Ideological Contest in
Syria's Revolutionary Moment:
The Concept of Dignity

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Abstract

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In this thesis I make use of interpretive methods within comparative political theory for a consideration of the idea of dignity (*karama*) in Syria's revolution, began in 2011. The state and its ruling ideology is, of course, deeply contested in revolutions. But less attention has been paid to how this happens and to the kinds of new ideas—or established beliefs recovered and recast—which can rapidly emerge from the ideational periphery. The concept of karama acts, along with other adjacent and related 'ideas in the wild', to resist. It signifies important 'belief challenges' to the dominant order.

I show the ways in which dignity is used and understood by recourse to the writing and the vernacular utterances of Syrian revolutionaries. I pursue two distinctive ideational exemplars from within the revolution: the progressive *al-jumhuriya* (The Republic) website; and, the armed fighters of the *liwa al-tawhid* (Unity Brigade). My research traces the ways in which divergent Syrian revolutionaries share important beliefs in common; ideas which cohere and are clarified, to an important extent, around the concept of *karama*—as it is used and acted upon in the revolution.

I compare the broadly western and Arab conceptual trajectories for this idea, showing points of commonality and illuminate the particular instances and context for a distinctive dignity in resistance. I explore a historicised idea of and emergence of a deeply political and radical Fanonian dignity in resistance to oppression and tyranny.

The centrality of dignity—as a core organising idea in Syrian 'thought-practices' of resistance—shows us how such ideas can take on a political bent and how powerful they are when harnessed and acted on in particular contexts. My analysis of revolutionary thinkers and fighters therefore sheds more light on the actions of people often neglected in state-centric and structuralist analyses.

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I am grateful to Abdel Razzaq Takriti who was generous enough to discuss issues in the study of revolutions, in our meetings in Oxford during 2013. He also kindly read over some of my early work on Arab Baʿth political thought in Chapter Three—making suggestions for improvements.

I warmly acknowledge Abu and Umm Nina for their careful translations of some of the material relating to *liwa al-tawhid* and the report of the first year of the revolution in *al-jumhuriya*; I was also happy to make a donation to a cause dear to their hearts: the Camden Abu Dis Friendship Association. I feel greatly humbled and fortunate in my friendship with Muzna—I thankful for her help with video translations and our countless and intense discussions on Syria and on revolutionary organising and activism in Syria. I was also aided through the opportunity to work with Odai al-Zoubi (now Abu Ayoub) who very patiently tutored me in Arabic and helped me expand my vocabulary as I worked through the lengthy *al-jumhuriya* material for this thesis. His good (and increasingly dark) humour, as his country fell apart, and his self-effacing willingness to accommodate, and encourage, my quest for deeper knowledge of Syria in its revolution were an important influence on me.

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INTRODUCTION

Syria's revolution—and the violent and totalising put down of it which has now destroyed the country— has been relegated to the 'too difficult box' by western progressive activists, policy analysts, and important parts of the scholarly community alike. Before the latest round of Arab revolutions, knowledge production about contemporary Syria (at least in English) was limited to a small group of scholars[1] and commentators, most prominently in the USA and the UK, constantly seeking to explain and to 'demystify' Syria for the wider academic and policy community. Deeper understanding of Syria has oft times been thwarted by its geopolitical complexity and an enduring, and sometimes Orientalist, assumption of some kind of exceptionalism for Arab countries and Syria specifically.

My starting point in this thesis is that amidst the scholarly production and analysis about Syria, busy as it has been attending to the vital macro level state and geopolitical conundrums of an important regional and, now, globally significant (failed) state actor, are millions of people in their everyday and ordinary lives. Some of these 'ordinary' people rose up in 2011 in the name of dignity, and their reach for and central assertion of that concept is the focus of my thesis. I set out to show the ways in which this seemingly ubiquitous and polysemic concept of dignity emerged and signified a distinctly political turn. I will show that the idea of dignity (Arabic: *karama*) was so central in the Syrian revolution because it represented a fundamental 'belief

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[1] This paraphrases a remark made by Thomas Pierret at the 2013 Syria Studies conference held at St Andrew's University, convened by Raymond Hinnebusch. Pierret was giving feedback to postgraduate presenters, myself included, about the difficulties of doing research on Syria as it suddenly became a global focus of intellectual and knowledge production.

challenge' by Syrian revolutionary actors to the Syrian leadership, government, state, and systems of coercion and control. To dig deeper into the actual processes and actions of revolutionaries, the research question I pursue throughout this thesis is: what are the meanings and uses of dignity in the Syrian revolution?

Choosing to focus my research on Syria's latest revolution immediately raises the question: how do we 'know' Syria? One highly visible way publics have been able to relate to Syria is through the tragedy (and spectacle) of an individual life lost, such as Aylan Kurdi's body washed up on a beach. In a different point of access, much has been made of the Kurdish project of liberated Kobani in Syria.[2] Most recently, the increasing plight of the Syrian refugees has finally become mainstream and a prominent cause for many who had hitherto felt unable to grasp 'Syria's revolution'. The other way we 'know' Syria now is through a regular (but highly mediated) diet of disturbing images of civilian casualties, on our television and computer screens. Perhaps most of all, though, we have come to view Syria through the lens of the nihilism of the Islamic State group (ISIS) and through Syria's 'heart-eating', 'jihadi', 'extremist' rebels as they are overly represented and reproduced in a burgeoning field of terrorist and extremism studies which has grown since 9/11. Even when we acknowledge, as I will, that forms of Islamist and different forms of counter-revolutionary extremism took hold in Syria's revolution and liberated regions, we have still not accounted for (or, rather, have chosen to ignore) the revolutionary moment enacted and lived by Syrians under the bombs.

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[2] This despite identical achievements by Syrians elsewhere in the country, and much earlier, in maintaining liberated areas – such as the well-known (or, so it has been assumed by the Syrian revolutionaries themselves) case of the city of Daraya.

What these particular lenses and such partial access paths to 'ways of knowing' Syria show is how difficult it is to grasp or to gain insight into the important political dimension of Syria's revolution and war. That is, we have tuned out of politics and we need to tune back in. Some key political elements in Syria's revolution and the fallout from it have been clear from the outset of the uprising. Syrians stood up to and then fled from a purposively and extremely violent crushing of a popular uprising; ISIS maintains a HQ in Syria because of the space and the vacuum created by the unspeakable level of state violence and, to quote a respected Syrian veteran journalist and former prisoner, the state and security machinery which became an 'industrial killing machine'.[3] The Syrian Kurds have taken the initiative to advance their own cause for self-determination in the ruins of a revolution in which they had taken part alongside Arabs, Ismaili's and Druze, among others. These are all deeply political events and any analysis of Syria and its revolution must attend centrally to such political dimensions.

In conducting research on Syria which is attuned and attentive to the *political* I mean to say that, specifically, we cannot neglect the counterhegemonic 'ideas from below' which have been produced and promoted by Syrian revolutionary agents. We need to consider their words and their actions as constitutive of an important and alternative realm of the political. This is because these deeds took on a political hue when these Syrians exercised agency and attended *public* and *collective* protests and sit-ins, organised civil disobedience activities and, over the first months of the revolution, developed a radical revolutionary culture and practice. We also need to pay attention to the kinds of ideological commitments such agents advanced, without judging or romanticising the idea and practices we come across and without resorting to selective examples which we 'relate' most closely to.

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[3] This remark was made by the journalist during a meeting on Syria organised at Chatham House under the Chatham House Rule, in summer 2013.

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This thesis sets out to put aside the kinds of epistemic blind spots I have discussed so far and to seek ways to negotiate both the ontological and epistemological limits seemingly imposed on our study of and our understanding of Syria. I do so by bringing research on today's Syria more closely into conversation with a sub-field of interpretive political theory which studies political ideologies as the 'receptacles' for 'live' events and for ideas in train. In order to explore this ideational terrain my research is underpinned by the claim that it is vitally important that we reconsider and pay due attention to the political ideologies which serve to organise and define our societies by investigating their 'contents': that is, the ideas and beliefs which they gather in.

I situate my research within, and draw on innovations in, the study of political ideologies and the ideas which they comprise, a sub-field of political theory which avoids the normative impulse to abstract and generalise and instead is "distinguished by a commitment to studying political ideas as they are found 'in the wild'".[4] That is, as researchers, we ought to look beyond the formalised politics of our politicians and parties and engage with the 'everyday'

> political ideas found in, for example, speeches, statements, debates, interviews, pamphlets, newspaper columns, websites, posters, placards, demonstrations and performances.[5]

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[4] Finlayson, A. (2013) 'Rhetoric and the Political Theory of Ideologies', *Political Studies*, 60, 751.
[5] Finlayson, A. (2013) ibid., 751.

This way of thinking about ideas guides my methodology in my analysis of dignity in Syria's revolution. Some words are more special and significant and complex than others and require closer attention. Some of our everyday and common words, such as the concept of dignity which is central to this research study, can *become* and act *politically* in a number of important ways. To help ground and structure my research I draw together the scholarship of two prominent political theorists—William E. Connolly and Michael Freeden—to develop an approach which attempts to get closer to people and to their ideas.

However, there are two immediate puzzles to pose about 'getting closer to the people' before I begin the body of this thesis. First, if we do listen closely to Syria's revolutionary agents we might find (as I shall show in this thesis) that some believe(d) their cause to be ultimately apolitical or even, perhaps, post-political/ideological. This presents a dilemma for the researcher keen to listen to what is being said and to take this seriously. How can I situate my study of dignity in Syria's revolution as being importantly *political* if some Syrians say that 'it is not about politics'? Here I rely on Freeden and Connolly in urging for a reconfiguring of our very notion of what constitutes the political, whilst also recognising that this Syrian rejection of the political is based on the lived experience under an authoritarian system and hereditary rule. We can suspend any resolution of this tension, though, as I examine it in more detail in my exemplar studies (Chapters Five and Six). There is, perhaps, nothing more deeply political, in the way Connolly and Freeden conceive of this field, than standing up to and acting against a repressive system; Syrians have forged a radically new political ethos and dignity helps us to name it.

The second immediate puzzle is: can we usefully analyse such a potentially 'slippery' concept as dignity and does it really have any meaningful use given its ubiquity? Dignity is indeed common in our everyday and in our formal legal codes; we find it promulgated in international law and at the core of our universal human values, in the speeches of politicians discussing the plight of Syrian refugees and in such diverse contexts as 'dignity in dying' and 'dignity in labour'. Some have dismissed the idea based on just this seeming unending polysemy and indeterminacy; others have problematised it from competing perspectives. Religious conservatives argue that its innate and God-given nature is under threat in modern science and medical advances which interfere with nature. On the other hand, political theorists have argued for its importance based on human law and normative ideas of equal dignity and so on. I tackle these issues in detail in this thesis and in particular in Chapter Four. But I also draw on important ontological and epistemological commitments to build an understanding and meaning in use which gives central consideration to historical context, to its appearance and use by agents, and to patterns which start to show and suggest and clarify meaning-in-use.

I have so far introduced my thesis topic and outlined my central research question and the arguments which emerge and which I defend. I have attempted to address some immediate ontological questions and to briefly introduce the basis for my own methodological approach. This helps to clear a path for the first two chapters which serve an important function in setting up my thesis question and methodology.

In Chapter One I carry out a methodological critique of the most influential scholarship on modern revolutions. I focus on studies from within the discipline of political science, as they have been the most enduring and set the terms of our inquiry into revolutions. I argue that

mainstream scholarship on revolutions has tended to adopt a state-centric and causal approach which has neglected people, ideas, and agency. I examine how the study of ideology has interacted with that of the study of revolutions. I negotiate a way out of the unproductive debates about whether structural or agental approaches are *the* right approaches and instead argue that it is important to ask questions about and conduct research into people and their ideas. This occurs within revolutionary *processes* which have, as I show, suffered from relative neglect. I then look at existing attempts to do this and suggest that we can productively build on this research.

In Chapter Two I set out how I intend to frame and conduct my research on the idea of dignity in Syria's revolution. I establish my interpretive approach as coming from that of a sub-field in political theory which gives prominence to ideas, or concepts, as important units of analysis provided that we do not seek essence of meaning but rather investigate concepts in use and in context. Specifically I position dignity, in the Syrian revolutionary context, as a distinctly radical and political concept. To facilitate this approach I introduce the work of William E. Connolly and Michael Freeden. These theorists have, between them, nurtured a more attentive study of the complex, political, concepts which serve as the building blocks for the ideologies that organise our social and political world.

I build on their scholarship and frameworks in order to fine tune my own methodological approach for a non-Western context and for a revolutionary terrain. In doing so I argue that a very productive research potential exists in the joining of (western) non-normative, 'post-analytic' Political Theory with the field of Area Studies (within which Syria is most often given its scholarly treatment). I then add the flesh onto the bones of my interpretive method by

outlining and reflecting on my own 'Method and Material' as I prepare to conduct research on 'ideas from below' with recourse to the 'concrete' empirical world of Syria's revolutionary agents. I elaborate on the selection of material when I introduce the two exemplar studies from Syria's revolution (Chapter Five and Six), each of which represents differing and competing currents and offers an ideational picture of new ideas emerging.

In Chapter Three I provide the necessary diachronic backbone to my own study of ideas in a time of change and flux. In historicising the rise and formation of modern Arab ideologies I show how the weight of history has weaved and solidified dominant ideological formations in the era since Syrian independence. I give particular focus to the dominating ideology and the case of the rise of the Syrian Arab Baʿth Party, but I also briefly touch on other ideational currents which have vied for space and have contested hegemonic power, such as Political Islam and a seemingly 'Civic Republicanism'. Here I analyse the ideas which underpinned the Baʿth project and note the three core concepts—unity, (Arab) socialism, and freedom—which featured at the centre of political thinking and writing from prominent ideologues and political leaders of the time. I argue that the real potential in the Baʿthist ideals came to be hobbled and marginalised by the urges of a ruling elite to maintain the status quo and to ensure that their own self-interests were safe guarded. The chapter shows how important concepts take hold and how they can be instrumentalised for reasons of power and coercion and yet still hold (unfulfilled) potential in rapid periods of change, as was seen from 2011. It was the failure of the Syrian Arab Baʿth Party, in power, to live up to and maintain its radical ethos and the virtues of the Syrian people for unity, freedom and the desire for a socially inspired equality, which created the conditions for the Syrian dignity revolution.

In Chapter Four I investigate in detail the concept of dignity, to elucidate on distinctive historical trajectories and traditions for this. I explicate the religious, premodern, and modern conceptions of dignity, and the meanings-in-use, during different historical times. In the latter part of the chapter I focus in on resistance against colonial rule, including in the Arab region. I examine the thought-practices of anticolonial writers and agitators and I draw out some of the core concepts which cohere at differing junctures. In particular, I show how the idea of dignity was a core idea and that it often appeared alongside that of freedom and honour. I argue that, in the case of the Arab region, dignity was to become embedded in a 'politics of resistance' and that this context has vital importance in enabling us to understand the context of resistance in which dignity was asserted, again, in the latest revolutions.

In Chapter Five I introduce the first of my exemplar studies of Syria's revolutionary moment: the revolutionary website of *al-jumhuriya* (The Republic). Established and managed by Syrian intellectuals, academics, writers, and bloggers in support of the Dignity Revolution in Syria, this website provides a rich source of 'raw material' for an empirical examination of 'ideas in the wild'. I investigate some of the thinking and ideas of its most prominent cofounder: the Syrian dissident and intellectual Yassin al-Haj Saleh. Saleh is an exemplar of the Syrian progressive and leftist current importantly active in the revolution. I investigate the ideational patterns across the material produced by Saleh, and by this collective, and I draw out some of the core ideas in their thinking and in their revolutionary culture and practice of resistance. In particular it is apparent that the notion of dignity is central in their revolutionary speech-acts – as a name, as an assertion and demand, as a mobilising call, as a human right, and as an overarching and ineliminable virtue which is constitutive of their very struggle.

In Chapter Six I set out the second exemplar study: the Syrian armed revolutionaries: *liwa al-tawhid* (the Unity Brigade). My focus on this particular brigade stems from it being one of the most prominent brigades fighting pro-government forces in northern Syria. In negotiating the complexity of these fighting brigades I begin with an exposition of this fighting unit and of one of its most revered commanders: the martyr Mujahid Abdel Qader al-Saleh. I examine mediated content published and available online through Arab television channels and content-sharing and social networking sites. I build a picture of this so-called moderate Islamist brigade in Syria and find among them the core ideas of dignity, freedom, and armed jihad. I show how this group represent another form of revolutionary resistance and one which is ordered around an ideal vision of a future Syria in which a sub stratum of Sunni Muslims is respected and given freedom to be Syrian and religious. This is precisely why the concept of dignity exhibited and enmeshed both through a particular 'local' religious sensitivity and in a revolutionary resistance is so potent an idea and demand.

I then draw this thesis to a close with a concluding section in which I draw together my findings and suggest possible future avenues of exploration.

Chapter One
Ideas *in* Revolution

Introduction

 My research study is an investigation into ideas in a dynamic and heavily contested state of flux in the context of Syria's revolution, which began in 2011. Specifically, I investigate the idea of dignity as it emerged and manifested itself in Syria's revolution. The idea of dignity—Arabic: *karama*—was concretely and empirical visible and audible in the revolution, appearing and functioning in a number of interesting ways.

The first two chapters in this thesis are importantly linked; both aid in addressing the problems in the conventional study of revolution and ideology and some of the potential, as well as the shortcomings, in the literature. Before I can deal substantially with an analysis of dignity in use in the Syrian revolution I need to investigate how to draw on theories of modern revolutions so as to situate Syria and its latest revolution.

This is an important process as it allows me to consider what conceptual or methodological tools might be pertinent to a study of the idea of dignity in Syria's revolution. The question I therefore pose in this chapter is: to what degree might the literature on revolution and on ideas, and the ideologies that contain them, provide productive approaches and tools which might assist a study of dignity in revolution?

In Section One of this chapter I present an analysis of the canonical work in the conventional social sciences regarding the study of revolutions. I highlight scholarship on modern revolutions, in particular John Foran's analysis of the four generations of research and the

varied approaches taken.[1] I place an emphasis on the political scientist Theda Skocpol[2] because her research has been immensely influential and is an exemplar of the major historical sociological studies undertaken in the latter part of the twentieth century.

I also pay attention to the contribution which the field of social mobilisation theory, led by Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow,[3] has made, and discuss some of the conceptual ideas they introduced. The notion of a 'revolutionary moment' and a 'revolutionary situation' are used in the examination of recent revolutions. I investigate the extent to which the scholarship considers the place of people, as agents and actors, and ideologies in revolution. I pinpoint some of the shortcomings in the literature and how it has tended to reproduce state-centric and structuralist analyses which neglect people and their political thinking and ideas.

In Section Two, on surveying the field of study of ideology, I examine and summarise its historiography in the modern period, starting with the idea as it emerged in the Renaissance and Enlightenment period. I note the influence of Marxist approaches to ideology and update them with regard to other developments: such as the linguistic turn. I include reference to the emergence of a school of discourse theory, and in particular the influential directions taken by Ernesto Laclau and Chantelle Mouffe [4] which have necessarily complicated the picture and opened up diverse ways of thinking about ideologies. While we no longer conduct research on ideology as a unitary phenomenon or object of study, we still tend to consider it pejoratively, as something bad and to be rid of. This closes off the

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[1] Foran, J. ed. (1997) *Theorising Revolutions*, London & New York: Routledge.
[2] Her major works are: Skocpol, T. (1979) *States and Social Revolutions: a comparative analysis of France, Russia, & China*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Skocpol, T. (1994) *Social revolutions in the modern world*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[3] Major works include Tilly, C. (1995) *European Revolutions, 1492-1992*, Oxford: Blackwell; Tilly, C. & Tarrow, S. (2007) *Contentious Politics*, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers.
[4] I reference here their joint earlier and major work: Mouffe, C and Laclau, E. (1999) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, second edition. Verso: London & New York.

very dynamic political thinking and actions which are produced and disseminated outside of ruling elite and state structures of domination.

In Section Three I bring the two scholarly strands of revolution and ideology together, looking at ways in which ideologies, and their ideas, have been treated in the study of revolutions. In particular in this section I note the key debates around structure versus agency, and therefore the significance, or not, of people and their ideas in times of revolution. To aid in this I draw on a major dialogue between two opposing political scientists: Theda Skocpol and William Sewell.[5] I show how both paths of argumentation illustrate the limits of an either/or understanding of revolutions. I demonstrate a relative neglect of ideas and ideology in the study of revolution, both because of the methodological (quasi-scientific) approaches taken and because of the pejorative way in which academics, policy-makers and the public have continued to regard ideology.

Finally, in my conclusion, I pull together some of the useful threads in preparation for an examination of the idea of dignity in Syria's revolution. I therefore do not seek to contribute substantively to the scholarship on revolution *per se*, which (as we shall see shortly) has tended to consider revolutions in retrospect and to prefer meta-narratives and generalised theories for defining what a revolution is, what causes it, and what constitutes a successful revolutionary outcome. I contend that conventional approaches to the analysis of revolution fail to pick up important and interesting currents and trajectories associated with ideas. Such ideas, in their concrete manifestations, can offer us insight into the actual wider ideological changes which occur in revolution, as I will show in the case of Syria.

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[5] See my discussion of them later in this chapter, Section Three, regarding 'A Dialogue about Culture and Ideology in Revolutions', in Skocpol, T. ed. (1994) Social Revolutions in the Modern World, Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 169-209.

This thesis thus aims to avoid some of these epistemic and methodological shortcomings. Instead, in Chapter Two, I introduce an interpretive methodology which supports my focus on the study of ideas for ideas' sake and as important units of analysis. My investigation centres on 'ideas from below'. This means that I explore the political implications of the thought and action of Syrian revolutionary actors which takes place within and from a 'live' revolutionary moment or situation. In doing so I anticipate the theoretical critique of the study of ideologies made by the political theorist Michael Freeden[6], whose work I give detailed attention in this thesis.

Relatively little attention has been paid to the consideration of what happens to ideological traditions and patterns when revolutions take hold. In particular, the new ideas – or old ones given a new airing – which emerge and cohere at a particular spatial and temporal point. We can look at the ideas which are produced, transmitted, communicated, promoted, and struggled for. In this way we can pursue 'ideas in the wild' or the ideas produced in myriad ways by people in revolutions.

