55] She was also a member of the National Council of the Damascus Declaration for Democratic Change in 2005. Suhair founded the Jamal al-Atassi Forum, named in memory of her father, during the Damascus Spring.[56] The Jamal al-Atassi Forum and the Damascus Declaration of October 2005 were initiatives demanding reform rather than revolution in Syria. The main demand in both projects was the lifting of the Emergency Law.[57]

Suhair Atassi is a divorced and single mother. She organised sit-ins and small demonstrations in Damascus in January, February and March 2011, before the nationwide uprising took off.[58] At one silent protest on March 16, 2011, she raised a poster depicting a political prisoner and the secret police dragged her away, pulling on her hair, and charged her with "sowing division" among the people. In an interview given in April 2011, she recounted:

> It was surreal. I was dragged for what felt like the length of two streets. The apparatchiks looked at me as if I was not their compatriot. They kept shouting that I was an Israeli spy. […] As I stood bruised in front of the judge at the Palace of Justice, I thought that the only progress the Syrian regime was making was in making up absurd charges.[59]

She was not the only woman arrested that day: among the forty activists arrested, nine were female and they were sent to a women's prison. Suhair explains that the day before her release on April 3, 2011, she was transferred to a security branch where she was "held incommunicado to exert psychological pressure."[60] She went on a hunger strike as a form of protest until her release.

Suhair Atassi then went into hiding for seven months. She coordinated revolutionary opposition groups during this time, uploading and classifying videos that demonstrators had filmed on the streets, for example. For her, the media played an important role in protecting civilians because sometimes security forces would stop firing on protestors when she and other activists reported on it.[61] On July 16, 2011, she spoke to *Asharq al-Awsat* newspaper about the nature of the uprising:

> It's a revolution... triggered by the Syrian people seeking to stand up and say that they are citizens and not subjects, and that Syria belongs to all its citizens and not just the Assad family. This is a revolution of the youth who are demanding freedom and are being confronted with violence and murder... Today Syria is witnessing a battle for freedom by unarmed civilians urging the ouster of a regime that has utilised methods of brutal and inhumane suppression. They have brutally attacked and killed the protesters whilst the demonstrators have nothing but their words to defend them.[62]

She also explained to the newspaper that it was not the early dissenters such as herself, or formal political opposition groups, who had created the revolution. Rather, it was the youth:

> We have been subjected to suppression and murder for merely calling for freedom, democracy, general freedoms, the release of all prisoners of conscience, an end to the state of emergency, and the return of all political exiles. At the time, we said that any suppression would cause the volcano to erupt... we knew that we were working slowly but surely toward freedom, but we didn't dream of a revolution like this breaking out. It was the Syrian youth who made this dream a reality[…]The revolution will produce a viable alternative capable of governing Syria in the future, and everybody must realise that the Syrian revolution has come out of nowhere to quickly become a substantive movement thanks to the awareness of our youth. Syria has been transformed from "the kingdom of silence" to a living country.[…]The revolutionaries alone represent the Syrian street.[63]

In November 2011, she left Syria "in secret, at the request of the revolutionaries." She specifies that she "didn't leave because of danger," but rather to bring the opposition "to a new stage, at a critical time." In Paris, she was very active in diffusing the message of Syrian revolutionaries on the ground via social and traditional media networks.[64]

As an activist, Suhair only employs social media to communicate news about developments in Syria, but also to express her personal anxieties and concerns. Suhair expresses the difficulties she is enduring in exile. Some selected updates from her Facebook account provide evidence for this. On January 26, 2012, Suhair published this Facebook status update in Arabic:

> Why attack those who left Syria!? Do you think those who left did so of their own will? #Syria There are those who left to preserve their lives. And that is understood. And there are others who left to preserve their families and this is legitimate. And there are those who left despite themselves, because they have been asked to carry out a specific role for the revolution. The latter's departure is considered a sacrifice because being an expatriate is one thousand times harder than disappearance. They took a risk in leaving and we have betrayed and ridiculed them for it enough.[65]

This status conveys her distress in reaction to the attacks she suffered for leaving Syria. She speaks for those, who, like herself, did not leave the country of their own free will. She sees this action as a sacrifice and wants to let her readership know that, for her, being in exile is much more difficult than hiding in Syria ever was.