Before we can advance to this stage of the thesis I set out here the pertinent literatures which act as a point of reference and departure for my own research.

I   The study of modern revolutions

In reviewing the literature and argumentation of revolutions we will notice that three enduring questions take a central place. I argue that this is an important observation because

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[6] See Chapter Two for an explication of his theory of political ideologies and for his major works.

scholarship on revolution remains problematic if the research questions are fixed and if its study remains retrospective – that is, looking at revolutions in history.[7] These organising questions which serve to frame and limit scholarly exploration are: firstly, what is the definition of a revolution? Secondly, what are the causes of revolutions? And, thirdly, what are the necessary factors to make for a successful revolutionary outcome? Each of these questions is given varying levels of attention in the scholarship and I set out some of the main instances when each of these questions becomes a central organising feature, and constraint, for researchers. We shall also see a number of sub-questions which emerge in the study of revolutions. For example, in seeking to define revolutions other questions come to the fore regarding how we might distinguish between a revolution and, say, a *coup d'état*, uprising, rebellion, changing of the guard and so on.

With this in mind the next section concentrates on the generational shifts in the study of revolutions. For ease of reference I organise the scholarship into 'four generations' (or waves) of study, a framework used by scholars themselves.[8]

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[7] William E. Connolly advances an interesting idea on 'the politics of becoming', as in the historical struggle of Jews, slaves, and so other groups, as a necessarily ongoing process, rather than the realising of an essence. Becoming (or, i would argue, change) 'proceeds when it is in motion": Connolly, W. E. (1996) 'Suffering, Justice, and the Politics of Becoming', *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry,* 20, 256.

[8] Goldstone, J. (1982) 'The Comparative and Historical Study of Revolutions', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 8, 187-207. A useful selection of the wide ranging debates and the theoretical shifts is in Foran, J. ed. (1997) *Theorizing Revolutions*, London: Routledge. On methodological dilemmas see also: Aya, R. (1979) 'Theories of Revolution Reconsidered: Contrasting Models of Collective Violence', *Theory and Society*, 8:1, 39-99; and, Goodwin, J. & Jasper, J.M. (1999) 'Caught in a Winding, Snarling Vine: The Structural Bias of Political Process Theory', *Sociological Forum*, 14, 27-54. For a regional perspective (which echoes my critique of the field in this chapter) see Cole, J. R. I. (1999) *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement*, Cairo: American University Press, especially Cole's introduction. A concentrated volume on the emergent theme of contention is McAdam, D., Tarrow, S & Tilly, C. (2001) *Dynamics of Contention*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

First and second generation

The first generation of scholarship on revolution consists of what Jack Goldstone refers to as the "natural history" generation.[9] This historical scholarship was conducted throughout the 1920s and 1930s on the so-called great revolutions, such as the French and Russian revolutions. The historians describe and provide empirical depth on major revolutions and offer descriptive accounts of the socioeconomic conditions which led up to the revolutions. So, for example, as Goldstone points out, their findings become almost truisms about the conditions we commonly understand revolutions to spring from. The focus tends to be on the ruling elite and social class machinations. The main criticism levelled at the natural historians is that their descriptive narratives fail to get to grips with explaining or analysing *why* revolutions happen.[10]

The second generation of scholarship on revolution refers to the earliest 'social scientific', rather than 'natural history', treatments of revolution in the academy which persisted throughout much of the century until they were challenged and eventually undermined by later scholarship. This second wave is characterised by attention to psychologically-based explanations into the causes of revolutions and collective violence. This approach reinforces the notion that revolutions are a 'volcanic' eruption by people, as individuals and then as a collective, into a violent show of popular discontent.[11] Through the 1950's and 1960's scholars were exercised by a compulsion to fit revolutions into neat, 'scientific' schematics

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[9] As discussed in: Goldstone, J. (1982) ibid., 187-207.

[10] Goldstone, J. (1982) ibid.

[11] Examples of such approaches, some of which I discuss here, can be found in the work of James Davies; Ted Gurr; Neil Smelser; Ivo Feierabend, Rosalind Feierabend, Betty Nesvold; and Chalmers Johnson See discussions in Aya (1979) and Skocpol (1979), op cit.

which focused on mono-variables, such as the propensity for people to be violent or aggressive.[12]

Revolution has been treated as a disturbed 'condition of a society at large', according to a biting critique of this field of study by Roderic Aya.[13] Aya argues that the 'volcano models' of revolution try to psychologise revolutionary violence and to treat political conflict and contestation as some kind of illness or social aberration.[14] A typical approach, according to Aya, is that by James C. Davies whose hypothesis is that revolution is more likely to occur when there is a period of prolonged rising expectation and gratification [15] which is subsequently reversed, so that there is a gap between expectation and gratification which becomes intolerable.[16] Davies tests this in his modelling of the J-Curve which plots levels of gratification. As these variable indicators of gratification decline they result in a "revolutionary state of mind".[17] Following this method, Aya notes that examples of the increasing propensity for violence results in the somewhat incongruous grouping of the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Nasserite 'coup d'état' of 1952 in Egypt, and the Nazi

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[12] As critiqued in Aya, R. (1979) 'Theories of Revolution Reconsidered: Contrasting Models of Collective Violence', *Theory and Society*, 8:1, 39-99; also, Skocpol, T. (1979) *States and Social Revolutions: a comparative analysis of France. Russia, & China*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Zimmermann, E. (1983) *Political Violence, Crises, and Revolutions: Theories and Research*, Cambridge, Mass: Schenkman Publishing Co.; Foran, J. ed. (1997) *Theorising Revolutions*, London: Routledge.

[13] Aya, R. (1979) 'Theories of Revolution Reconsidered: Contrasting Models of Collective Violence', *Theory and Society*, 8:1, 39-99.

[14] In doing so Aya, following Tilly, argues that scholars were influenced by Durkheim (and the trend towards modernisation theories) in analysing the ways in which individuals react to the social tensions produced by rapid social change: Aya, R. (1979) ibid., 50-51.

[15] Gratifications included basics such as food and water, as well as 'cultural' factors such as standard of living and dignity

[16] Cited in Aya (1979) op cit., 53.

[17] As critiqued in Aya, R. (1979) 'Theories of Revolution Reconsidered: Contrasting Models of Collective Violence', *Theory and Society*, 8:1, 39-99

accession of 1933 together with Black Power [18] movements in America and campus collective actions in the 1960s.[19]

Aya argues that Davies "compounds a wide variety of gratifications into a one-dimensional (and non-empirical) index".[20] Attempts to use this one-dimensional J-curve model as a singular thermometer to take "an entire society's emotional temperature over time" are problematic, as it is too blunt an instrument of analysis. For example, the studies do not provide a way in which to distinguish frustrations which led to revolution from those which "form the grist of political continuity".[21] Aya is scathing of the volcano models because he is troubled by the level to which they are influential and well-regarded in scholarly circles. The methods are extended to other studies by scholars, who go on to attempt to quantify the triggers for political violence as an empirical basis for a theory/theories on revolutions.

Another example is the major statistical study of Feierabend, Feierabend and Nesvold,[22] which gathered data on social change and political violence variables for eighty-four nations between 1948 and 1965 in order to produce a general theory of revolution. Their study concludes that "systemic frustration" causes people to get angry and revolt.[23] The details of their methodology have been critiqued as being flawed and over reliant on socio-

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[18] For a reflective article on this period and the work to be done still see Azikiwe, A (2016) Stokely Carmichael, 'Black Power and the age of political oppression', The Spirit of Biko: Struggles for Black dignity continue', 16 June, *Pambazuka News,* 790, published online at pambazuko.org., accessed December, 2016.

[19] Aya (1979) ibid., 53.

[20] Aya (1979) ibid., 53.

[21] Aya (1979) ibid., 53-54.

[22] Feierabend, I.K., Feierabend, R.L., & Nesvold, B.K. (1969) 'Social Change and Political Violence: Cross National Patterns', in Graham, H.D. & Gurr, T., eds. (1969) *Violence in America*, New York, London: Bantam Books.

[23] Aya (1979) op cit.., 54-5.

psychological explanations.[24] In particular Aya records how the scholars over-interpret the correlations in their data to argue that it confirms a causal link between rapid social changes in certain transitional societies. This confluence creates systemic frustration and spills into violence and strife.[25] Aya makes a number of other criticisms but, overall, the key flaw is that the researchers "presume a direct connection between frustration and revolt" without any evidence to prove it.[26] In other words, correlation does not necessarily prove any causal links. Roderick Aya concludes his critique of these studies by asserting that the "theories themselves are at fault" which, as a result, "steers research analysis down a blind alley".[27]

Aya's analysis and critique of the second generation is multi-layered and the aim of this chapter is not to expound on all the details or to agree completely with Aya's own approach. However, there are two key aspects that, so far, we can draw out from reflecting critically on these first two waves of study. Firstly, the scholars seem to set the very idea of resistance and revolution in the pejorative – as a deviation, as something that must be understood so that it can be stopped and/or predicted and thus avoided. This is a problem which has underpinned the study of modern revolutions and reflects the positionality, or natural bias, of the very scholars who undertake the work. Put simply, researchers seem to start with a premise that resistance through rebellion, uprisings and revolutions indicates deviant behaviour and a departure from societal norms. This puts scholars on the side of the status quo, and ignores the political thinking, grievances, and moral commitments which might motivate revolutionaries.

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[24] Zimmermann (1983) op cit., 412; see also Foran, J. (2005) *Taking power: on the origins of third world revolutions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 9.
[25] Aya (1979) op cit., 54-55.
[26] Aya 1979) op cit., 57.
[27] Aya (1979) op cit., 39-40.

The second problem to emerge from these first two waves of scholarship is that there are a number of methodological flaws in the studies conducted on revolutions, as we have briefly seen above. What Aya's critique points to is that although there is nothing problematic about doing quantitative studies on revolutions in and of itself, it has to be recognised that the "the juggernaut of Quantitative Method"[28] may not always be an appropriate tool to help us to answer some of the important questions we might have about revolutions. The problem, it seems, then becomes one in which we might actually be asking the wrong questions altogether about revolutions and working with tools which are not incisive or fine-grained enough to aid a deeper understanding of people in revolutions.

On reflection, it appears that the earliest kinds of empirically-rich historical studies may well prove to be more useful sources for our understanding of revolution, in that at least we have valuable evidence from the archives, albeit with a focus on elite actors. By contrast, the resultant shift to the second generation has privileged the causative imperative in our study and thinking on revolutions which, I continue to argue in this chapter, closes down fruitful studies into other important aspects of revolution. Throughout his critical analysis of the early study of revolutions, Aya makes favourable references to what were then new developments in the study of revolution. He references the third generation of scholars. He also notes how it has been left to the historians to seek to explain the political workings of revolution, thus indicating the gains made in the emerging historical-sociological approaches which we will now examine in detail. However, as I go on to discuss, it is not apparent that this third generation offers us a suitable escape route.

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[28] Aya (1979) op cit., 55.

Third generation

Having exhausted models for isolating and proving a unitary cause for revolutions such as a violent tipping point due to a mismatch between what people want and what they get, a third wave of study comprised of the advent of the historical sociologists. These scholars sought to conduct research which gave due attention to the historical and social context for revolutions. This school of thought departed from the existing 'natural history' and socio-psychological approaches to revolution by examining more complex aspects of revolutions in the round. Studies joining history and social theory enabled more "historically grounded comparative studies of revolutions", as in the detailed scholarly studies produced by Moore, Wolf and Dunn through the 1960s and 1970s.[29]

However, it was to be Theda Skocpol's landmark historical sociological study comparing the great revolutions in France (1789), China (1911) and Russia (1917) with unsuccessful ones elsewhere, which represented the most serious scholarly attempt to explain revolutions in their political and social milieu. Although Skocpol herself is clear that she does not aim to present a general theory of revolutions, later theorists have followed her approach and this has influenced the field to this day, in the way we define and pin down causes, and in what we expect to be revolutionary outcomes. Scholars have engaged extensively with her Marxist and structuralist emphasis, and added critically or positively to her contribution, thus building the legacy on which current understandings of revolutions have been framed.

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[29] Discussed in Skocpol (1979) op cit., 6; Foran, J. ed. (2005) op cit., 10-11.

I give her work detailed attention here as an exemplar of the dominant strand of historical sociology in the third generation of scholarship on revolutions. The main shift was a move to not only describe events but to analyse why revolutions happen *when* they do and also to investigate the *causes* of revolutions by comparing 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' revolutions. In this section I briefly outline some of her argumentation which is organised around her idea of "conjuncture": the meeting of different social, economic, and political happenings from which revolutions are made.

Skocpol and her adherents believe that revolutions cannot be made by people, but come about due to the position and performance of the state or ruling power in the wider economic, social, and political system. A series of such factors produce a certain **conjuncture** in 'world time' and an ensuing state crisis which paves the way for social transformation between the classes. A key contribution of her work is that it brings the State centrally into the analysis of modern revolutions, deepening understandings which hitherto have been based solely on the historical description of socioeconomic conditions.[30] In a break with what has gone before, Skocpol herself notes how she has "successfully hit scholars over the head" with what she feels is the obvious "centrality of state power and coercive organisations in all revolutions".[31] Undoubtedly the scholarly study of revolution needs such a hit over the head, but Skocpol's choice of 'weapon' continues to be contested.

In formulating her definition of revolution, Skocpol argues that complete revolutions require social *and* political transformations to take place due to a coincidence of "societal structural

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[30] Skocpol (1979) op cit.
[31] Skocpol (1994) op cit. 8.

change with class upheaval".[32] Skocpol argues that mere political revolutions happen when state structures change but social structures do not – and political revolutions are not necessarily accomplished through class conflict.[33] She cites the seventeenth century English revolution as a good example of a political revolution, as sections of the dominant landed classes were in conflict with the monarchy, and this resulting in the introduction of the parliamentary system of government. But, in Skocpol's opinion, without real transformation between the social classes there is no revolution. Anything outside her stricture on social revolutions is merely a changing of the guard, or political revolution, uprising, coup and so on.

Skocpol's own definition of social revolutions has stood the test of time and remains influential. Skocpol's definition is:

> Social revolutions are rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures; and they are accompanied and, in part, carried through by class-based revolts from below.[34]

This definition has remained influential in the analysis of modern revolutions. Skocpol embeds the requirement for social class transformation (that is, a complete transformation of social class structures) as an essential component of the definition of social revolutions. This does a number of things at once.

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[32] Skocpol (1979) op cit., 4.
[33] Compare with Hanna Arendt who invoked Condorcet noting that the word revolution 'can be applied only to revolutions whose aim is freedom', Arendt, H. (1963/2006) *On Revolution*, Penguin edition, 19.
[34] Skocpol (1979) op cit., 4.

First, her definition is fundamentally aligned with Marxist conceptions of revolution. She clearly considers class-based struggle and transformation to be a fundamental feature of revolutions, although she does depart from Marx inasmuch as she does not see the French revolution of 1789 as being merely a bourgeois seizure of power.[35] Skocpol gives due prominence to the role of the peasants, and thus, the transformation of agrarian structures, in the 'great' revolutions.[36]

Second, and of vital importance, Skocpol's definition requires us, therefore, to only consider revolutions retrospectively (and historically), and thus being contingent on the outcomes delivered. This has the effect of occluding important aspects of revolutionary processes and situations which cannot be garnered from a study which proceeds to investigate only the causes of revolutions which are defined, in retrospect, by their outcomes.

Third, as I have mentioned, her approach serves to relegate political revolutions to the periphery because they lack social class transformations. Defining revolutions as being based on transformations between classes of people whereby the workers or peasantry, for

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[35]Tucker, Robert, ed. (1978) *The Marx-Engels Reader, second edition*, London & New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 595.

[36] In this Skocpol was influenced by Barrington Moore's ground breaking Marxist-influenced study on *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the making of the modern world*, published in 1966; and given a sympathetic treatment in Skocpol's critical review published in 1994 in *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*, op cit., 25-54. See also: Wolf, E. (1975) 'Peasants and Political Mobilization', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 17:4, 385-38; and, for a rational choice theory influence see Scott, J. C. (1976) *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: rebellion and subsistence in South East Asia*, New Haven: Yale University Press. For studies on the peasantry in the context of the Middle East see Beinin, J. (2001) *Workers Peasants in the Modern Middle East,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Lawson, F. (1981) 'Rural Revolt and Provincial Society in Egypt, 1820-1824', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 13, 131-153; and for Iran see Abisaab, R. J. (2016) 'Peasant Uprisings in Astarabad: the Siyāh Pūshān [wearers of black], the Sayyids, and the Safavid State', *Iranian Studies*, 49:3, 471-492.

example, gain power and own or redistribute property resonates historically, and may be how some revolutions play out, but this definition may not (and need not) fit all revolutions. Skocpol's influence has resulted in a certain neglect in the scholarship as to transnational and differing kinds of liberation struggles which may not be in direct contention only with and in a bounded state context. Generally the structuralist approach occludes any potential for detailed analysis of what people were saying and why they made and named a revolution, but we return to tackle such issues of popular politics from below later in this chapter and, methodologically, in the next chapter.

Having flagged a possible definitional tautology of revolution in which the actual definition of revolution itself requires the inclusion of certain criteria relating to outcomes, we can move on to summarise how Skocpol maps the complex causal factors for revolution. Central to and privileged in her analysis is the state as an autonomous actor in the way it performs both in the domestic and in the wider international system.[37] Skocpol forcefully argues that the state must be considered as the essential macro unit of analysis. In particular the state's 'administrative and coercive organisations' are a central aspect of her analysis of social revolutions.[38]

Then, the importance of 'world time' is regarded as precipitative: historical events collide and combine to provide the elements for crisis. In this way Skocpol pays homage to Marxist conceptions of history and the importance of history in ordering events and paving the way for crisis and change. Once the state is in crisis, for example the fiscal crisis in France which

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[37] Skocpol (1979) op cit., 110-1.
[38] Skocpol (1979) op cit., 32-3.

preceded the revolution of 1789, the ensuing class struggle brings about a complete social transformation.[39] Such crises opened up and worked with other factors to generate pressure toward change and led to political contestation from, in the case of France, the nobles and bourgeoisie and then the peasants, who seized on the uncertain political climate and the return of the Estates General system to advance their own causes.

In summary, Skocpol's study argues in each of her case studies that a series of unrelated macro-level structural factors worked together to enable a revolution to emerge. Skocpol concludes that successful social revolutions were "launched by crises centred in the structures and situations of the state of the Old Regimes".[40] This 'conjuncture' resulted in the meeting of a state crisis at home with economic and political vulnerability in the international system.   In this sense she offers some generalised patterns for social revolutions. Skocpol thus established herself as the leading proponent of a structural, state-centric, explanation and analysis of revolutions. Subsequent theorists have either defended and built on her work, such as Jeffery Goodwin,[41] or become her critics, such as William Sewell, who reflects on the importance of ideology in the French revolution,[42] as well as Jack Goldstone, who is critical of her structuralist argumentation.[43]

The structuralist school of thought on revolutions has dominated the literature and the theoretical study of revolutions. Whether intentionally or not, the historical sociological

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[39] Skocpol (1979) op cit., 23-24.
[40] Skocpol (1979) op cit., 111.
[41] Goodwin, J. & Skocpol, T. (1989) 'Explaining Revolutions in the Contemporary Third World', *Politics and Society*, 17:4, December, 489-507.
[42] Skocpol, T. (1994) op cit., 169-198.
[43] Goldstone, J. (1980) 'Theories of Revolution: The Third Generation', *World Politics*, 32:3, April, 425-453.

study of revolution has set up subsequent research on revolution along the lines of the structure versus agency debates.[44] This is problematic for two connected reasons. First, it encourages choosing between two supposedly divergent explanatory paths. Second, this binary obscures directions for exploring the dynamic relations between state, institutions, political actors, and the public or 'ordinary' people. Later in this chapter I will bring together the strands of scholarship on revolutions and ideology.

For now, I note that such debates have informed moves within academia to further fine-tune the methods and tools for the study of revolution. These developments are captured in the fourth wave of scholarship on revolutions. This new scholarship sought to respond to some of the limits in Skocpol's structural commitments in order to rebalance attention to agency, in tune with structural factors, by looking more closely at organised mobilisation and the influence of ideas and culture in revolutions, among other variables.

Fourth generation

Building and improving on the third wave of historical-sociological approaches, political scientists such as John Foran nurtured new scholarly contributions in a 'fourth generation' of study through the 1990s and beyond.[45] These studies attempted to pursue inquiry into the "somewhat interrelated areas of agency, structural considerations, and the place of culture and ideology in revolution".[46] It is in this wave of scholarship that the competition between structure and agency gains pace, and from which we witness the emergence of new

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[44] See Pleasants, N. for problems regarding the structure/agency debate: Pleasants, N. (1997) 'Free to act otherwise? A Wittgensteinian deconstruction of the concept of agency in contemporary social and political theory', *History of the Human Sciences* 10:4, 1–28; and a response in dialogue with Colin Hay on same: Pleasants, N. (2009) 'Structure, Agency and Ontological Confusion: A Response to Hay', *Political Studies*, 57, 885-891.
[45] Foran, J. (1993) 'Theories of Revolution Revisited: Toward a Fourth Generation?' *Sociological Theory,* 11:1, March, 1-20.
[46] Foran, J. (1993) ibid., 6.

theorising on social mobilisation and political contention. This last development will be given particular and more detailed attention here as it encompasses an influential and, in many aspects, productive mode of study. Finally, I will discuss some of the benefits and shortcomings of this generation of scholarship, and the possible application of these theoretical and conceptual tools to my own research.

A key driver for reflection on the study of modern revolutions was, of course, the emergence of revolutions across the globe and beyond our own Eurocentric confines. In particular, John Foran's theoretical treatment of 'Third World' revolutions such as those which occurred in Latin America, Asia and Africa, concentrated our attention on relatively neglected and variegated modern revolutions. Foran recognises that there are problems with an imposed duality between structure and agency approaches, and states that he and others made attempts to try to 'explode it' in a way which opened up new thinking on revolutions which "blends culture and political economy".[47] Nevertheless, revolutions, for Foran, are still defined by an assumed outcome: "in terms of taking and holding state power long enough to engage in a project of social transformation", and he gives the 'successful' examples of Mexico 1910-1920, China 1911-1949, Cuba 1953-59, Iran 1977-9, and Nicaragua 1977-79.[48] Again, this requirement of outcome in definitions of revolution presupposes that only some revolutions are worthy of study, and then only in retrospect. Thus it reproduces some of the problematic approaches we see in Skocpol's study.

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[47] Foran, J. (2005) *Taking power: on the origins of third world revolutions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2.
[48] Foran (2005) ibid., 227.

However, Foran's scholarship is an important advance which ties in with other attempts within the scholarship on revolutions which aim to shine a light on the mobilisation of people in revolutions. Within this broadly conceived field of social mobilisation theory, Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow are prominent exponents.[49] They manage to decouple some of the distinctive and very different aspects of a revolution and to introduce new conceptual tools for its study.[50] They have enriched scholarship and remain pertinent to a study of revolutionary actors because the tools they promote offer us some useful ways to look at revolutionary processes or revolutions in train. I will therefore examine their ideas in more detail.

Tilly and Tarrow treat political contention in the variegated ways in which it is present in the everyday, but also in the context of analysing complex revolutions.[51] In this section I will attend to their later scholarship on revolution and political contention (this will necessarily be selective as their research spans decades and makes a number of turns). I will pick out some of the most influential conceptual ideas that have emerged from their work and draw out some of its possible limits, at least for the purposes of this research.

Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow's scholarship has given more attention to revolutionary processes and to so-called agency dimensions. We can usefully compare their definition of

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[49] See the founding study: McAdam, D., Tarrow, S. & Tilly, C. (2001) *Dynamics of Contention*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. There are later editions and divergent studies relating to the same, as I discuss now.
[50] Tilly, C. & Tarrow, S. (2007), *Contentious Politics*, Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 155.
[51] Casting the conceptual net as wide as to include all kinds of political contention has drawn criticism which they have responded to in subsequent publications.

a revolution to that of Skocpol's, which we discussed earlier. For Tilly and Tarrow a revolution is:

> [t]he forcible transfer of power over a state in the course of which at least two distinct blocs of contenders make incompatible claims to control the state, and some significant portion of the population subject to the state's jurisdiction acquiesces in the claims of each bloc.[52]

As discussed earlier, Skocpol's method shows a tendency to link the definition of 'revolution' with that of 'required outcomes' in her structural treatment of revolutions. To illuminate the refinement in their definition, Tilly and Tarrow introduce new terms so as to recognise different aspects of a revolution. For example: a 'revolutionary situation' as distinctive from a 'revolutionary outcome', thus opening up the internal processes of revolutions. In focusing more on aspects of mobilisation, and on the political actors, these scholars have helpfully aided a more nuanced understanding of revolutions. They argue that both revolutionary situations and revolutionary outcomes require an examination of how the state interacts with and reacts to political contention, on its various defined levels. In doing so they introduce the idea of 'multiple sovereignty' which emerges within a revolutionary situation and in which differing claims and interests are represented.[53] Once contention reaches a level whereby it is challenging the state's legitimacy then a revolutionary situation has evolved in which different actors are contending for power.

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[52] Tilly & Tarrow (2007) ibid., 155.
[53] Tilly & Tarrow (2007) ibid., 10-14.

Tilly's and Tarrow's work remains influential, with the increase in scholarly attention to social movements, because it draws attention to the possible investigation of the different groupings *within* a revolution, the interests they seek to protect, and the claims they are making. Tilly and Tarrow thus succeed in moving away from classical Marxist configurations limited to class relations to consider a wider variegated set of actors involved in political upheaval and contention. However, their conceptual approach tends to introduce other problems, not least in the way they seem to revert to a rational actor model of analysis in which individual interests are pursued and isolated. So we can still find limitations in the application of the mobilisation theorists to fully allow for a study of revolutionary agents, their political thought and their ideas. As we can see from their definition above, Tilly and Tarrow continue to adhere to dominant trends in the study of revolutions. They tend to tie considerations of mobilisation to a research-imperative to pin down the causes of revolutions and focus inquiry on the state.[54]

A revolutionary outcome or complete revolution occurs, according to these mobilisation theorists, when there are an increasing number of regime defectors from the ruling elites, when the revolutionaries gain arms, and when there are significant numbers of military defectors from the regime.[55] Significantly, though, and related to the multiple sovereignty claims, in their work a central requirement is that revolutionaries gain control of the state apparatus in negotiation between regime elements and the revolutionaries.[56] The

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[54] As does Jeff Goodwin whose definition is thus: "a relatively rapid and fundamental change not only to state institutions, but also of the economic, cultural, and associational arrangements among the population governed by those institutions". In Foran, J. (1997) op cit., 30, n1.

[55] I note here too that this seems to focus our attention on revolutions involving high levels of political violence. I cannot pursue this focus further here but scholarship on the so-called negotiated revolutions can be instructive. See Lawson, G. (2004) *Negotiated revolutions: the Czech Republic, South Africa and Chile,* Aldershot: Ashgate.

[56] Tilly & Tarrow (2007) op cit., 155-6.

mobilisation scholars continue to reserve the revolutionary name tag for "a revolutionary situation with a revolutionary outcome".[57]

The approaches outlined here improve on the first two waves of literature which concentrated on empirical historical work and a psychological propensity for violence, respectively. The most influential literature has been discussed and the main arguments referred to regarding the ways in which political scientists have been influenced by scientific approaches to codifying and setting out the essential and variable attributes of a revolution. In the third generation of scholarship we see the domination of historical sociology. Bringing social and economic history into the analysis added crucially important historical context, but it also forced the discipline into studying things that are 'complete', as historians do, and then relied on and codified the outcomes of these 'experiments', as scientists do. Anne Norton's critical essay on the joining of politics with history provides a good basis for a critical assessment of the contribution of the historical sociologists, as she asserts the need for an "alternative, disruptive, conception of time" to allow for the reality that human activity, and politics, "is never smooth, uniform and uninterrupted".[58]

The fourth generation sought to accommodate the more messy and contingent business of revolutions, in particular through attention to the actions of humans and so-called 'agency' in tandem with analysis of the state and the social classes. However, I also noted that despite these efforts and advances in thinking about the place of people, their ideas, and the wider ideational contexts in which they operate, there is still an over-emphasis on structural factors around the role and place of the state and the social classes. Within this tradition there

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[57] Tilly & Tarrow (2007) op cit., 155.
[58] Norton, A. (2010) 'Politics against History: Temporal Distortions in the Study of Politics', *Political Studies*, 58, 349.

remains a compulsion for focusing on causation and on producing a single theory which generalises across diverse and complex social and political activity. This wave of scholars thus remained wedded, in important ways, to an approach which assumed that it is possible to prove and to measure and to generalize, or provide an overarching theory of revolution. In such theories, in as much as people or agents have been studied, there seems nevertheless to be a tendency to reduce them to units of analysis protecting interests and making rational-actor decisions. Thus the claims of the fourth wave and of the social mobilisation theorists to be bringing agency back in are at best partial if those agents mostly form units of analysis for, albeit reconfigured, structural treatments of revolutions.

A constant omission in the study of revolutions has been to simply look at ideas in a particular period of time, in this case in Syria's revolution, to see what is happening, what people are saying and what ideas they are acting upon. This does not require us to prove that individual or collective ideas caused a revolution, let alone require it to first successfully 'deliver'. The study of revolution has suffered from and continues to suffer from certain methodological 'blinkers' which are reproduced by new scholars drawing on the established canon of scholarship on revolution. This has the effect of regurgitating the same narrow set of questions and can directly block off other important research avenues. Revolutions, regardless of the final outcomes, always comprise of and institute important political and social change (for good or bad).

While we can agree that the macro level social and political factors in revolutions are crucially important, not every angle of research must be limited to these methodological paths. For example, it is okay to recognise the macro and structural findings and then to investigate something different, especially where this departure might shine a more

significant light on the people who do the marching, protesting, organising and fighting in revolutions. This shift to the 'raw material', the ideas of collectives and of people rising up, requires that we think about the ideological aspects and political dimensions of their actions.

Despite some important contributions and valid argumentation, we are still far behind in our thinking on people and their ideas and practices within revolutions.[59] This is because any analysis of ideas, or the ideologies which contain them, has always relied on the extent to which ideas may have *caused* revolutions. If political scientists cannot prove that ideas caused a particular revolution or show any patterns to illustrate as much, then ideas are crossed off the researchers' list as an avenue of exploration. This hinders learning about the complex processes and practices emerging within a particular revolution. Such knowledge is of itself really worthy of study – given the complex political thinking and human sacrifices which underpin many revolutions. However, before we can look properly at this in the context of Syria, it is important to set out the conventional scholarship and history of the study of ideology. I do this now.

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[59] Though there has been some welcome new scholarship since I conducted this literature review and in particular the latest Arab revolutions. Much of this has gone to press in the final stages of my writing up and thus it has not been possible to incorporate it here. In particular see Chalcraft, J. (2016) *Popular Politics in the Making of the Middle East*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. I discuss this and other recent contributions later in this chapter.

II   The study of ideology

Scholarship on ideology has traditionally emanated from the same political science research as that conducted on revolution.[60] Perhaps not surprisingly, then, we can find some important overlaps and similarities in their epistemological and methodological approaches to the study of revolution and ideology. In this section I focus on the conventional study and history of ideology. This ranges across the historiography of the study of ideology from its first appearance in the Enlightenment and French Revolution onwards, and the key ways in which the concept was solidified and came to be considered pejoratively in the twentieth century. I also show how Marxist conceptions of ideology have been influential. I briefly summarise innovations which have emerged in a broadly post Marxist and poststructuralist school of thought. I reference the influence of discourse theory and linguistic philosophy. I then move on to join the thinking about ideology to that of the study of revolution more explicitly.

The earliest discussion of the word 'ideology' is attributed to the scientist Antoine Destutt de Tracy in his work on the Elements d'Ideologie which promoted the scientific (rational) study of ideas. The notion of ideology was first considered in the philosophical debates of the Enlightenment period and the 1789 French revolution.[61] It gained a particular political currency when the Enlightenment 'ideologues' established a programme for the 'teaching of ideas' grounded in science and invoking Universalist principles. In tracing the conceptual

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[60] Re the problem of ideology for political scientists see Connolly, W.E. (1967/2008) *Political Science and Ideology*, New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction.

[61] Stråth, B. 'Ideology and Conceptual History', in Freeden, M. & Stears, M. (2013) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3-4.

history of ideology, Bo Stråth notes how the subsequent French counter-revolutionary period called into question the role of the ideologues - Napoleon saw to it that they were undermined and condemned as "whimsical dreamers".[62] The result of this offensive was a turn away from intellectuals and the entrapment of politics within the narrowly defined political realm of government. This period is thus notable for the shifting of the position of ideology towards a mere "label for unrealistic theories that tried to intervene in the sphere of government and political action".[63]

In the twentieth century ideology was commonly regarded in the pejorative and this position was later sustained, in different ways, through the legacy of Marx and Engels. In particular *The German Ideology*, once translated and made available from 1932, became influential in crafting understandings of ideology until our present time.[64] In the first of two volumes, written between 1845 and 1846, Marx and Engels discuss 'ruling ideas' and also 'revolutionary ideas'; terms which signalled their conception of ideas, and ideology, and their conviction in the project of communism. In their analysis (and critique) of capitalist societies and the system of the ruling and bourgeoisie elite, ideas are produced and promoted by powerful elites to maintain power and domination. In this sense Marx and Engels make an important point about ideas circulating in society in that they "associate ideology [and by extension ideas] with class", that is, a ruling class, but in ways which mean that ideas were instruments of control.[65] In its classic Marxist conception, ideology, as a pejorative and unitary structure, is attached to a bourgeoisie acting to maximise its own interests over the working class.

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[62] Stråth (2013) ibid., 4.
[63] Stråth (2013) ibid., 5.
[64] Here I reference extracts from 'The German Ideology, Part I in: Tucker, R. C. ed. (1978) *The Marx-Engels Reader*, second edition, New York, London: W.W. Norton & Co.
[65] Freeden, M. (2003) *Ideology: A Very short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 6.

However, as these mentions of revolutionary ideas might suggest, there are possibilities to break out of this system of complete oppression. This can be achieved when the working class or the proletariat gain a collective consciousness. One aspect of Marx's conception of ideology is that the workers are unaware of their 'false consciousness' because of a distorted social world in which, as in Marx's *camera obscura* analogy, the bourgeoisie *appears* to be acting in the interest of the people (the workers, the proletariat) but is merely protecting and promoting the narrow interests (the means of production, land and property ownership) of the ruling elites. Those in power use ideology to dominate and control and to create an all-encompassing truth and validity.[66] Once the ideological cover of capitalism is exposed the workers can organise and become conscious of their own reality and their own *real* interests.

There were other influential currents which came later and which provided equally negative treatments of ideology. In the twentieth century ideology came to be primarily associated negatively with the worst political excesses of communism, the totalitarian ideologies of the Soviet Union and the binaries of the Cold War. This drive to banish ideologies was, of course, further reinforced by the experience of European fascism and the coming to power of the Nazis. In the latter half of the twentieth century a school of thought emerged which promoted the notion of the 'end of ideology', at least, that is, the end of ideological competition and contestation, and the triumph of liberalism.[67] This sentiment was reinvigorated with the fall of communism and the Berlin Wall. After the Second World War it was the political ideology of liberalism, in its various strains, that formed the hegemonic system of government at home and as part of an international system of states. Increasingly

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[66] Freeden (2003) ibid., 6.
[67] Fukuyama, F. (1992) *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York: Avon.

there has been an assumption that the 'failure' of a broadly conceived left and/or socialist current (at least in Europe, but also beyond) meant the end of competing and destructive ideologies and the triumph of liberalism, leading to declarations of the 'end of ideology'.[68]

Challenges to an assumed status quo came in the form of, for example, the events of May 1968 in Paris,[69] rising feminist movements, as well as the significant decolonization processes and the attendant emergence of a critical school of postcolonial studies.[70] Despite this increasing political contestation, an assumed age of consensus and an end to political contest ensued. From within the scholarship critical responses to a new order, of neoliberalism, emerged in particular from the sub-field of political theory which questioned the assumptions that underpinned it.

The linguistic turn and discourse theory

The unleashing of more complex social and political currents paved the way for new critical approaches to thinking about ideology and the internal contents of ideologies.[71] New academic schools of thought and new methodological approaches emerged from the 1960s, influencing and cutting across the different disciplines. In particular, we saw the so-called

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[68] For the original thesis see: Bell, D. (1962) *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*, New York: Free Press.

[69] For a detailed and fascinating journalistic treatment of this see Seale, P. & McConville, M. (1968) *French Revolution 1968*, Hammondsworth: Penguin.

[70] I pick up on this literature and the debates within it and around it later in this chapter.

[71] See discussion by Torfing, J. (2005) 'Discourse Theory: Achievements, Arguments, and Challenges', in Howarth, D. & Torfing, J. *Discourse Theory in European Politics: Identity, Policy and Governance*, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 1-32. Key among the adherents of the earlier school of critical discourse analysis was: Fairclough, N. (1992) *Discourse and Social Change*, Cambridge: Polity Press; and, Fairclough, N. (1994) *Critical Discourse Analysis*, London: Longman.

linguistic turn[72] in philosophy, and (later) the insight which 'post-analytical' philosophy[73] afforded together with post-Marxist directions in political science and theory. These linguistic investigations led to all sorts of philosophical questions about meanings in context, and in text, and theoretical innovation in 'speech-act theory' and in contextualism;[74] shifting away from abstract analysis and classical Marxist explanation.

Quentin Skinner developed some of these philosophical ideas; in particular, later Wittgenstein and Austin's speech-act approach, which Skinner refashioned and extended for theorising about political thought in history.[75] Aletta Norval has conducted an in depth analysis of this subfield, in which she notes:

> The later Wittgenstein's understanding of language as a social activity, and Austin's work on the 'illocutionary force' of language served to open up new areas of analysis, and new methodological approaches to the study of political thought and its relation to action in specific historical contexts. Skinner's work on the role of *virtú* in Machiavelli's *The Prince* is a case in point. Of great importance is the emphasis on exploring the languages of politics in terms of prevailing conventions,

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[72] For the idea of the 'linguistic turn' , see Rorty, R.M. ed. (1967/1992), *The Linguistic Turn: essays in philosophical method, with two retrospective essays,* Chicago: University of Chicago; and, discussion in Cameron, D. (2006) 'Ideology and Language', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, June, 11:2, 141- 152, n1; van Dijk, T. A.(1998/2000) *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (reprint), London, California, New Dehli: Sage; Norval, A. (2013) 'Poststructuralist conceptions of ideology', in Freeden, M., Sargent, L. T. & Stears, M. eds. (2013) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, 155-174.

[73] See the collection by Rajchman, J. & West, C. eds. (1985) *Post-Analytic Philosophy*, New York: Columbia University Press.

[74] On method see Skinner, Q (2002) *Visions of Politics: Volume 1: Regarding Method*, Cambridge University Press; Wittgensteinian contextualism has recently been developed by Charles Travis, see Travis, C. (2001) *Unshadowed thought,* Cambridge MA: Harvard.

[75] Palonen, K. (2003) *Quentin Skinner: History, Politics, Rhetoric*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

including shared vocabularies, principles, assumptions, criteria for testing

knowledge-claims, problems, conceptual distinctions, and so on.[76]

This illustrates the turn towards thinking about words, or ideas, and to investigations which

took into account the possible 'meaning in use'.[77] This meant that the philosophical

treatment of ordinary conventions or 'language-games',[78] was borrowed by theorists

seeking innovative avenues and modes of inquiry.[79] Norval, for example, draws on James

Tully's analysis of Skinner to extract ideas about the important connections between

language and ideology:

expressly argued for in Skinner's work is an understanding of ideology as nothing

other than a language of politics deployed to legitimate political action and to

establish and/or alter a society's moral identity. From this perspective, the analysis

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[76] Norval, A. (2000) 'The Things We Do with Words – Contemporary Approaches to the Analysis of Ideology', *British Journal of Political Science*, 30:2, 319.

[77] See section 43 in Wittgenstein for the origin of this idea: Wittgenstein, L. (1958) *Philosophical Investigations*, I, 3rd edn., trans Anscombe, G. E. M., New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 20-21. It has been much developed since; see for example Scheman, N. (1996) 'Forms of life: Mapping the rough ground', in Sluga, H. D. & Stern, D. G., *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 383-410.

[78] See especially sections 7 & 23 of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations, ibid.*

[79] The leading proponents of 'ordinary language' philosophy were J. L. Austin, P.F. Strawson, and, to some extent L. Wittgenstein himself. Questions on the extent to which the sub-field of political theory has really engaged with the work of these philosophers are provoked by Gunnell, J.G. (2011) *Political Theory and Social Science: Cutting Against the Grain*, in which he takes political theorists to task for, he claims, *superficially* employing Wittgenstein in their work. Some of the poststructuralist theorists (most notably, Lyotard, J.F. (1979) *La Condition postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit), certainly borrow from Wittgenstein, not necessarily unproblematically, to sharpen their analyses and to productively depart from limiting and problematic metanarratives and limiting political discourses. As we shall see in Chapter Two, Connolly is influenced by Wittgenstein and other key figures in the 'linguistic turn', and, Freeden makes use of Wittgenstein's ideas such as 'family resemblance', but Freeden's method of locating the concept in its ideational context appears to differ from what Wittgenstein's approach would have been; see Freeden, M. (1996) op cit., 73 n42, 89-91. For a more recent, ambitious, analysis of the political implications of and possible application of Wittgenstein with reference to the 'dialogical' approaches of Skinner, Taylor and Tully see Temelini, M. (2015) *Wittgenstein and the Study of Politics*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press. For some limits to Temelini's approach, see Harkin, J. & Read, R. (2016) 'Review of Michael Temelini's Wittgenstein and the Study of Politics', *The Review of Politics*, 78:2, 329-331.

of ideologies must proceed through a careful, historically informed conceptual analysis.[80]

Skinner's intellectual oeuvre is vast but he does usefully update and bring his canonical contributions together in a volume dedicated to method and interpretation of texts which uses Wittgenstein and Austin to argue for analysis which investigates not what was merely said but what were agents actually doing and what might they have meant in a particular context. [81] This utilises Austin's 'performative' aspect of language, and his helpful distinction between locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary dimensions of 'speech acts'. In particular the illocutionary force of a word in use can indicate something beyond the text. For example, when a person says 'I do' in the ceremony of marriage he or she is *doing* something very significant: entering into a contractual marriage arrangement.[82]

I cannot elucidate further here and I am not suggesting that these philosophers alone, or a unitary reliance on Skinner's method[83], can be used to build a theory or framework for the distinctly political project of looking at ideas in revolutions. Rather their influence on political thinking is often implicit in 'borrowings' from the language philosophers to enhance analytical thinking in political theory. For the purposes of my research, I flag this linguistic turn because language and the study of the politics of language is central to

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[80] Norval (2000) ibid., 319-320. The quotation continues, "[Freeden's] approach resonates in important respects with the work of other contemporary writers on ideology who draw on Gramscian post-Marxist and poststructuralist traditions of thinking." I come to dealing with Michael Freeden in Chapter Two. Norval also goes on to link Gramsci's interest in shared conceptions of the world directly to Wittgenstein's interest in shared forms of language and of life.

[81] Skinner, Q. (2002) Chapter Six: 'Interpretation and the understanding of speech acts', *Vision of Politics: Volume I: Regarding Method*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 103-104

[82] Austin, J.L. (1979) 'Performative Utterances', *Philosophical Papers,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 233-252.

[83] Skinner (2002) op cit.

understanding ideologies and ideas. I now look briefly at the subsequent growth of a sub-field of discourse theory which also tackles the study of ideologies in new ways.

These ideas have provided stimulating modes of inquiry most significantly in the emergence of Discourse Theory which has been influenced too by new Marxist directions. One of the most influential writers on ideology since Marx is the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci.[84] One of his contributions was to reconstitute the theory of ideologies so that they could be understood on a number of levels. The idea of state dominance through coercion was only one way of understanding the ways in which capitalist societies sustained power. Another important aspect was that the ruling elite were able to garner and maintain continuing consent (and therefore domination) through non-state mechanisms. This *hegemony* might thus be achieved and maintained by the appearance of contest between elites in civil society and through the media, for example. Equally, state hegemony might also be contested or countered in a number of ways.