Two weeks later, on January 30, 2012, Suhair wrote of the role that the youth of Syria are playing in the revolution. "Syria is being liberated by its young men and women, and her Free Army," she writes. She again speaks of her loneliness in exile: she was with the youth two months ago, but is now in distress being so far from them.[66] On February 3, she published a poem on Facebook about her suffering from afar in seeing what was happening to her home city, Homs.

> Homs...Al-Khaledīya[67]...my parents there...my father's spirit and all my being,
> Homs cries out all the consciousness left of the whole world #Syria
> So do al-Zabadānī[68], Hamāh, Idlib, Dar' ā, Al-Ghūa al-Sharkīya[69]
> Rīf Dimashq[70], all of Syria cries out for you.
> Where is humanity?
> Did it fall apart because of the Russian arms embargo?[71]

On April 10, 2012, she once more evoked her suffering in exile, stating that she used to communicate with soldiers, such as fighters, activists, and protestors, by Skype when she was in Syria. "I collaborated with them, the revolutionaries of the inside, in founding the Syrian Revolution Coordinators Union and the Syrian Revolution General Commission," she says. Suhair confirms in this update that she still communicated with soldiers and revolutionaries from abroad at that time. She claims that even those outside the country are real revolutionaries, and are paying a price for being abroad. "These soldiers may be anonymous, but they

are known to the free people inside Syria, they also are true revolutionaries," she writes. She concludes with "regards to you, who are free behind bars," evoking an immense Syrian prison in which the people themselves are fundamentally free.[72]

A few days later, on April 14, she wrote that "in documenting the revolution we will write a history, one written by free Syrians." This is an example of the importance that Syrian revolutionaries place on recording and sharing the revolution online. For them, by becoming journalists, they are being revolutionary because they are writing the history of the revolution. They are reinterpreting and revising the history imposed by the Baʿ th Party. Suhair writes that she has had enough of United Nations observers, and that she is only waiting for Assad to breach the United Nations mandated cease-fire. Contradictorily, she claims that the nature of the revolution will remain peaceful, but asks the "free world" to provide arms to the Free Syrian Army.[73] This places her in a different position from other opposition groups that only were asking for humanitarian help as opposed to arms. In the week of November 26, 2012, Suhair Atassi's Facebook profile had 11,000 "likes." Her number of "likes" peaked in the week of November 18, 2012, just after she became vice-president of the Syrian National Coalition.[74] According to public Facebook data, most of her readers are located in Damascus and are between twenty-five and thirty-four years old.

On November 15, 2012, *Al-Arabiya* aired an interview with Suhair Atassi for the political talk-show, "Studio Beirut." The presenter argued that "everyone considers that the Syrian revolution began with children in Darʿ ā,[75] but it really started with women in Damascus." The interviewer, Giselle Khoury,[76] suggested that the "women in Damascus" applied to Suhair. Suhair countered that it was both women and youth who were the primary motors of the revolution, but lamented the fact that "so far they have not been considered as real partners and participants" by the formal opposition. She also mentioned that no women were elected to the Syrian National Council in November 2012. According to her, it is not necessarily the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamists that hold this attitude towards women. Rather, it is "the classical mentality of the opposition" to see "women and youth as decorations only." In Suhair's experience, the liberals sometimes exclude women as well.[77]

Suhair cites the newly elected leader of the Syrian National Coalition, Sheikh Moaz al-Khatib, as an example of an Islamist who recognises the role of women in the revolution.

In his acceptance speech, al-Khatib systematically referred to "our young men and women" as the actors in the revolution, and said "I want to specifically salute the Syrian woman, the greatest woman on this earth, who made the human beings who have conquered iron and blood."[78] He also saluted the participation of children in the revolution. According to Suhair Atassi and Rima Fleihan, the official spokesperson for the Local Coordination Committees of Syria (LCCSyria), al-Khatib also called for a seventy percent representation of women in coalition initiatives.[79]

Suhair Atassi returned to Syria in October 2012. There, she was welcomed by members of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in Tal Abyad, Ar-Raqqah.[80] She told Khoury that she went to Tal Abyad of her own initiative. She met with the Salafis and with the Al-Nusra Front (*Jabhat al-Nusrah li-ahl ash-Shām)*.[81] "I never felt that I was a stranger to them when we were approaching them and not isolating them, we cannot isolate them; you see that these are the Syrians, these are our people," Suhair told the journalist. According to Suhair's personal observations, the percentage of foreign jihadis remains very small. The foreign jihadis told her and other Syrians that they would leave after the regime had been toppled. For Suhair, it was necessary to meet with these groups as a female spokesperson in the revolution:

> Our role as women, when we talk about women, our primary role is very much to get inside, not only to sit with the civilians and with the local councils and we must be with the brigades as well. We will not bear arms, but we will sit with them and be there with them.[82]

"The role of women in the revolution was major," Suhair clarified in her Studio Beirut interview.[83] "We must not

forget the spark that started the revolution only fifteen months ago, we must not forget the women of Baniyas who blocked the Baniyas highway to force the release of their men there."[84]

Suhair posted an apology about her statements in the interview on her Facebook page on November 18, 2012. She explains that she did not mean to undermine the importance of the children's protests in Dar' ā in the interview. She writes that "no individual or group or council or alliance can rewrite the alphabet of the revolution, [the alphabet] that the rebels have written themselves in each region of Syria."[85] This re-emphasises her view that the history of the revolution is being written by the Syrian revolutionaries, including the women and children, on the ground.

Women and the Free Syrian Army

The FSA was created by a group of defectors from the Syrian Army on July 29, 2011. In a YouTube video, these defectors, under the leadership of Colonel Riyad al Asa'd, declared in Arabic:

> Given our patriotic sense and our belonging to this people; because what this stage requires of decisive actions to stop this regime's massacres which cannot be bore anymore; and given that the army's mission is to protect this free unarmed people, we declared the formation of the Free Syrian Army.[86]

They also asked Syrian Army soldiers in this video to defect to form a national army "able to protect the revolution and all the components of the Syrian society with all its sects." By October 2011, 10,000 to 15,000 defectors would join the FSA. [87] This development was separate from the objectives of the initial dissenters, such as Suhair Atassi, and the peaceful demonstrations, and from diplomatic initiatives such as the SNC. While SNC initially wanted to preserve the peaceful character of the revolution, it agreed to back the FSA and attempted to coordinate actions with the FSA in November 2011.[88]

Zubaida al-Meeki was an Alawite general in the Syrian Army, who became the first female general to defect from the Syrian Army in October 2012.[89] She then became a coordinator in the FSA's *Jond Allah* battalion. "While al-Meeki did not participate in the fighting itself, she was very close to the frontline: her courageousness and dedication to the group were very positive for the morale of the soldiers," according to Abo Adnan, a Syrian filmmaker who is producing a documentary on the revolution. He says that he observed men in the FSA treat al-Meeki "like an older sister" and that they "respected her and obeyed her orders." Al-Meeki, however, is an exception. She told Al-Jazeera that it was "unusual for females to train males in Syria," and that there are "hundreds of females in the country's military but they mostly had administrative positions with little pay or benefits." In the Free Syrian Army, women generally only carry guns as a purely symbolic sign of support and solidarity, Omar, an activist in Homs, told Al-Jazeera. "Videos of women battalions or women fighters are sometimes meant to embarrass men who are sitting on their bums and not participating in the struggle," he continued.[90]

Raghda, a female activist from Deraa, told Al-Jazeera:

> We need to shake people, to show them that women can participate in the armed struggle that emerged in Syria. While I'm only a civilian activist, I'm still stigmatised as a loose woman because I travel a lot from one place to the other to deliver food and medicine. […] Bashar al-Assad is giving me a hard time, but so are my parents and the whole neighbourhood.[91]

These statements demonstrate that women participating in the armed revolution are exceptional, and that even women who participate in non-violent protest do struggle with gendered norms of expectations of their behaviour. However, from the examples discussed in this paper, it appears that in revolutionary times these norms become less rigid.