The discourse theorists[85] were influential in moving beyond a well-established school of critical discourse analysis,[86] to rethink ideology (beyond critical approaches which aimed to 'uncover' hidden ideological dispositions in our speeches and our texts). This recognised that ideologies are embedded and ubiquitous but that they are not merely formed and

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[84] Hoare, Q & Nowell Smith, G. eds (1971/1986 reprint) *Selections from Prison the Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci,* London: Lawrence & Wishart.

[85] Norval, A.(2000) 'The Things We Do with Words – Contemporary Approaches to the Analysis of Ideology', in *British Journal of Political Science*, 30:2, 2000, 313-346; and, poststructuralist approaches are well-articulated and put to use by Martin, J. (2005) 'Ideology and antagonism in modern Italy': Poststructuralist Reflections, *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 8:2, 145-160; also, a useful introductory textbook on poststructuralism is: Finlayson, A. & Valentine, J. (2002) *Politics and Post-structuralism: An Introduction*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

[86] Key among the adherents of the earlier school of critical discourse analysis were: Fairclough, N. (1992) *Discourse and Social Change*, Cambridge: Polity Press; and, Fairclough, N. (1994) *Critical Discourse Analysis*, London: Longman.

maintained by ruling elites in formal and party politics, but also in many other dimensions of our everyday lives.[87] Thus we needed to make efforts at decoding ideologies as "part and parcel of the run-of-the-mill thinking about politics".[88] An emerging school of discourse theory has subsequently 'reinscribed' our understanding of ideologies as being a "decentred conception of structure and of subjectivity, developed within the context of a systematic engagement with language and the symbolic dimensions of political practices".[89] In particular, the radical ideas of the theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantelle Mouffe exemplify the post-Marxist school which sought to unsettle and unseat structuralist and foundational analyses.[90]

These theorists were influenced by Gramsci's ideas on hegemony but took them in new post-Marxist directions so as to begin "the process of re-appropriation of an intellectual tradition, as well as the process of going beyond it".[91] The work of Laclau and Mouffe needs to be considered in the context of their re-articulation of the interaction of the social (ie. social classes) and the political (ie. adversarial political contestation). There is not the space for us to elaborate on their expansive and influential work, but it has been a central influence and driver of the emerging field of 'discourse theory'.[92] Their critique provides ways of

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[87] Torfing, J. (2005) 'Discourse Theory: Achievements, Arguments, and Challenges', in Howarth, D. & Torfing, J. *Discourse Theory in European Politics: Identity, Policy and Governance*, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 7.

[88] Freeden, M. (2013) 'Language, Interpretation, and Ideology', in Leopold, D. & Stears, eds. M. *Political Theory: Methods and approaches*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 196-215.

[89] Norval A. (2013) 'Poststructuralist Conceptions of Ideology', in Freeden, M., Sargent, L.T. & Stears, M. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 156,

[90] See Laclau, E. & Mouffe, C. (1985/2014) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Polity*, second edn., London, New York: Verso, xi. The philosophical aspects are considered in Laclau, E. (no date) 'Philosophical Roots of Discourse Theory', *Archived Papers, Centre for Theoretical Studies*: University of Essex.

[91] Laclau, E. & Mouffe, C. (1985/2014) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Polity*, second edition. London, New York: Verso, xi.

[92] Prominent among the theorists on discourse and ideology were Mouffe and Laclau, ibid; see also: Howarth, D. and Stavrakakis, Y. (2000) 'Introducing discourse theory and political analysis', 1-23, in Howarth, D., Norval, A. & Stavrakakis, Y. eds (2000) *Discourse theory and political analysis: identities, hegemonies and social change*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

moving beyond seemingly inadequate classical Marxist and structural frames, towards a consideration of the shifting empirical reality of our increasingly complex and globalised world.[93]

Studying ideologies and revolution in the Arab world

The developments outlined above are pertinent to the study of dignity in Syria's revolution on a number of interrelated levels. Firstly, the post-Marxist direction helps us to consider revolutions beyond Marxist configurations, a problem we discussed in the first section of this chapter. In Marxian and classical Marxist formations, revolutions were analysed based on assumptions about the nature and role of social classes and the role of the state. As I summarised earlier, this has limited our vision of the full revolutionary picture. In the (broadly Gramscian) move beyond formal politics and narrow, unitary conceptions of a bourgeoisie or elite-led dominant ideology, we can think productively about more complex manifestations of ideology and the ideas that make them up. We can consider possible counter-hegemonic aspects of ideologies: ways that ideas might serve to counter and challenge the dominant power. Centrally for this research project, if we pursue such an approach to ideas we necessarily move closer to agents and their thought-practices (and positionality). Along this path, we can explore efforts to interrupt dominant power structures and counter embedded, hegemonic discourses.[94]

However, we might raise the question here concerning to what extent seemingly context-specific European theoretical projects that stemmed from a crisis in the European left, with

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[93] For differing applications of DT see the collection in Howarth, D., Norval, A. & Stavrakakis, Y. (2000) *Discourse theory and political analysis: Identities, hegemonies and social change*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
[94] The whole topic of counterhegemonic struggle is covered well by Chalcraft, J. & Noonan, Y. eds. (2007) *Counterhegemony in the colony and postcolony*, Hants: Palgrave Macmillan, especially the introduction, 1-19.

its particular traditions, can be drawn on in the study of a revolution occurring outside any properly democratic and party political structures, as is the case with Syria. There have been several very recent studies published reflecting and responding to the full weight of the latest Arab revolutions which help tackle such questions and which might accommodate my own research approach. In recent years scholars of the Middle East have also tapped into these same poststructuralist debates and offered innovative approaches which move beyond some of the most common methods of research based on political economy and state authoritarianism. John Chalcraft and Yaseen Noorani address conceptions of hegemonic power in their edited volume: *Counterhegemony in the Colony and Postcolony*.[95] John Chalcraft picks up these questions too in his latest work on popular politics in the Middle East. He draws on some aspects of Gramsci to forge the conceptual tools to put to use in a study of 'bottom up politics'.[96]

Charles Tripp attends to the same question by providing detailed insights into a "politics of resistance in action",[97] reinvigorating the field of study and tracing concrete examples of the variegated politics and culture of resistance in the Middle East, which has long been present. For Tripp these creative 'paths of resistance' — from graffiti to art installations and rap music, all the way through to taking up arms - feature as resolutely *political* acts.[98] Part of this turn to the performative and creative articulations of resistance,[99] for example, has benefitted from the later theoretical and linguistic developments I have outlined above. In

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[95] Chalcraft, J. & Noorani, Y. eds. (2007) *Counterhegemony in the colony and postcolony*, Hants: Palgrave Macmillan.
[96] Chalcraft, J. (2016) op cit.
[97] Tripp, C. (2013) *The Power and the People: Paths of Resistance in the Middle East*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2.
[98] On this, refer to back to my comments in the thesis introduction about agental claims to be apolitical.
[99] See also Tripp, C. (2013a) 'Performing the Public: Theatres of Power in the Middle East', *Constellations*, 20:2, 203-216; and, Ismail, S. (2011) 'The Syrian Uprising: Imagining and Performing the Nation', in *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 11:3, 538-549

particular the recognition of the extent to which the whole field of contestation is, to a notable degree, fluid: bounded by social and political context, but not radically determined or structured in the ways perhaps supposed by Marx or Althusser.[100] Such scholarship, argues Chalcraft, straddles a vast and rich terrain, attending to "subjectivity, representation, cultural creativity, identities, frames and principles".[101]

New directions of study of the Middle East region have been limited, hitherto, by a narrow focus on, for example, studying the region solely through a lens of economic determinism or political economy. These moves have enriched scholarship over the last decades and the latest round of Arab revolutions have served to recalibrate and return scholars to attend to such topics. More broadly, the utility of the canon of western theory and scholarship in the study and deepening understanding of the Middle East, or non-western world, is a perennial question. I cannot tackle all the methodological issues here but return to this topic again in Chapter Two in light of developments in and methodological insight within political theory and, in particular, within the framework of Comparative Political Theory (CPT).

To summarise this section, the conventional study of ideology had frequently been premised on the idea that ideological competition can be dissolved and a consensus-led, pragmatic form of governing society can pertain. This is reflected in the scholarly study of ideology claimed by researchers as an 'objective detachment', as if they existed outside this phenomenon of 'ideology' which they examined. As we shall see in Chapter Two, the approach I take for this research raises more general objections to this epistemological blind

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[100] See Althusser, L. (1971/2008) Chapter One: 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (notes towards an investigation)', *On Ideology,* London, New York: Verso, 1-60.
[101] Chalcraft (2016) op cit., 16.

spot.[102] This objective distance is not possible if we consider that ideology, or rather ideologies, are *ubiquitous* parts of our social and political world. In this conception and interpretation, ideologies can be positive or negative; they are complex constructions which help to organise and define, and therefore distinguish different outlooks, priorities and so on.

I have briefly indicated some influential developments in political theory and an emerging sub-field of discourse theory in which we find the coming together of the study of ideology with the realization that it is necessary to attend both to the ways in which ideologies might be understood (which I do shortly, in my discussion of Freeden's study of ideologies in Chapter 2) and how ideas need language. Language intersects with ideologies and is central to the way in which ideas and beliefs are articulated, contested, and may become hegemonic as part of an established ideological tradition or pattern. I have then sought to join up this thinking and to start to put it in conversation with new scholarship on the Middle East. However, before I can set out my own approach to this research study, I first need to bring the different strands of ideology and revolution together.

III   Ideology and revolution

A good starting point in a consideration of the interplay between revolution and ideologies is to examine the scholarship on the Iranian revolution of 1979 and, in particular, the specific debates which emerged from it in relation to the role that ideologies might play. The year

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[102] For discussion on the positionality of social scientists see MacIntyre, A. (1973) 'Ideology, Social Science, And Revolution', *Comparative Politics*, Special Issue on Revolution and Social Change, April, 5:3, 321-342.

Skocpol's 1979 study on social revolutions was published coincided with the Iranian (and Nicaraguan) revolutions. Iran later became a subject of her research and of heated debate. Skocpol's paper on the 'Rentier State and Shi'a Islam in the Iranian Revolution' was published and came in for criticism from Nikkie Keddie, among others.[103] In particular Keddie criticised her for not giving due attention to the ideological influences on the Iranian revolution.[104] These debates return us, in part, to the so-called structure-agency conundrum which I flagged earlier in this chapter and which I turn to now.

I focus first on Skocpol as a central figure in the structural school. I introduce some specific points she has made about her position regarding this debate, and I then draw in one of her main opponents, William Sewell, who has argued for a more considered place for ideology in revolutions. I briefly introduce and discuss other contributions, for example that of Parsa Misagh.[105] However, the aim of this section is not to resolve this tension between structural and agential accounts, but to discover the ways in which the scholarship started to open up to a consideration of ideas and ideological forms in relation to revolutions.

Structure versus agency

It was to be the monumental events in Iran during the lead-up to the overthrow of the Shah in 1979 that would put Skocpol's work to the test and result in her conceding some small ground to her critics. The social and political conditions culminating in the Iranian revolution of 1979 had emphasised the importance of competing ideologies through the

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[103] Republished in Skocpol, T. (1994) 'Rentier state and Shi'a Islam in the Iranian Revolution', in Skocpol, T. ed. *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*, 241-258. See Keddie's constructive and helpful critique: Keddie, N. (1982) 'Comments on Skocpol', *Theory and Society*, 11:3, May, 285-292.
[104] Keddie (1982) ibid.
[105] Parsa, M. (2000) *States, Ideologies, & Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of Iran, Nicaragua and the Philippines*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

communication of ideas within revolutions.[106] In a later collection of her essays in *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*, Theda Skocpol's reflections on her earlier work on the Iranian revolution of 1979 are notable for the revised definition of 'social revolution' she puts forward:

> rapid, basic transformations of a country's state and class structures, *and of its dominant ideology*. Moreover, social revolutions are carried through, in part, by class-based upheavals from below.[107]

The addition of a 'dominant ideology' was a direct result of Skocpol's recognition that "if there ever has been a revolution deliberately 'made' by a mass-based social movement aiming to overthrow the old order, the Iranian revolution against the Shah was surely it".[108] This is an important concession from Skocpol as it updates her principle position that "revolutions are not made; they come", based on world historical circumstances and structural conditions.[109] Nevertheless, Theda Skocpol's conception of ideology was one in which she considered it only inasmuch as it might be instrumental in the causes and outcomes of revolutions. Skocpol still saw ideology as an expression of voluntarism:

> or idea systems deployed as self-conscious political arguments by identifiable political actors. Ideologies, in this sense, are developed and deployed by particular

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[106] Sreberny-Mohammadi, A & Mohammadi, A (1994) *Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture, and the Iranian Revolution*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Parsa, M. (2000) op cit.
[107] My italics. Skocpol, T. (1994) ibid., 240.
[108] Skocpol (1994) ibid., 242.
[109] Skocpol Citing Wendell Phillips (1979) ibid., 17.

groups or alliances engaged in temporally specific political conflicts or attempts to justify the use of state power.[110]

The revised definition of revolutions, above, and her discussion of ideology were presented by Skocpol in a rejoinder to William Sewell's detailed argument that ideology was actually central, both in cause and outcome, to the French revolution of 1789.[111] The dialogue between Skocpol and Sewell about their understandings of ideology in the case of the French revolution in particular, highlights key conceptual matters about which they disagree.

Sewell and Skocpol had different conceptions of ideology (and therefore of political discourse as used in revolution) and of the arrangement and prioritising of structural factors, in their debates. As we have seen, Skocpol followed Marxist understandings of ideology and regarded it as an instrument for power, whereas Sewell appeared to be influenced by developments in anthropology which recast conceptions of ideology to extend to matters of culture.[112] Equally Skocpol adhered to a rigid state-centric approach regarding structure, whereas Sewell elicited a more fluid conception which aspired to accommodate the actions of people as carriers of ideas, albeit as added variables or units of analysis.

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[110] Skocpol, (1994) ibid., 204.
[111] Skocpol (1994) ibid.
[112] As we shall see in the following chapter, I argue that both these conceptions are problematic, though the anthropological influence has been more productive and helpfully echoes some poststructuralist thinking: moving away from science and causation generally to consider contingency and ambiguity. Most recently, see Thomassen, B. (2014) 'Liminal Politics: Towards an Anthropology of Political Revolutions', in Thomassen, B. (2014) *Liminality and The Modern: Living through the in between*, Surrey: Ashgate, 191-213.

Skocpol does concede that she was so focused on "reworking class analysis in relation to a state-centred understanding of revolutions" that she may not have given due attention to the ways in which social revolutions are "ideologically-inspired projects to remake social life in its entirety".[113] For Skocpol, "struggles over the organisation and uses of state power are at the heart of all revolutionary transformations".[114] The language of politics and the dynamic of ideologies in play are recognised latterly by Skocpol, but relegated to a political or cultural idiom amidst the broader and more important structural explanation of revolutions. Skocpol argues that there are important limitations to anthropological treatments of political and social systems.[115]

Whereas, Sewell's interpretation of the French revolution and the central place of ideology as formed "in relation to social forces, not in the conscious wills of individual actors"[116] stems from new thinking about ideologies. In this sense Sewell's thinking is in tandem with Skocpol, as he asserts, in that he agrees that individual actions alone cannot make a revolution. He recognises people as carriers of ideas and that these can become patterns of thought which are acted upon or aspired to in a revolution. Sewell argues that it is necessary to complicate the treatment of ideology in the context of revolutions. In doing so he is drawing on influential writings on, and critiques of, ideology from within the field of anthropology, in particular the work of Clifford Geertz.[117] Sewell uses such ideas to argue for an understanding of ideology which can form part of a broader conceptual framework incorporating international structures, class, and state.[118]

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[113] Skocpol, T. (1994) Ibid., 201.
[114] Skocpol, T. (1994) Ibid., 208.
[115] Skocpol, T. (1994) ibid., 202-3.
[116] Sewell in Skocpol (1994) ibid., 172.
[117] Geertz, C. (1973) See Chapter Eight: 'Ideology as a Cultural System', in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books, 193-233.
[118] Sewell in Skocpol (1994) ibid., 173.

Both scholars offer insight into problems in the ways in which ideology has been treated. Both have, clearly, very different conceptions of ideology and different ideas about how much the structural confines can be bent to accommodate ideological aspects of revolutions. Despite their differing conceptual and methodological commitments (which are far from resolved in the dialogue), both share an epistemological commitment to and privileging of structural approaches to revolutions and both focus on understanding causes and outcomes. However, Sewell appears to be moving more in a direction which regards revolutionary processes, and therefore the ideas which underpin them, as important, whereas Skocpol adheres to 'cause' and 'outcome' as central points in her research.

Instead of seeking to attach ideology to rigid structural accounts of revolution which require proofs of causation, it might have been more productive for Sewell to simply argue that the ideas that people attach to and act upon, and the ideological patterns which are formed in times of flux and in revolution, are important and useful subjects for study in and of themselves. This need not result in rejecting important macro-level social and political structural considerations. Indeed, such a binary approach is not helpful and has resulted in a pernicious attachment to studying the question of causation, not to the study of revolutions as processes and as the actions of people.

Rethinking ideology and revolution?

Other theories of revolution have noted the relative lack of consideration of ideologies in revolutions. Juan Cole's comparative study of Egypt's *Urabi* movement asserts that the British occupation of Egypt in 1882 in fact put down a long social revolution which had been underpinned by important ideological considerations. Borrowing from George Rudé's studies of the French revolution, Cole notes that scholars have, increasingly recognised the important role played by Egyptian non-elite actors and the ways in which a 'popular ideology' manifested itself across social strata and against the 'Old Regime'.[119] Likewise, Misagh Parsa takes a more nuanced approach to ideology in his comparative study of the revolutions in Iran, Nicaragua and the Philippines.[120]

Parsa considers in tandem the structural conditions for the revolutions, together with the complex processes involved in vying for power. In doing so he focuses on unexpected outcomes in that those who were the most active in the beginning and during the revolutions were not the ones who then took up power.[121] He draws on extensive empirical evidence in order to focus on the collective action of the different actors and groups inside the revolution, noting that analysts had often only focused on the ideological patterns of those revolutionary groupings who became the successful challengers to power.[122] In so doing he echoes Skocpol's caution against elevating ideology after the fact, and assuming an intentional role for ideology in the causes and outcomes of revolutions. That is, it cannot be surmised that the ideas that informed the revolutionary processes are the same ones that endured. Equally,

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[119] Cole, J. R. I. (1999) *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement*, Cairo: the American University of Cairo, 11, 23.
[120] Parsa, M. (2000) op cit.. See also Parsa, M. (2011) 'Ideology and Political Action in the Iranian Revolution', *Comparative Studies in South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East,* 31:1, Duke University Press.
[121] Parsa (2000) ibid., 3-5.
[122] Parsa (2000) ibid., 5.

the successful contenders for power do not necessarily represent the early or forming ideas of revolutions. In the case of Iran, Khomeini seized power but the revolution had not been about religion and was led by a myriad of social and 'secular' groupings.[123]

Parsa records how it is critical to be aware of "the ideologies of the specific collectives that carry out most of the collective actions during conflicts", and not to assign causal links of ideologies to outcomes without a detailed study of all the major social actors.[124] Caution must therefore be shown so as not to mistake tactical actions for ideologically-based actions, and to be aware that ideological debates may be limited or moderated in severely repressive situations.[125] Parsa does argue that similar structural conditions can result in different revolutionary outcomes and suggests that ideology is one variable which can be empirically examined in considering the extent to which it is or is not a causal factor of revolutions. Parsa's study strives to build a particular 'theory of revolution' based on the structuralist, mobilisation and process theorists.[126] His study then examines empirical case studies in detail, which have helped to update the literature on causes and outcomes by highlighting the 'impact of ideology'.[127]

Parsa's study was an important step in showing both the socio-economic conditions leading up to the revolutions in Iran, Nicaragua and the Philippines, while also considering more deeply the multitude of political actors who were proposing their different ideological platforms and positions and vying to be the successful revolutionary challengers and attain power. But such empirically-based studies do not fully come to grips with what ideologies

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[123] Parsa (2000) ibid.,9.
[124] Parsa (2000) ibid.,9.
[125] Parsa (2000) ibid.,9. This point will be very relevant to the Syrian context, as we shall see.
[126] Parsa (2000) ibid.,25.
[127] Parsa (2000) ibid.,10.

are made up of and how they actually function, or might function, and change, and be recast, in revolutions. Additionally, Parsa's approach has added to the burgeoning body of theoretical accounts of revolutions which continue to rely on the structural causes of revolution, but pay more attention to an ideological component for revolutionary causes and outcomes. Ideology, in his study, appears to serve merely as an instrument or variable object of study to consider alongside other variables. In my study, I want to go beyond such a limitation.

A study of the structural causes of revolution is very different from a study of ideas in revolution which is what my thesis aspires to be. They start with different questions and follow different methods. The study of ideas in revolution should not be subordinated to or necessarily linked to structural analyses of the causes and outcomes of revolutions. Within Skocpol's 'macro' level study of revolutions, her position on ideology is perhaps a logical one. In dismissing ideology as a possible *causal* factor in revolution, Skocpol is claiming that it is simply not possible that any one group or individual political actor, such as Robespierre, "deliberately shapes the complex and multiple determined conflicts that bring about revolutionary crises and outcomes".[128] This, she grounds in empirical evidence. But if it were to be asked, instead, what kind of ideas were forming *in* the revolution then a fuller understanding of the (contingent) nature of ideologies as being 'receptacles' for ideas could be pursued. This necessarily takes us beyond considerations of how individuals might act (including in their own self-interest), as we find in rationalistic theory-based approaches, towards a consideration of ideologies as group systems of beliefs and patterns of thinking that become common sense for a collective or for a particular 'public' at a particular time.

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[128] Skocpol, T. (1994) op cit., 200.