Conclusion

In closing, women's role in the Syrian revolution cannot be compartmentalised into that of either "victim" or "agent." Rather, women have been

dissidents alongside men from the start. Furthermore, they are often leaders of the coordinating revolutionary committees. However, women hold a distinctive gendered experience of the revolution. Women are more often raped, are more afraid of rape, and have different anxieties surrounding honour, motherhood, and family responsibility. Rather than join armed militias, for the most part, they coordinate committees, demonstrate peacefully in the street, and perform undercover missions, benefitting from their looser clothing. They are both more vulnerable because their gender is more often targeted by government forces for sexual violence, and sometimes enjoy an advantage because they do not join militias who are faced with government tanks and open gunfire on a more regular basis. The individual women activists discussed all emphasise the role of women in the revolution in the form of social media posts or interviews with Western and Arab media and institutions. In doing this, they are consciously participating in the discourse and history of the revolution by providing a narrative in which women are complex protagonists rather than caricatured onlookers. Nevertheless, although gender certainly has shaped the experience of dissidents, the overarching narrative of the Syrian Revolution, at least from the *emic* perspective of its supporters, is one of women and men fighting towards the same goal of overthrowing the Ba' th regime.

Appendix A

January 26, 2012

خرجوا خرجوا الـذين أن تعتقـــدون هل !!؟؟..سـوريا من خرج من علـى والتهجّم الهجوم لماذا #Syria
أمر وهو عائلتـــه علـى حفاظاً خرج من وهناك مفهـوم أمر وهو حياتـــه علـى حفاظاً خرج من هناك !!؟؟"مزاجهم"ب
الأخـير القســم !!..الثـــورة لأجل معيّن دورب يقـوم أن منه طلب من هناك لأن عنـه رغماً خرج من وهناك ..مشروع
واســـتهتار تخـــوين يكفـــي ...الثـــواري ظروف من مرة بـــألف أقســى الغربـــة لأن ..تضـــحية خروجه يعتـــبر
.. للمخـاطرة تعرّضنا ..خرج ممن وســخرية

Source:
Suhair Atassi's Facebook Page. https://www.facebook.com/Suhair.Alatassi

Appendix B

January 30, 2012

هنا وأنا ..تتحـــرر أسدي احتـلال من ..الحرّ وجيشـها ..شـــبابها بأيـدي تتحـــرر ســوريا #Syria
بعيداً أختنـــق الآن ..شـــهرين منذ معهم كنتَ ..ولهم لنـا المواطنـة حقّ يمســـترجعون هم ..ســفر وثـــائق بـدون وهناك
..عنهم

Source:
Suhair Atassi's Facebook Page. https://www.facebook.com/Suhair.Alatassi

Appendix C

February 3, 2012

ضـمائر من بقـــيت ما تستصـــــرخ حمص ..كبـــاني وكل ..أبـي روح ..هناك أهلـي ..الخالديـــة ..حمص #Syria
ســوريا كل ..دمشق ريـف ..الشـــرقية الغوطـة ..درعا ..إدلب ..حماة ..الزبـــداني كـذلك ..أجمع العـــالم
!!!..سـلاح لتـــاجرة فيتـــو ..روسـي فيتـــو أجل من تعطّلت هل !!!!!!الإنســـانية؟؟؟ أيـن ..تستصـــــرخكم
Source:
Suhair Atassi's Facebook Page. https://www.facebook.com/Suhair.Alatassi

Appendix D

April 10, 2012

ثـوار وإياهم شاركتُ ..سـوريا فـي كنـت عندما الســكايب عـبر معهم أتواصـل كنـت ..مجهـولين ربمـا جنودٌ
عندما قـرب عن هموعرفـت ..الســورية للثـــورة العامـة والهيئـــة التنســـــيقيات اتحـاد تأســيس فـي الـداخل
كانـت مهما تنطفـــئ لا الـــتي الثـــورة روح فيهـم عرفتُ ..معاً عملنـا ..نعشـق الـــتي الحريـة أرض غادرت
ربمـا جنودٌ ..بلادهم خارج وهم حـتى الثمـن لأجلهـا يـــدفعون الـــتي التضـــحية روح ..قاسـية الغربـــة ظروف
خلـف حرّ وأنت لـك تحيـة ...قبـح ثـوار أيضاً هم هؤلاء ..الـداخل لأحرار مطومـون لكنهـم ..مجهـولين
...القضـــيان