These arguments will continue to circulate and are probably irresolvable because the differing starting points rely on particular ontological commitments and selective ways of knowing. What I have set out to show here is that the questions being asked about revolutions have been unduly confined by structuralist theorising within the sub-field of historical sociology. This is partly because the whole project is underpinned by the urge to define and to retrospectively pursue causation and fix outcomes, but it is also because of the ideological positionality and (Marxist, or otherwise) commitments of many of the scholars themselves.

Conclusion

In this chapter I critically engaged with the most influential literature on modern revolutions. I focused on examining some of the methodological limitations in the major contributions in the field of political science. I have argued that the methodological pitfalls found within this scholarship do not bode well for the study of live and incomplete revolutions. In particular, the focus on the state as an actor in the wider international system occlude considerations of people as actors and of the ideas that move them. I have shown that when we think about language—and how it animates the political—then we can find productive paths of inquiry which give due attention to what people are *saying* and *doing* within revolutionary moments. I have thus illuminated the ways in which a revolutionary language and ideas might serve to undermine and counter dominant hegemonic orders.

Overall, there have been some important contributions to our thinking revolution in the literature, which have deepened our knowledge and understanding. In particular, Theda Skocpol's scholarship on successful revolutions helps to show how the conjuncture of a set of factors can make for revolution. These factors include a crisis of the regime or state (in the case of France, the Royal seat of power and fiscal crisis), problems in the performance of the ruling power or state regarding its political and economic position (problems which pertain to 'world time' or historical legacy and positioning in the international system), and, finally, her focus on the transformation of social classes. Skocpol's foregrounding of the state and social class-based analyses of revolutions places her firmly as a leading structuralist influenced by Marxist thinking on revolution and social and political change (although, clearly, she departed from economic determinist iterations of Marxism). This has had the welcome effect of drawing scholarship away from a unitary focus on political violence as being the main characteristic of revolutions. Her debt to a comparative historical approach shows in that she is able to consider historically contextual differences across the countries being examined, rather than graft a universal model for revolutions onto diverse social and political landscapes.

I then noted some shortcomings in the structural approach to revolutions, and in particular an antipathy towards a consideration of the role of agency therein. As we saw in discussing Skocpol and Sewell, disagreement tended to be ranged around whether or not political ideologies, or particular ideas and beliefs, could be held to be a causal factor of revolutions. Skocpol's approach neglected aspects regarding revolutionary processes and the mobilisation and practices of revolutionary actors. We then moved on to look in detail at the significant developments in the fourth generation of scholarship on revolutions. This turned our attention to the ways in which people mobilize, and gave space to a consideration

of agency and indeed ideas, thus releasing scholarship, to some extent, from the structuralist hierarchical ordering in the analysis of revolutions. Important developments in this fourth wave included an opening up to all kinds of contentious politics, and to the multiple 'repertoires of contention' available in different contexts. In specific regard to completed revolutions, mobilisation theorists refine and pinpoint different junctures in revolutions, from 'revolutionary situations' to 'revolutionary outcomes', whilst also taking in the complexities of 'multiple sovereignty' regarding parties in contention. While this takes some of the emphasis away from the search for definitive causes and definitions, the mobilisation literature still tends to focus on the role of the state in relation to the army and elite classes in considering a revolutionary transformation and outcome. This has had the effect of reproducing some of the patterns of thinking and assumptions in the mainstream scholarship of revolutions that tend to revolve around the state.

Later studies of revolution have included discussion on ideas and culture, but this has either i) been subsumed into a structural variable alongside more established causes of revolutions, or ii) been relegated to cultural studies of revolutions which attempt to balance the structural causation models with a treatment of other possible causal factors of revolutions. So, while this latter wave of scholarship has provided new and nuanced avenues for research, there have been few effective efforts to properly engage in political and social inquiry which focused on the people and on bottom-up popular revolutionary thought and actions.

Trying to bring ideas into the arena of political analysis seems to implicate one in an enveloping and circular 'structure versus agency' debate. While political scientists, such as Foran, have tried to extricate themselves from this exclusionary binary approach by

suggesting that elements from both can merge in explanation, there still remains the problem that all is considered within a framework of structural and causal argumentation. The state and social classes remain as central explanatory causes, and other elements such as ideas and human agency have been shoe-horned into this fixed structure as possible new variables or instrumental features of revolutions. While not wishing to argue for one in exclusion of the other, this does have the effect of avoiding altogether any questions of what exactly the ideas mean and how they manifest themselves, and why some ideas became more, or less, important than others in a time of radical change. In other words: I believe both that agency has been undervalued, *and* that the very debate itself has often been a damaging distraction.

The problems I have highlighted in the literature have important implications for Syria and its revolution in 2011: in the way we might or might not describe it as a revolution; in the divergent scholarly presuppositions which underpin the study of ideas in revolution; and in the ways in which analyses of people, of revolutionaries, of agents in a particular revolutionary upheaval, may be neglected. These topics have been given attention by scholars of the Middle East, some of whom have also drawn on theoretical insight, as I indicated in this chapter. Taking into consideration scholarship on the region and the cross-pollination of theoretical approaches, I have chosen in what follows two theorists who help me to avoid some of the limitations of positivist and behaviourist approaches, as well as the limits of structuralist, Marxist approaches to both revolution and ideologies.

Much of the present opening chapter of this thesis has necessarily been by way of a literature review, and some of it has concerned approaches which do not end up featuring prominently in the remainder of the thesis. This chapter has cleared the ground for and started to build

towards the approaches that I *do* follow. As we will see in Chapter Two, my research draws primarily on two prominent political theorists and utilises their methodologies and ideas as an alternative way of thinking about the concept of dignity in Syria's uprising. Specifically, I utilise the early scholarship of William E. Connolly, whose study of political discourse and contested concepts provided a radical departure and opportunity for alternative paths of thinking about our political world. Second, I draw on an interpretive approach in the study of political ideologies in the work of Michael Freeden. These theorists provide the tools and a framework in which to focus inquiry into the ideas or concepts that emerge, or which become contested, during times of upheaval. In this way I can then follow a method which enables me to focus specifically on the concept of dignity and on the ways in which it emerged and is used in the Syrian revolution. This is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Two

Methodology: an interpretive approach to dignity

in the Syrian revolution

Introduction

In the previous chapter, a critical review of the study of modern revolutions and the treatment of ideology indicated that there were a number of problems with conventional approaches.[1] I showed how political scientists tended to mimic the natural sciences and to rely on scientific methodologies in order to define revolutions and to search for and prove their causes.[2] Also, I noted an emphasis on isolating the fixed and necessary set of outcomes which, retrospectively, define a revolution. This has limited the instances in which academics *might* ascribe the term 'revolution' and means that studies have focused on what political scientists define as revolutions, rather than what people assert are revolutions. In the same vein, structural analyses, which came to dominate the study of revolutions

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[1] In particular, as critiqued in differing ways by Aya, R. (1979) 'Theories of Revolution Reconsidered: Contrasting Models of Collective Violence', *Theory and Society*, 8:1, 39-99; and, Takriti, A. R. (2013) *Monsoon Revolution: Republicans, Sultans and Empires in Oman, 1965-1976*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. For detailed references and analysis of the literature on revolution see Chapter One.

[2] For discussion on this see Winch, P. (1958/1977) *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 66-94. I follow Winch in emphasising reasons for action, and steering clear of a causal analysis. It is worth noting Connolly's criticism that Winch goes too far in his proffering of an "extreme alternative" (to Winch's corrective argument that the study of our social and political world might be repaired by removing it from the confines of "the 'laws of social science"), in Connolly, W. E. *The Terms of Political Discourse*, 3rd edn, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 5-6. Michael Freeden makes a similar argument: Winch is right to question attempts at scientific generalization and future prediction but Freeden departs from Winch in that he is arguing that we can make some useful generalisations about ideas based on a temporal and spatial conjuncture; see Freeden, M. (1996) *Ideologies and Political Theory: a conceptual approach*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 99-100. As we shall see later in this chapter, this reflects Freeden's diachronic and synchronic approach in his morphology of ideologies and concepts as units of analysis.

throughout much of the twentieth century, trained attention on state actors and on centres of power rather than the actual people who rose up.[3] Consequently there is a lack of attention given to the actual thoughts and actions of the people as revolutionary actors.

I then showed that in so far as ideologies and ideas are given consideration, the focus has been primarily on how they might, or might not, serve as an auxiliary variable with which to help explain the *cause(s)* of revolutions, reproducing the same scientistic tropes and circular, irresolvable questions as to whether structural factors or the ideas and actions of people, or the latter subordinated to and in concert with the former, cause revolutions.[4] As a result, and despite later developments in the field, I claimed that conventional scholarship has not really given sufficient consideration to ideologies as the 'receptacles'[5] for the ideas that people claim and promote in a time of rapid revolutionary change.[6]

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[3] Except where the people were considered as the 'mob', thus ascribing a pejorative sense to any collective resistance - see Chapter One. For a counter to this see Rudé, G. (1959) *The Crowd in the French Revolution*, London: Oxford University Press. As I mention in Chapter One, there are notable exceptions, but they seem to go too far in the other direction and lose altogether the contextual and structural aspects, for example: Selbin, E. (2010) *Revolution, Rebellion, Resistance: the power of story*, London: Zed Books.

[4] For different perspectives see: Sreberny-Mohammadi, A. & Mohammadi, A. (1994) *Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture and the Iranian Revolution*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; and, to some extent, Kumar, K. (1989) *Revolutionary Ideas and Ideals*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota; also, Parsa, M. (2000) *States, Ideologies, & Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of Iran, Nicaragua and the Philippines*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[5] Freeden, M. (1996) *Ideologies and Political Theory: A conceptual approach*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 13-14.

[6] As I made clear in Chapter One I do *not* seek to link ideas to causes of revolutions; see my discussion of the debate between Skocpol and Sewell, in Chapter One. However, for just such an argument see Israel, J. (2014) *Revolutionary Ideas: An intellectual history of the French Revolution from The Rights of Man to Robespierre*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. A reading of this must be accompanied by a scathing critique of it by Hunt, L. (2014) 'Louis XVI Wasn't Killed by Ideas: This is what happens if you ignore the role of politics in intellectual history', Book Review published online, *New Republic*, 28th June. In thinking more broadly about ideas and moving towards an interpretive approach we can background sociological and Marxist treatments of ideas: Eastwood, J. (2008) 'The role of ideas in Weber's theory of interests', *Critical Review: A Journal of Politics and Society*, 17,1-2, 89-100; Arthur, C.J. (1974) *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The German Ideology*, London: Lawrence & Wishart; and, discussion of Bevir & Rhodes' contribution to and application of an interpretive methodology in first part of Finlayson, A. (2007) 'From Beliefs to Arguments: Interpretive Methodology and Rhetorical Political Analysis,' *Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol 9,4, 545-563; Hay, C. (2002) *Political Analysis: A Critical Introduction*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 205-6.

Promising new theoretical approaches which focus on social mobilisation and contention, exemplified in the research of Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, are also limited by some starting assumptions which might, problematically, give only a limited airing to agents in revolutions. This is because such approaches still retain elements of the scientific imperative to both explain the rational choices of agents and to consider agents only in as much as they interact with the state.[7] Therefore the study of revolutions has embedded and reproduced some methodological problems and dictated what is or is not a revolution. Such approaches narrow our field of vision[8] and lock out any analysis of politics in action and the actual *processes* within a revolutionary contest, regardless of causes or final and successful outcomes.[9]

It is in contrast to these kinds of approaches that I seek to study Syria's revolutionary actors, by attempting, as Quentin Skinner puts it, "to grasp their concepts, to follow their distinction, to appreciate their beliefs and, so far as possible, to see things their way".[10] To do so I investigate the emergence of the concept of dignity (Arabic *karama*) in Syria's revolutionary moment and to follow its functions and uses in this context. I argue here for a conceptual

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[7] Chalcraft, J. (2016) *Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 19-29. Instead, the author offers a modified "transgressive contention" approach to the study of bottom up (popular) political contention. This book was released too late for me to fully consider and incorporate in my research methodology.

[8] Here it is useful to think about insight gleaned by 'vision' or 'sight', as in the origin and meaning of the Greek word *theoria* (theory) referred to in: Ball, T. (2007) 'Professor Skinner's Vision', *Political Studies Review*, 5, 351.

[9] See Chapter One; my argument and shift away from questions of role or single causation was influenced by a discussion on the literature on revolutions with the historian Abdel Razaq Takriti, Oxford, 2013; and, by his monograph on the Dhufar revolution in Oman: Takriti, A. R. (2013) *Monsoon Revolution: Republicans, Sultans and Empires in Oman, 1965-1976*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[10] See Skinner, Q. (2002) *Visions of Politics; regarding method*, *Vol I*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 37. I borrow from Skinner to situate my research closer to the agents and what they are saying and doing.

approach to 'dignity', which recognises the importance of paying attention to such ideas in their variegated spatial and temporal contexts. The instances and the force of the use of dignity in Syria signal at once both some elements of continuity as well as an abrupt departure from, revision of, and reformulation of what has gone before. The Syrian revolutionary practice of recovering and reinventing the idea of dignity may be considered as a "politics of resistance in action".[11] Framed this way an investigation into the idea of dignity in revolution requires thinking about the collective will and ideas forged and sustained in Syria's revolutionary moment. The uses of the idea of dignity in the latest Arab and Syrian revolutions are indicative of the ways in which people not only describe but also strive to bring about social and political change.

In this chapter I set out my methodological approach and detail the ways in which we can conceptualise dignity as it has emerged in Syria's revolution.[12] In order to focus in on my pursuit of alternative ways to investigate the kinds of ideas flowing in, through and around Syria's uprising and, specifically, the idea of dignity, I introduce two key theorists: William E. Connolly and Michael Freeden. I discuss their contributions to the scholarship and in the final section I elaborate on the ways in which their insights and tools can aid a study of dignity in the Syrian context.

The rationale for concentrating on these two theorists lies in the importance of their critiques of conventional scholarship and the new avenues of inquiry which their work opens up. In

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[11] Tripp (2013) op cit., 2.
[12] In this thesis I try to follow Elizabeth Frazer's useful distinction between methodology (epistemological and ontological commitments) and method (of research – ie interviews, data collection): Frazer, E. (2008) 'The boundaries of Politics', in Leopold, D. & Stears, M. (2008) *Political theory: methods and approaches*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 176, n5. Although, of course, one informs the other.

particular, William E. Connolly's seminal study, first published in 1974: *The Terms of Political Discourse* (TOPD), provided an important critique of positivist assumptions about the way political concepts were treated within the mainly North American discipline of political science. Connolly provides an important backbone to this thesis because his early work sought to recast the ways in which we study the political concepts we use. What this shows us is how such concepts are an essential part of our political space, and how they might also *become political*.[13]

Connolly's thesis retrieved the notion of essentially contested concepts and showed how we can seek to clarify their content, or criteria and to recognise this process as an important and constitutive part of 'politics itself'.[14] This necessarily, and often essentially contested terrain provides the space for conceptual dispute and innovation and, therefore, political change. Connolly's critique also echoes the problems I found within the conventional study of revolutions and ideology in Chapter One. For example, the concept of revolution had also been confined and presupposed by scientific imperatives to measure, define, and to promote a fixed definition and criteria, whereas revolution is itself a live and dynamic *process* of contestation and conflict, which must be studied beyond the compulsion to fix a definition.

The messy, changing, and contingent aspects of our political world have been attended to by the political theorist Michael Freeden in his landmark study of political ideologies:[15] *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach,* first published in 1996. Freeden offers a new research agenda and pathways for scholarship which resuscitates the study of

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[13] Connolly, W.E. (1974/1993) *The Terms of Political Discourse*, 3rd edn. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2-3.
[14] Connolly (1974/1993) ibid.,30.
[15] Freeden (1996) op cit.

political ideologies. He provides an overarching theoretical framework within which we can attend to the meanings and uses of political concepts. This framework draws together the important diachronic, historically sedimented context for ideas with the 'here and now' of the synchronic appearance and use of concepts. Freeden adumbrates his morphological approach to political ideologies and the ways in which concepts are preferred or excluded, for example, through the ideological processes which he calls 'decontestation'. Freeden's later scholarship also deepens and expands our avenues for thinking about the synchronic, 'vernacular' forms of political thinking in a particular time and place; this opens a vista onto "the varieties of political thinking that societies produce", as a central element of "what societies and their members do".[16] My methodology benefits from Freeden's detailed critique of the study of ideology, and the research potential he sets out is of critical importance in foregrounding the ideas of the people (in a revolutionary situation).

In the following sections I introduce, explain and synthesize the work of Connolly and Freeden and their approaches to the study of political concepts as contested and contestable units of analysis within the wider and competing ideological landscapes we all inhabit.[17] As will become clear, my approach is necessarily 'interpretive'. I try to establish a point from

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[16] Freeden, M. (2014) 'Editorial: the 'political turn' in political theory', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 19, 1, 1-2; Freeden, M. (2013) *The Political Theory of Political Thinking: the Anatomy of a Practice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; and, Freeden, M. (2008) 'Thinking Politically and thinking about Politics: language, interpretation, and ideology', in *Political Theory: methods and approaches*, Leopold, D. & Stears, M. eds., Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[17] Connolly, W. E. (1974/1993) *The Terms of Political Discourse*, 3rd edn. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers; Freeden, M. (1996) *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; Freeden, M. (2003) *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; Freeden, M. (ed.) (2007) *The Meaning of Ideology: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*, Oxon: Routledge; Freeden, M. (2013) *The Political Theory of Political Thinking: the Anatomy of a Practice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. On various applications of Connolly's work see Finlayson, A. (ed.) (2010) *Democracy and Pluralism: The Political Thought* of William E Connolly, especially of interest for informing my methodology is the introduction, chapters by Howarth and Mihac, and then Connolly's rejoinder. See also Chambers, S. A. & Carver, T. eds. (2008) *William E. Connolly: Democracy, Pluralism, and Political Theory*, London: Routledge, for the collected works and overview of Connolly's contribution with part II of the volume focusing on Connolly's 'agonism'.

which we can hope to contextualise and analyse the concepts chosen by Syrian revolutionary actors: intellectuals, fighters and activists. My aim is to situate the idea of dignity historically and in relation to its specific usages and functions in Syria's current revolutionary moment. I examine some of the myriad ways in which Syrian revolutionary agents sought to contest and to struggle against an authoritarian and corrupt government in Syria. I attend to the revolutionary concepts which were harnessed and the functions of these ideas in a particular context. The Syrian revolution provides us with the chance to think anew about people rising up, and about the political implications and broader ideational context for their ideas and actions, and the performative[18] aspects of their revolutionary discourse and practices.[19]

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[18] See an agential approach through the performative in Tripp, C. (2013) 'Performing the Public: Theatres of Power in the Middle East', *Constellations*, 20:2, 203-216.

[19] For different historical treatments and exemplars in the analysis of revolutionary practices see Takriti, A. R. op cit; and, Hunt, L. (1984) *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, 1984, Berkeley: University of California Press.

I   William E. Connolly: The terms of political discourse (TOPD)

Setting himself against the mainstream of American political science in the 1970s, Connolly's then ground-breaking study *The Terms of Political Discourse* (TOPD) promotes a more expansive and reflective approach within political science and theory, which embraces the uncertainties and ambiguities in our political life. Concepts deployed in political analysis had frequently been assumed to be fixed ideas which were defined and then required no further attention.[20] In retaining epistemological commitments from the natural sciences, these seemingly neutral concepts were then harnessed to get to "the facts of political life", through claims to objective political inquiry.[21] Connolly's critique reminds us that we simply cannot treat complex political concepts as we do the more rigid scientific concepts.

Rather, Connolly argues that the concepts we rely on in political discourse are not merely a 'prelude' to and neutral medium by which political (scientific) inquiry might then proceed. Rather, the concepts we use and the politics of language are, he argues, part of a web of an "institutionalized structure of meanings that channels political thought and action in certain directions".[22] Connolly's is *not* an argument to improve on scientific ways of conducting political inquiry. His theoretical thinking proceeds from a position of necessary inter-subjectivity – in and of the world and clarified through interactions regarding beliefs and

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[20] Connolly, TOPD.
[21] Connolly, TOPD, 1.
[22] Connolly TOPD, 1, 213.

commitments articulated through political language.[23] Connolly's critique of the field of study thus marks a radical departure from conventional scholarship. For Connolly, the very ways in which we employ complex concepts constitutes a process worthy of political inquiry in itself, and shines a light on the oft-neglected but important political implications of some ideational aspects of our social and political world.

Connolly begins his critique of the state of play in political science by urging a reconsideration and engagement with the provocative essay published in 1956 by W. B. Gallie on '*Essentially Contested Concepts*'. Connolly notes three central claims that Gallie lists which make a concept *essentially* contested. These centre on the possible variations there are when a concept is *appraisive*[24] (of a valued achievement, such as democracy), when the practice the concept describes is *internally complex* and exhibits a number of dimensions, and, finally, when the ways in which a concept might be applied are always open to differing and competing interpretations, and thus involve "*endless disputes*".[25] Connolly critiques some of Gallie's assumptions and some limits to his analysis, but nevertheless recovers his central idea of **essentially contested concepts,** which provides a springboard for Connolly's subsequent argumentation.[26] Departing from the gloomy implication that such endless disputes render some concepts impossible to analyse, Connolly instead builds a thesis which argues that it is possible and necessary to open up complex concepts and to recognise and work with the ambiguity of contestation. In doing so he

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[23] For Connolly's political thought see the introduction in: Finlayson, A. ed. (2010) op cit.
[24] This criterion is necessarily complicated by Connolly in his chapter on essentially contested concepts and the discussion on the problem of descriptive-normative analysis which tends to assume there is *always* a close normative link between these two dimensions: Connolly, TOPD, 23.
[25] My italics. Connolly, TOPD, 10. I discuss this later in this section.
[26] I don't have the space here to provide a detailed explication and critique of Gallie's essay but I introduce it in brief as this is the starting point for Connolly's own thesis on essentially contested concepts which provides central ways of thinking for my research. Some of the key issues will in any case be tackled in this section as they arise in Connolly's analysis.

shows the ways in which established practices in the study of concepts had fallen short in grappling with complexity.