Source:
Suhair Atassi's Facebook Page. https://www.facebook.com/Suhair.Alatassi

Appendix E

April 14, 2012

الـدول من أحداً أن أصدّق لا ..ولكـن ..ريـاسـو أحرار سـطره تاريخاً نكتـب ســيجعلنا الثـــورة فـي التوثيـــق
ما إلـى الذهاب أجل من عنـان لمبـادرة الأسـدي الاحتـلال انتهاكـات أخبـار فعلياً فعلياً ينتظـــر "القـرار صـاحبة"
إتمامها عن المســفاح يتوانـــى لـن وإبـادة قتـل لعمليـــات الانتظـار حالـة علـى يواظبـــون مـتى فـــإلى !!..بعـدها
..مسـتمر السـلمي حراكنـا !!!..مـــراقبيكم ســنمنا !!!..والمهل المراقبـــة من المزيـد إلـى منها لينتقلـــــون
..الحـرة المنشـقة كتائبنـــا لتســـليح مخـازنكم أبـواب افتحـــوا ..كـذلك اللاعنفـــي ثورتنـــا وطـابع

Source:
Suhair Atassi's Facebook Page. https://www.facebook.com/Suhair.Alatassi

Appendix F

November 18, 2012

والتلفزيونيـــــــة الصـــــحفية اللقـاءات كل وفـي أنـني تعلمـــون أنتـم :الثـــورة مهد درعا وأحرار ثـوار إلـى
فـي الحريـــة ثـورة اشـتعلت من هي درعا أطفـال أنامل أن وأكرّر أقـول وأنـا الثـــورة بدايـــة ومنذ الســـابقة
درعا ثـوار أفضـــال ينكـــر أن يشـــر لأي يحقّ لا أساساً ...شـرارة سـوى يكـن لـم آذار 15 أن وأزيـد ..سـوريا
خوري جيزيـــل الصـــديقة مع لقـــائي فـي ...وتبـــاتهم تضـــحياتهم ولا ،الثـــورة اســتمرار علـى وأطفالهـا
مثـا خصوصـــية عن الحـديث بعـض كان العربيـــة علـى

الأمانة انتخابات إعلان عقب تسجيلها تم قد الحلقة وأن خصوصاً ..الثورة في السورية المرأة ركة

منذ المرأة مشاركة عن تحدثنا لذلك ..العامة أمانته في للمرأة المجلس واقتقار الوطني للمجلس العامة

الجانب هذا على للإضاءة دفعتنا للحديث مجنة خلفية هذاك كان إذاً ..باتياس نساء وعن آذار 15

يذكرون ولعلهم ...أحد من ولا مني شهادة ينتظرون لا درعا أهالي أن يقين على أنا ..أبرر لا أنا ..بالذات

...السفاح محاكمة يوم الأول الصف في هم يكونوا أن في الحق كل لهم درعا أطفال أن قلت لطالما أنني

من الرغم على ..حقهم في أخطأت أنني اعتقدوا إن درعا في وأخواتي وإخوتي أهلي من أعتذر أنا ..ذلك ومع

الأرض فيه أبوس الذي اليوم أنتظر بأنني لحظة يشاك أن يمكن لا جيداً يعرفني من أن أعلم أنني

...درعا أطفال نعال تحت وبالأخص ..ثائر كل نعال تحت

يملك ، كان من كائناً ،أحد ولا ..يتسطيره بدأتم من أنتم الثورة تاريخ أن ..بالنداء درعا أحرار إلى وأتوجه

لن الثورة فتاريخ ..أحد من بياتات تطلبوا لا لذلك ..للجميع علوم كم باتت حقائق يغيّر أن

كتبها التي الأولى أبجدياته كتابة يجيد أن التلاف أو هيئة أو مجلس أو مجموعة أو فرد يستطيع

...الحرية سوريا بقاع من بقعة كل في أنفسهم الثوار

Source:
Suhair Atassi's Facebook Page. https://www.facebook.com/Suhair.Alatassi

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53 Ibid.
54 Live-stream of Conference by United States Institute of Peace, "Who Owns the Syrian Revolution?", Washington, March 9, 2012
55 The SRCU has activities on the ground in Syria, and in London with the Syrian Network for Human Rights. The SRGC was established in August 2011 as a coalition of forty opposition groups in Syria. Its headquarters are in Istanbul, Turkey. They mainly monitor and report the uprisings, defend human rights, and publish press statements. Both groups are very active on Facebook and Twitter, rather than on traditional media networks or via official websites. See Syrian Revolution Coordinators Union's Facebook Page, accessed March 30, 2012, https://www.facebook.com/monasiqoon, and the Syrian Revolution General Commission's Facebook Page, accessed March 30, 2012, https://www.facebook.com/SyrianRevolutionGeneralCommission, and the section "Organising the Revolution" in this paper.
56 Suhair's father, Jamal al-Atassi, had been one of the founding ideologues of the Syrian Ba' th Party and was a proponent of the United Arab Republic. Although he had initially supported the Hafez al-Assad takeover, he later became a tolerated critic of the regime. He was tolerated because of his status as a national hero and due to his earlier friendship with Hafez al-Assad. When Bashar al-Assad imposed a complete crack-down on the Damascus Spring by early 2001, the Jamal al-Atassi forum was one of the victims, yet it was the only body that survived until the regime arrested its leading members, including Suhair, in 2005. Suhair then revived it in 2009 as an internet forum. See Carnegie Middle East Centre, "Suhair al-Atassi,"[n.d.], http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=48619.
57 See "Syria arrests more political activists," *Aljazeera.com*, May 24, 2005, http://www.aljazeera.com/archive/2005/05/20084101254719 06.html, and Carnegie Middle East Centre, "Suhair al-Atassi,"[n.d.], http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=48619.
58 "Thorn in the side of the Assad regime," *Financial Times*, March