In his reparative approach to essentially contested concepts Connolly argues that we should not reject complex or polysemic concepts but find ways to analysis them. He notes how conventional analyses thus far fall short as they rely on operational testing and seeking precision. Connolly gives the example of the concept of 'bachelor'. The analytic statement 'All bachelors are unmarried' is considered to be a purely definitional matter; whereas the synthetic statement that 'All bachelors are lonely' would require further testing.[27] What Connolly alerts us to (among other criticisms) is that this dichotomy has a place but only in such instances where the '*point*' of a concept (i.e. bachelor) is closely related to the '*criteria*' (i.e. unmarried).

Following another example, Connolly draws on the concept of 'politics' to argue that the 'point' of politics does not, in practice, adhere to one *definitive* 'criterion'. So, approaches which rely on analytical or synthetic deduction are not adequate when the conceptual criteria and/or its interpretation might be contested. As soon as we enter into these disputes about which criteria are in and which out, and about the descriptive, evaluative and the normative judgements of such internally complex concepts, we are involved in a state of (necessary) contestation. These examples clarify a key point across Connolly's study of political discourse: disagreement over the content and meaning of concepts in our political world is healthy and a part of politics itself.

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[27] Connolly, TOPD, 17.

To drill deeper into this important conceptual point, Connolly turns to the moral concept of genocide as a way of elaborating on his arguments. He uses the 'moral concept'[28] of genocide to show how problems emerge and how such ideas are open to conceptual contest and dispute. For example, a definition might describe genocide as an act which must be planned, and the extermination must be complete. But, what if the genocide was an unintentional effect of a war campaign or the extermination was not fully completed for whatever reason? The answer to these questions surely involves moral judgements, and these moral 'points of departure' will and do shift over time and in differing contexts. This necessitates conceptual revision, and agitates against an urge to fix the definition with complete finality.[29] This argument illustrates the contingent nature and the need to pay careful attention to the 'point' and its relation to a concept's internal logic or 'criteria'.[30] Some common political concepts may have a normative/moral point or 'angle of vision', but some may not.[31] Connolly's approach alerts us to how the 'point' of the concept is important in relation to its 'criteria', and these layers of analysis necessarily keep the meanings in use relatively open and subject to change.

Thus Connolly revises our theoretical framing to enable inquiry into the actual processes of contestation and to investigate the more internally, and essentially, complex (and contested) concepts.[32] Connolly usefully considers concepts within a cluster and as part of a related

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[28] Connolly noted that concepts may or may not have a moral dimension, but that in any case attention to this would be an important consideration. Connolly also seems to show how political concepts can carry internal moral dimensions, or be clarified in light of moral and normative considerations. See TOPD, 22-29. See also Kovesi, J. (1967) *Moral Notions*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
[29] Connolly, TOPD, 28
[30] Connolly, TOPD, 29, 32
[31] TOPD, 27-29
[32] Connolly, TOPD, 2.

conceptual system within which we find the space for conceptual dispute and contestation.[33] To return to our example of the essentially contested concept of 'politics', to make it intelligible we need to:

> display the complex connections with a host of other concepts to which it is related; clarification of the concept of politics thereby involves the elaboration of the broader conceptual system within which it is implicated.[34]

Of central importance in his 'cluster concepts' approach is how we can understand complex ideas in connection with others. Connolly shows how a list of possible criteria for the concept of politics is indicative of a wider conceptual system containing concepts such as 'interests' or 'values', for example. As is becoming clear from the above discussions, it is when there is disagreement over the selection of such criteria, in this case in relation to the concept of politics, or when there might be disagreement about the interpretation of agreed shared criteria, that there is a conceptual dispute.[35] In such instances our differing commitments to, and preferences for, some criteria over others signify our different conceptions and interpretations of the essentially contested aspects of our common and shared concepts.[36] Connolly explains his thinking on the concept of politics and its implications in the initial thesis of his book:

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[33] Connolly, TOPD, Cluster concept: 14, 15, 18.
[34] Connolly, TOPD, 14.
[35] TOPD, 14-15.
[36] Connolly, TOPD, 20-21.

Politics, then, is a concept particularly susceptible to contests about its proper range of application. The internal complexity of the concept, combined with the relative openness of each of its unit criteria, provides the space within which these disputes take place, and because of these very features, operational tests and formal modes of analysis do not provide sufficient leverage to settle such disputes.[37]

The possible layers of contestation are illuminated here. Essentially, contested and contestable concepts are relationally clarified when we consider the context and related concepts or units with which we might clarify and make meaning. This level of contextualism as a way towards the clarification of concepts is also the process in and by which concepts might *become* political. Connolly gives the example of the way in which the commercial interests of big business have been cast outside the traditional study of politics. It is Connolly's analysis of *concepts in use* which shows us how these aspects of our social world can and arguably should be considered as political, as part of a wider conceptual ordering and (re-)framing of our political discourse.

Conceptual change and innovation

We can also see his thinking in his explication of the notion of conceptual change: Connolly draws on the example of the concept of democracy to show where there might be *essential* contestation regarding the internal criteria of a concept. We may have in mind an assumed shared description of democracy, and there may be common (appraisive) agreement that it is a good thing to strive for, but scholars may equally have different ideas about what its

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[37] Connolly, TOPD, 22.

internal contents or criteria should be. Some political scientists might argue that a system of free and fair elections is a central tenet of democracy, while others might think that the idea of social equality is paramount. Consider Connolly's scenario[38] in which a decision is made that only highly educated elites should be able to vote or participate in democratic life. In such a case the concept of modern democracy faces a radical alteration, by which any new iteration *might* come to be considered pejoratively, to be avoided, or it *might* be revised to accommodate and accept this elite model, or, the concept *might* become obsolete altogether.[39]

Importantly, then, the process of conceptualization and clarification of the terms of our political language and discourse do not occur in a void. Connolly's consideration of what he calls 'inherited webs' or 'the structure of meanings',[40] in our language of politics, illuminates how established meanings can become embedded and normative in our discourse. But this also provides the potential for breaking out of such patterns of thinking and use of language should the circumstances change. Thus we can find ways of considering alternative ideas, taking on new forms, or appearing to indicate novel developments, as we might see in a period of rapid change.

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[38] Connolly, TOPD,

[39] Connolly, TOPD, 31-32

[40] Connolly, TOPD, 220. The idea of a 'web' or 'systems of meaning' and its logical constraints is referred to by Freeden who notes the work of Quine, W.V.O. (1953) *From a Logical Point of View*, Cambridge: Mass, 42-3, in Freeden, M. (1996), *Ideologies and Political Theory: a conceptual approach*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 50n,80n. As I have mentioned elsewhere, Connolly is influenced by philosophical treatments of language and does cite Quine in places: TOPD: 41, n7. This and other influences are mostly implicit (as, perhaps, they should be) in the main text and acknowledged throughout in his notes and in his bibliography, in which he provides, in particular, a selective reading list of influential ordinary and post-analytical philosophers such as Wittgenstein and his adherents: Winch and Pitkin, as well as Strawson and others: TOPD, 248-9.

Emerging and gaining pace in Connolly's analysis is the importance of the actual process of contestation and the clarification of contested, internally complex concepts, opening up to their possible change and revision. The concepts which make up our political discourse must necessarily be open to a process of 'conceptual contestation' and 'conceptual revision', as this is how we can both broaden our inquiry into all kinds of political matters and accommodate political change. As well as the implications at this micro-level of the internal content of complex concepts, Connolly's approach urges consideration of the wider context in which contested concepts appear and become embedded. In our political practices, convention has typically had it that one should move quickly to assume a point of consensus, to avoid or obscure any contention or conflict relating to our established *terms* of political discourse, and therefore to shut down, in effect, any 'agonistic' processes of contesting and clarifying ideas as part of the democratic process. Such agonistic processes shed light on the different ideological predispositions and commitments of the parties to a particular debate, decision-making process, and so on.

Whilst the *potential* for an expansive investigation into the ideological dimensions is not extensively and explicitly developed in Connolly's work, it is there. At times Connolly does indicate the ideological implications in the processes of conceptual clarification. Connolly's thesis in the TOPD makes mention of the ideological context in which discourse is formed—in the ways we use and interpret the political concepts embedded in it.[41] This is because, as I have illustrated, throughout Connolly's work the very nature of clarifying the concepts, or ideas, in use in politics involves articulating preferences, organising sets of beliefs, making judgements and assumptions, and promoting or preferring values, all of which indicate both

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[41] He does this in a discussion of the dynamic and interpretation of power and how its forms part of larger ideological debates: Connolly, TOPD, 126-130.

our individual and collective ideological distinctions or 'positions'. This ideological situatedness is how the concepts in use are bounded; they are not subject to endless disputes, as per Gallie. They are contained and constrained by, and *may be rendered political* through, their clarifying relation with other concepts and in particular contexts.

Connolly problematised scholarly study and assumptions relating to the terms of our political discourse. His arguments stand the test of time. Contestation over political terms is necessary and healthy and it is hardly ever complete, unless, we wish to claim the existence of a world without politics. Connolly makes a claim for the merit of recognizing and dealing with complexity, and avoiding the limiting dichotomy that would suggest that all concepts can be determined or fixed by either logical or operational means only, or that they are too vague to be worth considering at all. Instead, Connolly's thesis encourages a dissection of the contestable aspects in the criteria and interpretation of concepts, and explores ways of thinking about their complexity.

Although his work is set within a North American democratic context it certainly does not mean to say that his ideas on politics are specific to the American democratic system.[42] Concepts or ideas exist and are employed, preferred or judged and become part of a given discourse in all societies. Extending into a non-democratic landscape, and indeed into a context of revolution and war, there is much advantage in considering such ideas and the discourses in and from which they form and change, in a state of flux. Connolly's thinking

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[42] Regarding the relevance and utility of Connolly beyond his supposed American confines (as distinct from confined to a particular context), see discussions in: Finlayson, A. ed. (2010) Democracy and Pluralism: The Political Thought of William Connolly, London: Routledge, 1-2, 13; and, Carver, T. & Chambers, S. (2008) *William E. Connolly: Democracy, Pluralism and Political Theory*, London: Routledge, 2.

on the terms of political discourse therefore provides a number of important starting points and possible directions for my research into the concept of dignity. Nevertheless, there remains a question about precisely how to apply Connolly and his ideas to a very different, non-democratic, context – and this is something I will address (in the section below on 'Applying the ideas and thinking of Connolly and Freeden to Syria'), after first reviewing in some detail the second crucial theorist for my thesis.

II   Michael Freeden – ideologies and political theory

We now turn to look in detail at the scholarship of Michael Freeden, who offers a new research agenda for our understanding and study of ideology. Freeden's morphological approach recovers the study of political ideologies from its relegation to the status of 'a poor relation to philosophy'[43] to being an important part of political thinking and action. Freeden's *Ideologies and Political Theory: a conceptual approach* served to "demonstrate the link between ideologies and political concepts and the significance of this link as a framework for scholarly inquiry".[44] Since this early study there remains at the heart of Freeden's thinking a scholarly requirement to deal with the 'raw material' of ideas, studying political thought as part of the day-to-day empirically observable 'thought-practices' which can be analysed and interpreted by the scholar of political theory.[45] Also, as we saw in the scholarship of Connolly, Freeden offers a welcome return to considering the political dimensions of our social and political world or, as he phrased it, a 'political turn', which

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[43] Freeden, M. (1996) *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 13-14.
[44] Freeden (1996) ibid*.,* 8.
[45] Freeden (1996) ibid., 22-23.

opens up to "investigations into actual and diverse instances of political thought".[46] Such inquiry can be pursued if we think about the ways in which political thought develops into action or practice and the presence of a 'thought-practice', that is a 'recurring pattern of (political) thinking'.[47] These ideas from Freeden provide the intellectual scaffolding for my methodology and underpin my approach.

Regarding practical tools that I can explicitly put to use, I draw most deeply on Freeden's influential earlier work: his **diachronic** and **synchronic** framing, and the useful conceptual tools in his **morphology of concepts and political ideologies**. I will outline these two features in this section and discuss some of the thinking which encompassed the study of ideological families, new-forming ideational patterns, and newly emerging specific instances in which ideas, or concepts, were subject to change in their meaning and uses.

Freeden's 1996 study, and his subsequent work, has successfully rehabilitated ideologies from the classical Marxist and behaviourist approaches that I discussed in Chapter One.[48] Freeden sets out how the study of ideology has long been reduced to either making truth-normative declarations or to nothing more than the labelling of belief systems.[49] The first part of Freeden's book is taken up with a critique of this field, spanning the disciplines of linguistics, philosophy, political science and theory, history, anthropology and psychology. As we shall see, it is noteworthy that he was influenced by the language philosophers but

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[46] Freeden, M. (2014) 'Editorial: The 'political turn' in political theory', *Journal of Political ideologies*, February, 19:1, 1-14.

[47] Freeden, M. (2003) *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University, 21.

[48] For an example of a particular application of Freeden's work see Jackson, B. & Stears, M. (2012*) Liberalism as Ideology: Essays in Honour of Michael Freeden*; Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[49] Freeden (1996) ibid., introduction.

Freeden's attention to the language of politics should not be seen as a retreat into a purely linguistic study of words and texts.[50] Freeden moves beyond discourse analyses and avoids some of the limits of discourse theory.[51] Indeed, regarding the development of critical discourse studies and theory, Freeden warns against reducing ideology to a discourse.[52] Ideology *can* be articulated through discourses but also does other significant work which, for the purposes of this research, is, as we shall see, important.[53] Freeden asserts that scholars should investigate the complex, (contingent) internal structures and the patterns of beliefs and ideas which ideologies serve to organise and distinguish between.

Having cleared the ground in providing some context and general observations about Freeden's approach to ideologies, I now introduce in more detail the two central aspects of his thinking: the diachronic and synchronic considerations which serve to elicit meaning from and between our concepts, and the tools of analysis available for me in Freeden's morphology of political concepts and ideologies.

The longue durée and the everyday

Here I discuss the influence of conceptual history in Freeden's work, and how he integrates the diachronic aspects of our concepts into their temporal contexts so as to point up

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[50] In this way Freeden reflects Wittgenstein, for example, who emphasises the importance of action, of practice, and not merely of words: in Wittgenstein, L. (1958) *Philosophical Investigations*, I, 3rd edn., trans Anscombe, G. E. M., New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., sections 7 and 23-25.

[51] For the discourse theory approaches which move beyond a textual and CDA methodology see Howarth, D. and Stavrakakis, Y. (2000) 'Introducing discourse theory and political analysis', 1-23, in Howarth, D., Norval, A. & Stavrakakis, Y.(eds) (2000) *Discourse theory and political analysis: identities, hegemonies and social change*, Manchester: Manchester University Press. For an early example of DT put to use see Howarth, D. (1997) 'Complexities of identity/difference: black consciousness ideology in South Africa', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, February, 2:1, 41-69.

[52] Discussed in Freeden (2003) op cit., 105.

[53] Freeden (2003) ibid.

important patterns of common usage as well as to underscore the importance of interpreting actual 'live' concrete happenings and the concepts which animate them. Freeden's extensive critique of the conventional scholarship on ideology gives space to, among other things, a more historicised approach. Freeden stakes out a framework for the study and understanding of ideologies which requires a consideration of the sedimented or established traditions in the *longue durée*.[54] Freeden utilises the work of Reinhart Koselleck and scholarship on *Begriffsgeschichte* (conceptual history) in understanding the conceptual contents and ordering of ideologies.[55] In this vein, Lynn Hunt's study on the French revolution is a good example of a close application of a conceptual history approach.[56] Her work considers the "microtechniques" of the revolutionaries and their revolutionary culture and politics.[57] Such instruments brought to bear in the French revolution include, as narrated by Hunt, the entrance of new concepts like the *ancien régime*, appealing to another, as yet absent, possible future and ushering in a shift from unequal subject to equal citizen.[58] For Freeden such conceptual change offers us a (not necessarily equal) balance between linguistic innovation and the patterns of customary usage.

Political concepts inevitably "bear the accumulative burdens of their past".[59] Of course this is different from the idea of determinism or teleological assumptions in which the past

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[54]Freeden (1996) op cit., 97-100. Freeden, M. (2003) op cit., 2; and, discussion in Norval, A. (2000) 'The Things We Do with Words - Contemporary Approaches to the Analysis of Ideology', *British Journal of Political Science*, 30, 314-316.

[55] Freeden, M. (1996) *op cit*; Koselleck, R. (1985) *Futures Past*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press; Freeden, M. (2008), 'Thinking politically and thinking about politics: language, interpretation, and ideology', in Leopold, D. & Stears, M. (eds) *Political theory: methods and approaches*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 209. Also, Hunt, L. (1984) *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, 1984, Berkeley: University of California Press.

[56] Elaborated by Stråth, B. (2013) 'Ideology and Conceptual History', in Freeden, M., Sargent, L.T. & Stears, M. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, 2013, Oxford: Oxford University Press 3-19.

[57] Hunt (1984) op cit., 71-73.

[58] Hunt (1984) op cit., 31-32.

[59] Freeden (1996) op cit., 98.

predicts or presumes a fixed path for the future. What Freeden seeks to pursue is "the role of history in ideological analysis"[60] as he acknowledges that ideologies and their contents, or political concepts, are to a significant extent 'underwritten' by history.[61] In pursuing the diachronic, Freeden shows how history can serve as a backdrop in the process of eliciting important meanings in a particular time and place.[62] Therefore, historical considerations have important implications for thinking adequately about ideas and ideologies, and in this regard the work of Quentin Skinner has been influential in joining theory with political thought in history.[63] In Chapter One I attended, briefly, to new innovations from the linguistic turn and the influence of the philosophy of Wittgenstein and Austin in political theory. Following some similar interdisciplinary and post-structuralist approaches, Freeden argues that conceptual history has "borrowed insights from linguistics, and the end-result is the identification of a semantic field in which time and space both confer meaning on political language".[64]

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[60] Freeden (1996) op cit., 98.

[61] Freeden (1996) op cit., 77.

[62] In doing so Freeden notes the utility of Saussure's synchronic approach to conceptual interpretation but improves it to consider diachronic aspects, 1996, 73. He draws on Wittgenstein to do this—Freeden (1996) op cit., 89-91—noting Wittgenstein's emphasis on families (as in 'family-resemblance concepts') as diachronic in nature. Cf. Wittgenstein (1958) op cit., section 67, for the origins of this move.

[63] See e.g. Skinner, Q. (1969) 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory*, 8:35.
For a provocative critique of the Cambridge School and especially (early) Skinner, in what amounts to a plea for the rehabilitation of philosophy, see Green, J E. (2015) 'Political Theory as Both Philosophy and History: A Defense Against Methodological Militancy', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 425-441. Green makes a good case for the possible importance of a non-historical study of 'classic texts'; and cf Philp, M. (2008) 'Political Theory and History', in Leopold, D. & Stears, M. eds. *Political Theory: Methods and Approaches*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 128-149. Whereas Philp's argument on claims of 'relativism' regarding Skinner can usefully be compared with, perhaps, a more nuanced defence of Skinner in Palonen, K. (2003) *Quentin Skinner: History, Politics, Rhetoric*, Cambridge: Polity Press, especially the introduction on the 'Skinnerian revolution' for political theory; and, also, a more sympathetic review of Skinner by Ball, T. (2007) 'Professor Skinner's Vision', *Political Studies Review*, 5, 351-364. Another perspective on history and theory, which includes discussion on Skinner's method, can be found in Markell, P. (2015) 'Unexpected Paths', *Theory & Event*, 19:1.

[64] Freeden (2003) op cit., 72.

Acting in tandem with ideas in history and with sedimented traditions and meanings over time is the immediate synchronic dimension. Freeden discusses the contribution of the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who advances a synchronic system in language within which the components, such as words, derive meaning from "their contingent relationships at a particular point in time".[65] This system of meaning relies not just on the association of units in a particular formation but also on the consideration of the 'combinatory possibilities' of words in the text to delineate possible 'fields of meanings'. However, Freeden clearly departs from Saussure in important ways, as his (Saussure's) approach is predicated on the notion that we can lock or close concepts in their meanings, and also does not consider influences that might be external to his linguistic endeavour. So Saussure's system is characterised by a "relative de-emphasis on diachrony".[66]

Freeden is interested in the aspects of our language which connect with the 'external' social and political world, and this brings us directly to the formation and bounding of ideological assemblages. This requires a move towards the external patterns and interactions of culture and history regarding our political concepts and ideologies. Freeden is expanding the horizon of our analysis to include "the actual modes of political thinking, whether expressed in the vernacular, the discourses of political élites, or the academic languages of engagé political theorists and philosophers".[67] It is Freeden's morphology of political concepts and ideologies which acts to bring all these dimensions together: patterns over time, historical tradition with conceptual change or continuity and then abrupt rupture or discontinuity. We therefore need Freeden's morphological approach to deepen our thinking in order to be able to dissect ideas in a particular time and place.

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[65] Freeden (1996) op cit., 49.
[66] Freeden (1996) op cit., 51.
[67] Freeden, M. (2013b) 'The morphological analysis of ideology', in Freeden, M., Sargent, L.T., & Stears, M. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 118.

A morphological approach to political ideologies

The overarching consideration of both the synchronic and diachronic dimensions to our understanding of concepts and ideologies frames Freeden's morphological approach to political concepts and ideologies. For example, how exactly are some ideas prioritised or preferred over others; what factors go into this ordering; and how might we investigate a specific temporal and spatial event or happening? Freeden provides the fine-grained analysis to answer such questions. The first thing to emphasise is that Freeden's approach to political ideologies regards them as "ideational formations consisting of political concepts".[68] Concepts act as a "basic unit of political thought" to help us decode the "sets of political ideas circulating in society", be they the familiar ideological traditions or shifts in our ideational landscape.[69] Freeden describes political concepts as making up the 'ideological furniture' in a particular ideological 'room', thus providing the contents of ideologies.

Freeden, therefore, enables ways of working with essentially contested political concepts, using them as important 'building blocks' in an analysis of ideologies. Concepts are organized by and within specific ideological patterns or traditions, and are ordered to anchor, prioritize, advocate, and/or impress upon us certain beliefs over others. These processes can be understood through a central feature in Freeden's scholarship on ideologies: the notion of **decontestation**.[70] Freeden states that:

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[68] Freeden (1996) op cit., 48.
[69] Freeden (2003) op cit., 51.
[70] Some good examples of the dynamics of decontestation in motion are with regard to the British Labour Party, its record in government, and its evolution: see Finlayson, 'Third Way Theory', in *Political Quarterly*; 1999, 70:3, 271-279 especially with regard to the idea of and contestation about 'equality'; and, Bastow, S.,

In concrete terms, an ideology will link together a particular conception of human nature, a particular conception of social structure, of justice, of liberty, of authority, etc. "*This* is what liberty means, and *that* is what justice means", it asserts.[71]

The process of decontestation moves us from the problem of unending meanings of our essentially contested ideas towards a point of stability in attaching words which give us meaning in use. From this we can ascertain the appropriate usage of a word, as a political concept, at a given point in time, and determine usage over a period of time — within the context of a morphology of political ideologies. This process shows itself in the real world as "struggles over the socially legitimated meanings of political concepts and the sustaining arrangements they form".[72]

Freeden posits that concepts also obtain enhanced meaning through their positionality in the ideational pecking order. He devises a number of concepts to highlight this process and to help us make distinctions between different concepts. Freeden provides layers of detail about the ways in which a morphology of ideologies "displays core, adjacent, and peripheral concepts".[73] In one key explication Freeden gives, the concept of liberty can be considered

Martin, J., and Pels, D. (2002) 'Introduction: Third Ways in Political Ideology', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 7:3, 269-280. For some provisional thoughts on processes of decontestation in the Syrian and Arab revolutionary context see Haugbolle, S. (2012) 'Reflections on Ideology After the Arab Uprisings', *Jadaliyya ezine*, published online March 21; then, turning to Arab political intellectuals and their take on the revolutionary turn see Kassab, E. (2014) 'Critics and Rebels: Older Arab Intellectuals Reflect upon the Uprisings', *British Journal of Middle East Studies*, published online 19 March 2014 - especially in regard to shifting sands of ideas and values and how these are being contested now.

[71] Freeden (1996) op cit., 76.
[72] Freeden (1996) op cit., 77.
[73] Freeden (1996) op cit., 77.

as a **core concept** in our understandings of the ideology of liberalism. **Adjacent concepts** to liberty might help to explicate the central beliefs within this ideological formation, so that concepts such as 'equality' and 'democracy' act to further elaborate what *kind* of liberty pertains to the family of liberalism. Then, there may be **peripheral concepts** such as the idea of nationalism, which may be relegated through decontestation into the margins.[74]

Logical and cultural constraints

The dynamic and potential for change in this conceptual ordering is possible, but it is important to note that the variety of possibilities are not endless, as in Gallie's lament on essentially contested concepts. Rather, Freeden argues that there are a number of possible orderings but they all have vitally important internal and relational contexts and constraints. Freeden articulates these constraints more explicitly when he discusses the *logical* and *cultural* constraints, or logical and cultural adjacency, in which concepts are bound by ideological distinctions and preferences. Familiar meanings of the concept of democracy may not survive seemingly illogical moves such as restricting voting rights to a small ruling elite (as we encountered earlier with Connolly). For example, it would not be logical to have liberty without the notion of non-constraint as a 'minimum empirical reality'.[75] In this case Freeden assigns liberty as the "Millite core" concept in the ideology of liberalism.[76]

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[74] Freeden (1996) op cit., 77.
[75] Freeden (1996) op cit., 64.
[76] Freeden (1996) op cit., 96, in his chapter 'Liberalism: The Dominant Ideology'. See also the way in which George Lakoff (2006) *Whose Freedom: The Battle over America's most Important Idea*, Picador, 39-62, 73-74, 243-266 deconstructs the concept of 'freedom' in the contemporary north American context, noting both the 'tradition', or conceptual history of "progressive freedom" in the USA together with the 'live' and deep contestation of the idea and its misappropriation in current usage and how to (re)gain it. Lakoff's 'progressive freedom' exemplifies Freeden's ineliminable dimension of contestation over concepts in politics, but, equally, doesn't take this as an invitation to relativism, nor to the abandonment of the idea of conceptual contestability.

The morphological approach indicates how concepts are 'mutually defining', through their relative position within an ideological or political tradition.[77] For example, adjacent to the ineliminable core of liberty resides the importance of the individual, which we find through recourse to an established canon of human rights law and discourse in liberal societies. This logical placement of liberty which privileges the individual can be empirically ascertained in the political thought — and in the policies — of liberalism and liberal government. It mitigates against anomalous ideological contest or change which might attempt to, for example, marginalise the idea of the individual or the value of liberty. Such contests can of course emerge, as we see with current discourse around national security and the consequent erosion of individual liberties, but they challenge established tradition and logical understandings of what the concept of liberalism consists of.

In the case of cultural constraints, the production of "symbolic and material goods" that societies produce serves to "anchor them firmly into the contexts of time and space, and to fine-tune the logical interpretations that their conceptual arrangements can carry".[78] Cultural constraints might act to compensate for the fact that logic might be blind to moral and other considerations. Freeden gives the example of how a society might respond to the call to eradicate poverty. Responses could logically include the eradication of poor people; the transfer or economic cleansing of poor communities; or working with the belief that each should contribute to society and take from it according to their need – an effort to redistribute wealth (which itself could take various forms). The first two are morally (and therefore culturally) repugnant and would not be deemed as civilised acts (though it should be noted

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[77] Freeden (2003) op cit., 54.
[78] Freeden (2003) op cit., 57-58.

that in reality versions of the second are not uncommon). Freeden also invokes the notion of a common sense use of, for example, the concept of poverty. He gives the example of responding to the call to end poverty by redefining the very meaning of the term so that it is something which applies only at the point of death.[79] This, of course, would be to make nonsense of the concept as it goes against all common meanings in use.

As this brief example indicates, Freeden includes a range of factors within the domain of cultural constraint, providing a broad canvas on which we might paint the particularities of a given society in regard to conceivable cultural constraints. The very real logical and cultural constraints are central to the process of decontestation in a morphological approach to the concepts which make up distinctive ideologies and ideational patterns. Such are the very real constraints that exist in the concrete world in which particular ideas are organised and which might also disregard or dismiss others.

This morphological framework enables some stability of meaning in use and efforts *towards* settling meaning. The conceptual ordering of core and adjacent beliefs and ideas we have discussed so far enables an analysis of our established ideological families as well as new players. The idea of new formations and competing ideologies forming is further elucidated if we consider Freeden's ideas about the morphological periphery.

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[79] Freeden (2003) op cit.*,* 58.

Promise at the ideational periphery

For the purposes of this research in particular, there is much potential in Freeden's conceptual and ideological periphery, there being two nuanced kinds of this: the 'perimeter' and the 'margin'. Each of these appears to delineate a space for the messy business of everyday politics and for political change.[80] If we simplify this to consider a general periphery, as Freeden later does,[81] we can imagine concepts vying for attention or languishing on the very margins of ideological formations. Freeden notes that the periphery in his morphology of ideologies might, for example, house political concepts which are not fully fledged: 'belief challenges'[82]— such as 'immigration'. Yet we have seen how such ideas can gain pace and how issues of race and nationality can become defining features of ideologies at their very core—such as Fascism. Mobilising the morphological periphery illustrates how concepts can take form and become (adjacently, or even at the core) important in instances of abrupt change. For example, Freeden asserts that "cataclysmic events can propel marginal concepts into the core, such as happened with the concept of a 'market' after the collapse of the Soviet Union." Equally, the concept of 'violence' shifted from the margins to the core in the rapid development of Fascism, thus illustrating that concepts can suddenly gain significance.

Having set out some of the key elements of Freeden's morphology, we can start to look at the ways in which Freeden provides an exposition at a greater level of detail of his

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[80] Freeden (1996) op cit., 77-81.
[81] Freeden (2003) op cit., 62-3.
[82] Freeden (1996) op cit.

morphological approach to ideologies. In particular his 'four Ps' in the composition of ideologies.[83]

The four Ps.

The 'four Ps' give us the composition of Freeden's morphological approach: in **proximity** to other concepts, in obtaining **priority** over related concepts, as **permeable** and amenable to overlap and cross pollination between ideological formations and, finally, in placing **proportionate** emphasis on some concepts over others. Freeden is keen to illustrate how his theorising on ideologies does not constitute the suggestion of a fixed structure of organizing, but, rather, how the processes of decontesting are contingent, allowing fluid formations and changes to occur.[84] I outline them in brief, below, to advance further our thinking about the internal complexity of contestable concepts and the central process of ideological decontestation.

The first idea is that of **proximity,** and Freeden's point, allied with Connolly's cluster concept thinking, is that concepts cannot be considered or understood in isolation. We need to consider them in their particular contexts in order to see how they can be concretised. Therefore students of ideology need to pay attention to the specific 'idea-environment' that a particular concept shares with other concepts.[85] Freeden gives the example of the concept of individuality. How we conceptualise this idea will depend on the other concepts which help to clarify it through a relational dynamic in a particular ideological formation. For example, in a given ideology and conception of individuality, are humans conceptualised as

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[83] Freeden (2003) op cit.
[84] Freeden (2003) op cit., 60-64.
[85] Freeden (2003) op cit., 61.

being atomistic and self-sufficient? Or, alternatively, are individuals conceptualised in a particular ideological pattern by means of other concepts which mark individuals as completely interdependent, as social animals that need to be part of a community, for example.[86] In the first atomistic scenario we might find more libertarian ideational patterns and in the latter we might find some indications of socialist or communist leanings (and there are possible mixtures between these two ideological poles).

Priority refers to the order of the 'ideological furniture', the specific ways in which an ideology selects and ranks particular political concepts taken from a much more widely available 'pool of ideas',[87] assigning to some a core position while others are made peripheral. As we have seen, such processes are, inevitably, reflective of "sustained empirical, historical usage".[88] But the morphology of ideologies also involves a continual process of reordering the conceptual furniture in response to events and happenings in the real world. A core concept in classic Liberalism - such as the example Freeden gives of private property - may gradually be pushed to the periphery of the 'room' and, perhaps, marginalised altogether in a dusty corner.[89] This ordering of the concepts in use can also work the other way, of course, so that concepts at the periphery gain traction and start to be used more centrally.

Linked to this ordering and relational meaning is the notion of **permeability**. Freeden reminds us that "ideologies are not hermetically sealed: they have porous boundaries and

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[86] Freeden (2003) op cit., 61.
[87] Freeden (2003) op cit., 61.
[88] Freeden (2003) op cit., 62.
[89] Freeden (2003) op cit., 62.

will frequently occupy overlapping space".[90] This alerts us to the fact that concepts are not exclusive to a particular ideological tradition or current. So, we can suppose that ideas of modernization and progress might well be desirable concepts across a number of disparate ideologies, albeit configured in different ways. We might find that common ideas relating to social justice come to the fore and exist across assumed ideological divides, as has been seen at certain times in Egypt between broadly socialist groupings and the Muslim Brotherhood,[91] although other logical and cultural constraints serve to limit such fluidity.

Finally, **proportionality** is the tool with which Freeden suggests that the (perhaps necessary) simplification, but sometimes oversimplification, of ideologies can be tempered by considering the strength with which certain concepts are emphasised over others. Freeden gives the example of the way in which libertarians magnify the concept of individual liberty to the detriment of other important liberal values, thus distorting the picture.[92]

Utilising these possible compositions of ideologies we see how concepts are like pieces of furniture, preferred and ordered into the core and adjacent or side-lined and forgotten in the periphery or margins of a particular ideological formation. Such 'concrete manifestations' are just settled enough for political analysts to be able to understand and take meaning from the nature of the ideas in a particular time and space.[93] It is the multiple dimensions and possible logical and cultural considerations that ideological ordering might bring about, and the very real potential for change *in* them and introduced *by* them, which are pertinent to a

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[90] Freeden (2003) op cit.*,* 64.
[91] See discussion on this in: Browers, M (2009) *Political Ideology in the Arab World: Accommodation and Transformation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 4. Freeden (2003) op cit., 64-65.
[92] Freeden (2003) op cit.*,* 64-65.
[93] Freeden (1996) op cit., 3.

study of concepts which appear and are used in a situation of rapid change such as in revolutions.

At the heart of Freeden's project, and in his later work,[94] is a constant emphasis on and reference to our 'concrete' and 'empirical' world, and his plea for theorists to pay more attention to the 'raw material'; to study political thought in the vernacular and to reflect upon how these patterns of thinking and acting can be analysed and interpreted by the scholar of political theory.[95] This points towards the need to reflect on everyday political thought and practices, and the ways in which ideas or concepts might start to form a 'thought-practice', that is, a "recurring pattern of (political) thinking".[96]

Important thinking embedded in Freeden's scholarship about ideas is, perhaps, highlighted if we think through the implications of his conception of a 'concrete, empirical world' throughout his 1996 book, and subsequently in his later work.[97] Freeden, is suggesting that theory and practice are not two distinctive fields of knowledge, but, rather, is suggesting a way to expound on the complex interplay between them.[98] This has important value for researchers looking at ideas that are produced by divergent actors through their language, speech, performance and so on. In this study one of my central claims is that my approach seeks to get closer to the people, the revolutionaries, and to deciphering and interpreting

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[94] Freeden (2008) 'Thinking politically and thinking about politics: language, interpretation, and ideology', in Leopold, D. & Stears, M. eds. *Political theory: methods and approaches*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 203-210. Freeden, M (2013) *The Political Theory of Political Thinking: The Anatomy of a Practice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[95] Freeden, M. (1996) *Ideologies and Political Theory: A conceptual approach*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 22-23.

[96] Freeden (2003) op cit., 21.

[97] Freeden (1996) op cit., 85-92.

[98] On the problematic assumption that we can separate 'theory' from practice or the 'empirical' field see Fraser, N. (2008) *Scales of Justice: reimaging political space in a globalizing world*, Columbia: Columbia University Press, 36; which can be productively compared with earlier work from a realist perspective by Geuss, R. (2008) *Philosophy and Real Politics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

their worlds. I aim to show this by using Freeden's work to think about the Syrian revolution. The next section therefore draws together how the theoretical insight and useful conceptual tools which both Connolly and Freeden provide can be employed in an analysis of dignity in Syria's revolution.

III   Theorising elsewhere: Applying Connolly and Freeden to Syria

Before setting out in detail my approach to the conceptualisation of dignity in Syria's revolution, I seek to address the question of applying western theory and ideas to other contexts. It should be recognised that there is a significant debate in the area of comparative political theory and thought (CPT) concerning the application of Western theories to non-Western contexts. My own approach will be one which assumes that the interpretive methodologies I have outlined so far, are relevant to a study of human activity and to political happenings, independent of any geographic or imagined boundaries. Before specifying in more detail how I will go about this it is important to outline the key issues at stake. The debates about this matter span a very broad church of comparative political thought and theory (CPT). For example, Michael Freeden has co-edited a volume on contemporary political thought which engages with some of the central debates and problems in existing efforts regarding theoretical work in non-western contexts.[99] In the introduction Freeden cautioned that:

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[99] Freeden, M. & Vincent, A. (2013a) *Comparative Political Thought: Theorizing practices*, Oxon: Routledge.

We can never arrive at a complete understanding of other societies or even our own. What we can though arrive at are certain insights, certain glimpses that make sense to us; sometimes they may even make more sense to us than to the dominant cultural understanding in the societies that we study.[100]

Whilst recognising the collective effort within CPT to pay due attention to differing ideas and practices of different cultural traditions, Freeden notes the possible risks along the way. First appears to be the danger that some established problems in political theory, philosophy, and science have inculcated a sense of superiority for the assumed norm and model of the West. However, Freeden notes that contributions to his volume include successful efforts to overcome this problem such as the study of 'multiple modernities' taking us beyond narrow Eurocentric secular rational thought.

A second challenge on the path to 'theorising elsewhere' is the need to unsettle assumed universalist values and notions and in particular to avoid the assumption of timeless ahistorical conceptions of ideas such as politics and justice. Rising to this challenge, contributions in the volume utilise moves from idealism to political realism in political theorising. This move also contains seeds from which to harvest some rich, comparative studies on the everyday, vernacular world. However, this can be counterpoised with another obstruction to productive theorising which is the compulsion for normative theorising which

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[100] Freeden, M. Introduction, in Freeden, M. & Vincent, A. (2013a) *Comparative Political Thought: Theorizing practices*, Oxon: Routledge, 22.

attaches to moralising about, and, more or less, apologising for the 'Other'.[101] This includes

the theorists who labour to 'normalise' Islam and reassure us that it is compatible with

western liberal democracy, the problem here being, potentially, that theorists reproduce

Western framing and, more importantly, that it presupposes something questionable: that

Muslims or Islam have anything to apologise for. The other end of this obstructing pole in

CPT is the possible recourse to all kinds of relativism, which is equally damaging.[102] I shall

elaborate on some of these tensions below.

If we are making a claim for the importance of looking at or seeing the 'political' in its

widest and most human (agency/actor) sense (outside formalistic and narrow politics) then

we cannot assume that, methodologically, such political inquiry stops abruptly and becomes

irrelevant when we look at other regions in the world.[103] It is thus important to foreground

local contexts *and* to avoid exceptionalism. The tendency to essentialise societies and even

whole regions has been critiqued in the postcolonial critical school of thought that emerged

from the anti-colonial struggles.[104] There is, however, then a danger that this necessary

critique creates a new problem. Attempts at correction may take the argument to extremes

so that we reach a point where western academics have no place or right to study non-

western societies, or where we start to encounter western political thought as a possible

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[101] For a critique of the field along these lines see Goto-Jones, C. (2013) 'When is comparative political thought (not) comparative?' In Freeden, M. & Vincent, A. (2013a) *op cit.,* 158-180.

[102] This paragraph has drawn extensively from the introduction by Michael Freeden to his co-edited volume: Freeden, M. & Vincent, A. (2013a) op cit., 20-22.

[103] Mamdani, M. (2001) *When victims become killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press

[104] See overview in Rao, R. (2013) *Postcolonialism*, in Freeden, M., Sargent, L.T., & Stears, M. eds. The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 271-289. Also debates on decolonizing theory: Baum, B. (2015) 'Decolonising Critical Theory', *Constellations*, 22, 420-34, and a response from Ciccariello-Maher, G. (2016) 'Decolonising Theory from Within or Without? A Reply to Baum, *Constellations*, 23:1, 133-137. For a reparative approach to both Postcolonialism and Marxism see Rao, R. (2016) 'Recovering Reparative Readings of Postcolonialism and Marxism', *Critical Sociology*, 1-12.

'westoxication'.[105] Instead, the point might be, drawing on a sympathetic reading of Gunnell,[106] to be aware that we must not assume a copy-and-paste kind of theoretical model or schema, nor begin by assuming that our concepts in use might directly be transposed or, worse still, act as the imposed ideal in other contexts. However, and crucially, this does not close off the investigation of diverse social and political landscapes but merely underpins the approach I am advancing here, through Freeden and Connolly, that we need to pay careful attention to our political concepts as they appear and are organised in specific instances, and that we also need to be thoroughly historically—and contextually—minded in our inquiries.

Pursued from this direction and in this spirit, comparative theory seems a useful mode of approach to making actual comparisons,[107] rather than the mere seeking of equivalence across intellectual and political discourses in different contexts. So, for example, von Vacano makes a sensible argument that comparative political theory "should involve non-Western ideas or thinkers, not merely in the application of European ideas in non-European contexts."[108] In doing so von Vacano also offers a way to escape the attendant relativism of some postmodern lines of thought and to overcome one's own potential cultural prejudices and essentialising.[109] This is important for my research focus, as for some researchers careful attention to specificity has unfortunately led into a retreat into geographic or extreme

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[105] Freeden and Vincent (2013a) op cit., 9-10.

[106] Gunnell, J.G. (2011) *Political Theory and Social Science: Cutting Against the Grain,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan

[107] Compare sections 130-2 in Wittgenstein (1958) op cit.

[108] von Vacano, D. (2015) 'The Scope of Comparative Political Theory', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 18, 477. Cf. again, along somewhat similar lines, Mamdani, op. cit.

[109] Winch possibly offers a way to think/do this, though the language he used to do so is now out of step with postcolonial discourses; see his chapter; 'Understanding a primitive society', in Wilson, B. (ed.) (1970) *Key concepts in the Social Sciences: Rationality*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 78-111

forms of cultural relativism which, for example, can fetishize differences such as religion, ethnicity and so on, and suggest that not all humans could conceivably share similar wants, needs and claims, or to assert that Muslims are not ready for 'western' democracy, and so on, thereby returning us to the relativist path of 'Mannheim's paradox',[110] and the possible limits of 'postmodernists' such as Rorty.[111]

CPT, perhaps necessarily, complicates these matters in the course of correcting them, and airs a multiplicity of sometimes conflicting and competing visions, as is set out and critiqued by von Vacano.[112] There are, of course, a number of normative and interpretive approaches within CPT. Normative theorists seek to enter into dialogue, to engage with and/or promote equivalence, commonality or the accommodation of western with non-western ideas, or to offer correctives to and departures from colonial and Eurocentric errors. The task of the interpreter (where I place myself) is to seek to explicate, to 'understand and decode', and to de-centre different phenomena or different possible units of analysis without ascribing 'origin' and normative judgements which might then enforce prescriptive universalist positions in the process.[113] However, the attempt at more critical and reflective scholarship in response to the problematic of a hegemonic, liberal, normative knowledge production of 'elsewhere', as Bonura cautions, might reproduce some of the problems it seeks to correct.

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[110] Mannheim attempted to escape the relativism trap, unsuccessfully, which led to Clifford Geertz's characterization of his work on ideology as 'Mannheim's paradox': ie he argued convincingly that Marxism cannot be outside of ideology but in doing so could not extricate the positionally of the subject—see discussion on this in Freeden (1996) op cit., 26; and, Geertz (1973/2000) op cit., 194.

[111] At least, as Rorty is usually understood: as a postmodern relativist. This interpretation of Rorty may miss nuances in his stance which he himself describes as 'ethnocentric', and may miss distinctions between, for example, stances of superiority and those which merely recognise positionality, however uncomfortable. But an exegetical investigation which could settle these matters moves too far away from the main focus of this chapter. Rorty himself tackles accusations of relativism in Rorty, R. (1989) *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, specifically Chapter Three, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 44-69.

[112] von Vacano, D. (2015) 'The Scope of Comparative Political Theory', *The Annual Review of Political Science*, 18:465-80.