14, 2012, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/68d5cf72-6dc5-11e1-b9c7-00144feab49a.html#axzz1spXFPluB.
59 "Freed Syrian activist says Assad reform not serious," *Reuters,* April 5, 2011, http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/04/05/us-syria-atassi-idUKTRE7345G720110405.
60 Ibid.
61 "Thorn in the side of the Assad regime," *Financial Times*, March 14, 2012, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/68d5cf72-6dc5-11e1-b9c7-00144feab49a.html#axzz1spXFPluB.
62 *Asharq al-Awsat* (London), July 16, 2011, http://asharq-e.com/print.asp?artid=id25914.
63 Ibid.
64 Now Lebanon, "Syrian opposition activist moves to France," January 21 2012. http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=355379.
65 Suhair Atassi's Facebook page, accessed March 30, 2012, https://www.facebook.com/Suhair.Alatassi. My translation, please see Appendix A for full original Arabic text.
66 Suhair Atassi's Facebook page, accessed March 30, 2012, https://www.facebook.com/Suhair.Alatassi. My translation, please see Appendix B for full original Arabic text.
67 Al-Khaledīya is a neighbourhood in Homs.
68 Al-Zabadānī is a village near the Lebanese border and a popular summer resort.
69 Al-Ghūta al-Sharkīya refers to the eastern suburbs of Damascus.
70 Rif Dimashq refers to the governorate of Damascus.
71 Suhair Atassi's Facebook page, accessed March 30, 2012, https://www.facebook.com/Suhair.Alatassi. My translation, please see Appendix C for full original Arabic text.
72 Suhair Atassi's Facebook page, accessed April 15, 2012, https://www.facebook.com/Suhair.Alatassi. My translation, please see Appendix D for full original Arabic text.
73 Suhair Atassi's Facebook page, accessed April 15, 2012, https://www.facebook.com/Suhair.Alatassi. My translation, please see Appendix E for full original Arabic text.
74 Suhair resigned from the SRGC on November 10, 2012, before being elected vice-president of the SNC (also known as the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces) the following day. See "Syria's opposition chooses president, formally signs coalition deal," *Al Arabiya,* November 12, 2012, http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/12/249032.html, and Carnegie Middle East Centre, "Suhair al-Atassi,"[n.d.], http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=48619.
75 The consensus in the Western media is that the Syrian revolution began in Dar' ā in March 2011, when the regime massacred schoolchildren who had graffitied "the people want the regime to fall" on a wall of the city. The people of Dar' ā demonstrated and other cities demonstrated in solidarity for the children, and the regime cracked down on these protestors by opening fire. See Rania Abouzeid, "Syria's Revolt: How Graffiti Stirred an Uprising," *Time,* March 22, 2011, http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2060788,00.html.
76 Giselle Khoury is the widow of Samir Kassir, the Lebanese historian and journalist assassinated in 2005 in a car bomb in Beirut. He vocally opposed the Syrian presence in Lebanon and supported democracy in Syria.
77 Studio Beirut, "Syrian Women in the Syrian Revolution[translated title]," *Studio Beirut* video, 24:57, Al Arabiya, November 15, 2011 http://english.alarabiya.net/videos/20121115-studiobeirut.html.
78 "الدوحة في السوري الإئتلاف رئيس الخطيب معاذ الشيخ كلمة," YouTube video, 10:18, posted by "situasion1," November 11, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=5ihiBBv670M.
79 Giselle Khoury also interviewed Rima Fleihan, the LCC spokesperson, who confirmed Suhair Atassi's statements about the Syrian National Coalition and its leader. Fleihan said she too had been personally reassured by Sheikh Moaz al-Khatib's influential words about the participation and representation of women. Fleihan said the local committees were still active despite the militarisation of the conflict. "We as a coordination committee represent one of the faces of the greater peaceful civilian movement in Syria," she explained. She claimed that demonstrations continued each Friday, each often composed of 500 or 600 people. For Fleihan, this was an exceptional achievement, considering the level of violence and the attacks carried out by the regime. Other forms of civil action, such as media work, human rights activism and humanitarian work also continue. As spokesperson for the local coordination committees, she works directly with Syrian refugees in Jordan, but also coordinates the work of the committees inside Syria from Jordan. She told Khoury that women in the revolution provide support to each other, explaining that there was a special bond between women in the revolution because men cannot relate to them as easily. Unsurprisingly, Fleihan personally knows Suhair Atassi.
80 "بالأتاسي ترحيبا أبيض لتل المحلي المجلس رئيس كلمة," YouTube video, video, 2:15, posted by "حسن مصطفى," October 14, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GIE8Lel9Cpg.
81 The Al-Nusra Front, or *Jabhat al-Nusrah li-ahl ash-Shām*, is a jihadi Islamist group fighting with the Free Syria Army. It is allegedly affiliated with al-Qaeda. See "Syria revolt attracts motley foreign jihadi corps," *Now Lebanon*, August 12, 2012, http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=428915.
82 Studio Beirut, November 15, 2011, http://english.alarabiya.net/videos/20121115-studiobeirut.html.
83 Atassi also discussed the impact of the militarisation of the conflict on women's participation. Because the media focuses on battles and the Free Syrian Army (FSA), it fails to notice the participation of women. Women work in refugee camps, revolutionary media, and are problem-solvers on the ground, according to the activist. They also participate in medical care, and not only as aides. Suhair witnessed a young woman from Homs perform surgical operations to remove bullets from victims' craniums. For Suhair "the revolution was a dream," and the participation of the FSA has not changed that. She said the "mistakes" made by some members of the FSA in killing military prisoners, as shown on some YouTube videos were individual and inevitable acts.
84 Women organised a demonstration demanding the release of protestors recently arrested in Baniyas, and the regime's response was to send in tanks and open fire on the demonstrators, killing at least four women in May 2011. See "Syrian tanks and troops 'enter flashpoint Baniyas city," *BBC*, 7 May 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13320326.
85 Suhair Atassi's Facebook Page, accessed November 18, 2012, https://www.facebook.com/Suhair.Alatassi. My translation, please see Appendix F for full original Arabic text.
86 "Defected officers declare the formation of "Syrian Free Army," 29-7-2011," YouTube video, 4:08, posted by: "thesyrianinterpreter," July 29 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rk7Ze5jVCj4.
87 *The New York Times*, November 17, 2011.
88 Syrian National Council's Facebook Page, accessed March 30, 2012, https://www.facebook.com/SyrianCouncil.org/info.
89 "Syria Army Alawite Female Colonel Defects - Col Zubaida Almiki Denounces Dictator Assad," YouTube video, 2:16, posted by "Souria2011archives," October 10, 2012, www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2znn7gTDoE.
90 "Defected woman general trains Syria's rebels," *Aljazeera.com,* October 23, 2012, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/10/20121022105057794364.html.
91 Ibid.