[113] Citing Michael Freeden and Andrew Vincent, in von Vacano, D. ibid, 471.

Through this lens, theorizing elsewhere and in particular about non-western political thought merely:

> …reaffirms the 'here' of contemporary western political theory while rendering the substance of non-western political thought indefinite and subject to various kinds of 'moral ordering' amid comparisons with 'western political thought'.[114]

In all of these debates within and beyond CPT, some possible and perhaps problematical tensions, then, remain. They cannot be resolved here and that is not my intention. However, they can help to *clarify* the methodological approach I am seeking to build for a conceptualization of the idea of dignity in Syria's revolution. My research proceeds along a path which seeks to avoid both extreme relativism and Eurocentric errors by attempting to give due consideration to context, whilst also questioning any assumed Arab or Syrian exceptionalism in thinking about ideas and about the 'political'.

Freeden partly offers a way out of any seemingly theoretical state of aporia when he posits a 'contingent universalism'.[115] In this approach Freeden recognises and analyses different ideational patterns over time and across space, but also cautions against fixing ideas or patterns in stone, or assuming they can form a final ideological assemblage.[116] The necessary critique of the mainstream and conventional discipline of political science and theory and

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[114] Bonura, C. (2013) 'Theorising Elsewhere: Comparison and Topological Reasoning in Political Theory', *Polity*, 45:1, 40.
[115] Freeden, M. (2013b) 'The Morphological Analysis of Ideology', in Freeden, M. Sargent L.T. & Stears, M eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 128.
[116] Freeden (2013b) ibid., 128.

the emergence of more radical forms of postcolonial scholarship does not preclude the idea that a common way of seeing and thinking about the political can be applied in different contexts, even as diverse as Syria and the UK.[117]

Method and material

The previous discussion has provided the bridge to my detailed research on Syria and underscored the importance of an analysis of 'ideas from below' and a specific study of the concept of dignity in revolution. In this final section I set out my method specifically for a study of this idea. This method builds on the detailed methodological framing I have set out above. I will concisely summarise this first and then move on to discuss the actual raw materials available in the concrete case of Syria's revolution, including the selection of material and concomitant reflections on method.

I utilise ideas from Connolly to argue for and underpin a research study centred on the analysis of the complex and contestable concept of dignity. I set out to show how dignity is contested and contestable and how its internal criteria and its interpretive potential is an example of a contested concept. I then draw on Connolly to argue how the idea of dignity *becomes political* within a revolutionary situation. I show how dignity has a sedimented

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[117] This is patently not the same as, for example, the assumed universalism of an American-centric knowledge production, as discussed in Schatz, Edward & Maltseva, Elena, (2012) 'Assumed to be Universal: The Leap from Data to Knowledge in the American Political Science Review', *Polity* 44, 446-472; and, how such critiques contribute to post-colonialism as "an awareness of the ways in which five centuries of modern European colonialism continue to shape political ideas and practices, including those concerning the production of knowledge", in Chandra, U. (2013) 'The Case for a Postcolonial Approach to the Study of Politics', *New Political Science*, 35:3, 480. A critical school that emerged directly from the anti-colonial struggles is captured in the writings of Fanon, F (2001) *The Wretched of the Earth*; and Amilcar, C. (1980) *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings.*

meaning anchored in history, but also how it moves through time and how conceptual innovation and change might occur in a particular situation.

I rely on Freeden in order to situate and analyse the concept of dignity in all its complexity and in its relationship to and with the external world; the morphological approach gives me the tools to do this. I consider dignity in its diachronic and synchronic settings and look at how these dynamics interact. I think about the process of decontestation and how dignity relates to and is clarified in relation to other ideas. I investigate the extent to which dignity, as a core concept in the revolution, appears alongside other core and adjacent ideas.

I apply the ideas and theories in the scholarship of Connolly and Freeden to the concrete situation of Syria's revolutionary moment. The next chapter, Chapter Three, is a macro-level critical study of Syria's modern ideational landscape which formed the historical backdrop for the rapidly shifting ground and revolution which began in 2011. I utilise the diachronic elements of Freeden's research approach and draw on the detailed conceptual tools in his morphology of political ideologies to consider ideational traditions and ideological components of Syria's dominant ideology. I pick out the core and relational or adjacent concepts which structured the dominant Syrian Arab Baʿthist ideology and ruling party. I also consider the ideas which were to be pushed to the margins or periphery as the Baʿth party gained power and then, ultimately, was conceded to Asad's one party state and authoritarian rule.

In Chapter Four I extend this 'historicized' analysis specifically to a treatment of the concept of dignity. In thinking about the history of the concept of dignity and the processes of

conceptual change, it is necessary to investigate this internally complex concept and its relationship to and with the external world. I draw on the diachronic aspects of dignity in history and I analyse what seems to be the internal structure of the meaning of dignity. I also move towards an explicit consideration of the political aspects of the idea of dignity as it emerged and functioned at particular historical junctures. Therefore, I start to draw in the synchronic dimension along with a consideration of the broad sweep of ideological traditions. The final part of Chapter Four starts to shift us to the synchronic aspects and concrete empirical world of the Syrian revolution began in 2011. Here I introduce the beginnings of Syria's 2011 revolution and the utterances and actions of the revolutionaries in it.

In Chapters Five and Six I investigate the political thought and revolutionary practice of two distinctive 'exemplars' of Syria's revolutionary moment. I move to focus more directly on the conceptual content of dignity by means of these examples, and on some aspects of Freeden's morphological approach to political concepts and ideologies. I need to attend to the empirical, concrete world of Syria's revolutionary moment through the utterances, texts and practices of its participants, and that is the nature therefore of the two 'exemplar' chapters. I consider the uses and function of dignity as it is used explicitly, but also as it can be inferred implicitly – especially through its relationship with other concepts.

The raw material of revolution

I now introduce briefly the process of actually selecting the 'raw material' from Syria's revolutionary actors that I describe and analyse in detail in Chapters Five and Six. There is a vast wealth of material from the revolution in the form of alternative newspapers, content-

sharing channels, mediated content available via major Arab news and current affairs satellite channels, websites, blogs and much more. Navigating this burgeoning revolutionary culture and production was an important part of my interpretive approach to analysing the concept of dignity. There are many possible approaches to pursue that would go beyond a narrow textual analysis and seek to track ideational patterns and ideas in use. There are practical constraints in terms of access to people and information. Given the acceleration of the conflict it was not practical for me to travel to Syria without the risk of compromising my own and my potential informants' security and safety. At the same time, though, given the access to material on revolutionary websites and social networking sites it was possible to get closer to the ideas as they developed.

Having scoped out and monitored content online and followed various Syrian revolutionary Facebook groups, websites, and other social media platforms, I became familiar with the material available online and the different kinds of content being made available and by whom. In recognising the importance and dynamic nature of political ideologies as 'receptacles' for a variety of ideas, I traced two distinctive ideological currents from *within* Syria's revolution: that of the progressive liberal trend and the non-extremist Islamist current. These two threads provide us with the broader ideational context for an analysis of dignity in revolution.

From this point I selected two prominent ideational exemplars from each of these trends: the progressive website *al-jumhuriya* (The Republic) and the Islamist fighters' *liwa al-tawhid* (Unity Brigade). They serve as exemplars simply in the sense that they each offer us different takes on a particular set of beliefs and practices which are organised to achieve

common and collective revolutionary goals. These two exemplars enjoyed a high profile within the Syrian revolution and they offer contrasting profiles of revolutionary actors: a broadly intellectual and activist perspective in contrast to fighters on the frontline. Exploring these roles is central to gaining an understanding of what the revolutionary agents were doing and why they were doing it. These explorations are focused here through the lens of the idea of dignity. Both these groups have prominently used, referred to and promoted the idea of dignity in a number of ways, and offer us pictures of (the idea of) dignity in use in a specific revolutionary situation, and show us how this idea emerged and played out within differing traditions and trajectories in the revolution.

However, before this detailed examination of specific ideas, we need firstly to stand back and to take in the historical, diachronic, formation of Arab ideologies and, in particular, the dominant ideological current in modern Syria. Otherwise, it will not be possible to see from where the concept and the call to dignity came from in Syria in 2011. I suggest that we can come to understand the felt force of the concept of dignity if we acknowledge the ways in which the Syrian Arab Baʿth project run aground and that, in the era of nation-building, the promise of citizenship, freedom, and equality was fundamentally undermined in the service of ruling elites and their narrow self-interests and of regime survival.

This necessarily requires a more detailed investigation into the conceptual history and political thought of Arab Baʿthism as well as into the formation and aims of the formal Baʿth Party, which has dominated the Syrian ideological landscape since the military coup of 1963. Attention should also be given to competing and overlapping ideological currents which developed in the twentieth century. This will be the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Three - Arab Ideologies

The battle for ideas: the rise of the Arab Baʿth Party

Introduction

The first two chapters of this thesis prepared the ground for an interpretive approach to a conceptualisation and analysis of dignity in Syria's revolution. In Chapter One I indicated the ways in which I seek to move beyond the conventional research questions which continue to frame much of our analysis on modern revolutions. I noted welcome developments in the study of revolution which consider agental approaches to important social and political events such as revolutions. In Chapter Two I set out my methodology, situated in the study of concepts and political ideologies. I claimed that ideas are important aspects of revolutions, available for our inspection if we broaden investigation beyond questions of causation and look at the thought-patterns of revolutionary actors in order to uncover the interesting processes that were unfolding and the ideas contained within them.

This chapter acts as an historic 'bridge' and vital context for my specific research on dignity in Syria's revolution. The aim here is to ensure that any consideration of political ideas and beliefs is undertaken contextually and with due attention to contemporary Syrian politics, the rise of political parties and the forming of modern ideological traditions. I set out here the ideational landscape from which the revolution and the idea of dignity was to emerge. I focus on the emergence of the Arab Baʿth (resurrection) party and outline its founding beliefs and its organising concepts (focusing on the Syrian branch and party). This introduces some of the most influential and formative ideas which underpinned the main

Arab ideological families emerging and consolidating in the twentieth century. I necessarily, therefore, also introduce briefly the competing current of political Islam and I also give attention to the republican dimension which is less attended to in the wider scholarship on Syria.

Following the scholarship of Freeden, the diachronic aspects I consider enable us to see how ideas are important units of analysis for studies of the formation of Syrian Baʿthist ideology. This chapter is not a comprehensive history of the period and of the rise of the Arab Baʿth Party—that would be a thesis in itself. Rather I focus on the formation of the Arab Baʿth movement, emphasising the historic Syrian dimension. Against this backdrop I introduce and analyse the central ideas which informed Arab Baʿthism. I look at the conceptual content of (Syrian) Arab Baʿthism, and, in particular, the core concepts of Arab unity, freedom, and socialism. I discuss how we can understand these complex concepts themselves as well as in their important relations with each other and with other ideas in specific contexts. I briefly explore and analyse the ways in which the Syrian Arab Ba´th Party consolidated its grip and became the ruling party and dominant ideology in contemporary Syria. I also attend to the ideational currents of Islamism and also draw on new scholarship to recover some aspects of Arab republicanism. These sometimes competing and sometimes overlapping trends are important to the study of dignity in Syria, as we shall see.

In this chapter I argue that we find a fundamental tension between the narrow interests of a ruling elite keen to ensure a status quo and that of the ideas which were being produced and disseminated with the emergence of new movements and parties across the region. In

pursuing a morphological approach in an analysis of the concepts which went to make up

emerging ideologies and the formalised Syrian Arab Baʿth Party, I am able to explicate the

core ideas of Arab unity, freedom and the formulation of a particular Arab socialism. These

virtues were what underpinned the historical push for self-determination and citizenship yet

such ideas were marginalised when the party was formalised (and instrumentalised by rulers)

in power.

I   Historicising the Arab Baʿth Party

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century is a formative period for the formation of

new ideas and modern ideational currents in the Arab region. There had long existed an

abstract and broadly conceived cultural and linguistic sense of an Arab nation, or *ummah*—

albeit contested in practices. This general sense of being Arab was captured by the idea of

Arabism which preceded the formal and bounded nation-state and the more politically

explicit and contentious Arab nationalisms which were to follow. This Arabism tended to

exist alongside and in negotiation (rather than conflict) with the entrenched Ottoman system.

Provincial elites were in positions of influence and power and largely sought ways in which

to secure their interests and patronage networks. Such an elite network of notables acted as

an intermediary between the imperial power base and the local communities.[1] However, in

particular, the Ottoman *Tanzimat* reforms had had profound effects on subjects in the

empire. Issues from tax collection and military conscription to capitulation and ideas about

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[1] For discussion on the variegated interests of the 'notables': Hourani, A. (1968) 'Ottoman Reform and the
Politics of Notables' in *Beginnings of Modernisation in the Middle East: The Nineteenth Century,* Polk, W.
& Chambers, R. eds. Chicago, *41-68.* See P. Khoury, *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism: The Politics of
Damascus 1860-1920*, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

citizen equality generated political ferment within which new associations began to emerge. Differing ideas of Arabism and Arab nationalism came to reflect a reaction and response to the increasingly nationalist turn, with the Young Turks and the emergence of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) and perceptions of an increasing Turkification.[2]

Important centres of political agitation for reform emerged and shared common Arabist sentiments in Beirut, Cairo and Istanbul, as well as further afield among the exiled Arabs in Paris and elsewhere.[3] A number of crucial conferences and movements were convened, notable among them the *First Arab Congress in Paris* (1913) which gathered prominent figures from the *Mashreq* and sought more autonomy from centralised rule.[4] Also, in Cairo, the *Hizb al-markaziyya al-idariyya al-ʿuthmani* (the Ottoman Administration Decentralization Party) was founded, and there was al-*jamʿiyyat al-ʿarabiyya al-fatat* (The Young Arab Society) which was founded in Paris in 1911 by young Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese students and became a lasting influence in the consolidation of the idea of an Arab nation.[5] This group, 'al-Fatat', went on to form, in 1919, the pan-Arab *hizb al-istiqlal al-ʿarabi* (the Arab Independence Party) which aimed to achieve independence from the French and British and to do this by promoting Arab unity. The membership was dominated by Syrians and reached tens of thousands.[6]

In this context of political agitation the rise of formal and informal (and, sometimes, necessarily clandestine) political projects in Ottoman and then in post-Ottoman Syria

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[2] On all this see the work of Hanioglu, S.M. in Khalidi et al (1991) *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, New York: Columbia University Press.
[3] Khalidi et al, ibid., 54-55.
[4] Khalidi et al, ibid., 55.
[5] Muslih (1991) 167-185: in Khalidi et al, ibid.
[6] Muslih (1991) 175: in Khalidi et al, ibid.

signified a shift towards thinking about projects of self-determination and independence. As well as the exiled and students overseas, there were a host of other political actors forming new nationalist projects and agendas. The notion of Arab nationalism in an empirical and concrete form was first practiced, and manipulated, during the last years of the First World War, when the British needed the local Arab communities to join it, ostensibly in the fight against Ottoman rule. In years of negotiations between Sharif al-Husayn 'ibn Ali, of the Hashemite tribe of Mecca, and the British High Commissioner in Cairo, Sir Henry McMahon, a British agreement to support Arab aspirations for independence was reached based on detailed discussions about which Arab territories would form part of this independent territory. The condition was that the Arabs support the British military in the region in fighting the Ottoman forces, and an Arab Revolt against Ottoman Turkish rule began in June 1916.

As a reward for allying with the British, Sharif al-Husayn expected the British to honour a commitment to the formal establishment and recognition of a completely independent Arab constitutional monarchy covering significant Arab territory and centred in Damascus. Damascus fell to the British troops led by General Allenby in October 1918 and Sharif Husayn expected his agreement with the British to be activated. However, the competing 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement between the British and the French undermined the Husayn-McMahon correspondence because it allocated significant territory to the French at the point of victory. Thus, when the Ottomans surrendered in 1918, the colonial victors active in the Mashreq, primarily the British and French, had already decided to divide up the provinces based on the earlier arrangements in their 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement. When the British troops formally withdrew from Damascus in 1919 the French swept into the city to unseat Amir Faysal and to begin their twenty-six year occupation of modern-day Syria. In 1920

Arab representatives in the Syrian National Congress announced a declaration of independence, and Sharif Husayn's son, Amir Faysal, was declared king in March 1920. The French, however, soon put down Faysal's rule, and with it any illusions of self-rule and independence for the Arabs. Having advanced to victory in the historic battle of *Maysalun*, the French immediately instituted a colonial hold over historic Syria which involved parcelling up the territory along sectarian lines and favouring certain sects over others so as to divide and rule and protect French interests.[7]

This early example of Arab national rule was not successful but nevertheless, the Arab nationalist cause grew, increasingly amidst regional inter-war colonial rivalries as well as with the direct encroachment of imperial powers.[8] The different machinations of imperial powers and the variegated interventions in the inter-war period, from 'gunboat diplomacy', Mandate rule and direct occupation, were to shape and be reflected in the local nationalisms. I cannot set out all the historical twists and turns in the evolution of these different groupings; however I consider them broadly as making up a distinctive ideological 'family' based on Wilsonian ideals of self-determination and the commonly shared desire for complete independence.

The project of Arab nationalism was to become allied with other important political concepts which served to clarify what it might be and how its ideas might actually be realised, but it was by no means a unitary idea.[9] The concept played out differently in different contexts,

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[7] Khoury, P. S. (1987) *Syria and the French Mandate: the politics of Arab nationalism*, 1920-1945, London: I.B. Taurus & Co.
[8] Chalcraft, J. (2015) op cit., 221-222.
[9] With regard to the wider debates within the literature on the emergence and nature of Arab nationalism see the collection edited by R. Khalidi, L. Anderson, M. Muslih and R. S. Simon (1991) *The Origins of Arab*

often drawing on varied strands of socialist and communist thinking, foregrounding an ideal of 'social justice' understood as the levelling of gross economic and social inequalities. The idea of Arab nationalism resonated in Cairo, Damascus, Beirut, and among exiles in Paris and Istanbul, at different points in time. The common thread in this idea was the shared experience of imperial domination and colonial rule, the direct and antagonistic encounter with capitalist systems of trade, being subject to Orientalist mentalities, and the experience of and rejection of aspects of Western modes of modernity.

It was in this context that educated, elite Arabs organised their Baʿth (resurrection) movement and forged the foundations for the Arab Baʿth Party.[10] In order to unpick some of the critical steps in the rise to formal power of the Syrian Baʿthists it is useful to periodise key historical themes in the evolution of the Arab Baʿth Party and formal party politics in an independent Syria. These will be set out below with particular attention to the period after Syria gained its full independence, up until Hafez al-Asad took power in 1970 and instituted his corrective movement.

Nationalism, New York: Columbia University Press. In particular, for the purposes of this research, the chapters by Dawn and alternative arguments by Khalidi, and sections on political activists and thinkers in Part 2 on Syria and Iraq. Also, in the context of Syria see: Khoury, P. (1987) *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism: the politics of Damascus 1860-1920, Cambridge University Press,* which provides forensic detail on the urban upper elites and their interaction and influence under Ottoman rule and beyond. Provence, M. (2005) *The Great Syrian Revolt: and the rise of Arab nationalism*, Austin: University of Texas Press, provides a detailed argument for the centrality of the Syrian uprising in the subsequent formation and consolidation of Arab (state) nationalism. Albert Hourani provides a valuable historical record with his political essay: Hourani, A. (1946) *Syria and Lebanon*, Oxford University Press, 96-121. More recent scholarship by Christopher Phillips and Daniel Neep returns to historical events to make more current claims, respectively, about the reproduction of pan-Arabism, and, in Neep, violence as a practice of colonial rule (see bibliography entries: 2013; 2012).

[10] See Hourani (1946); Khoury (1987); Provence (2005) op cit.

Syria: towards independence

Some Syrian political actors and elites sought to advance ideas about increased local autonomy within the confines of French Mandate rule, but the Great Syrian Revolt of 1925 and the years of resistance which followed it made the fervent desire for liberation much more explicit and, perhaps, increased the bargaining power of the nationalists with their colonial rulers. A nominal agreement between the Syrian National Bloc, one of the political parties in Syria, and the French was negotiated, and culminated in the 1936 Syrian-French Treaty. However, it did not go very far in meeting the demands of some disillusioned Syrians, who formed *al-Baʿth al-ʿarabi* (the Arab Resurrection) in 1940 - founded by Sami al-Jundi and Zaki al-Arsuzi - as well as another party called *al-Ihya al-ʿarabi*, established by Michel Aflaq and Saleh al-Din al-Bitar.[11] I will expand on this and the political thought of its adherents later in this chapter.

Syria finally gained recognition as an independent state when it attained member status at the United Nations as the Syrian Republic, in April 1945, and it declared its independence formally in 1946. From 1946 until 1949 Syria enjoyed a parliamentary system of government, and three dominant blocs or gatherings of the elite vied for power: the National Bloc led by Shukri al-Quwatli, the National Party of Sabri al-Asali, and the larger People's Party of Rushdi al Kikhya and Nazim al-Qudsi.[12] These elite political actors had been active in the resistance against the French but seemed to place their own economic and political interests above realisation of more radical ideas for political and social change.

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[11] Kaylani, N.M. (1972) 'The Rise of the Syrian Baʿth, 1940-1958: Political Success, Party Failure', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 3:1, January, 3-23.
[12] Kaylani (1972) ibid, 9.

The struggle for independence had been influenced by wider events – and especially by similar movements for independence in Iraq, the turbulence of post-colonial rule, as well as the establishment of a Zionist state in historic Palestine. In particular, the response to events in Palestine from the various Arab nationalist and socialist groupings served to pitch traditionalists keen on the status quo against those of the more radical pan-Arabist and Arab nationalist strains. The latter lent their support to Arabs fighting the Zionist militias in Palestine, and to the Iraqis, for example. The Palestinian Great Revolt from 1936 to 1939[13] and then the 1948 struggle for Palestine were significant in the way that the various political groupings were configured and in how the traditionalists were seen to have sold out the Palestinian and Arab cause. This deep contention, and then the increasing foreign intrigue in the post war years, laid the groundwork for challenges to power in Syria's nascent independent state, ushering in an era of doing politics by military coup.

In 1949 there was a bloodless coup which ended the government of Shukri al-Quwatli and signalled the shift to government by coup.[14] Two more coups followed and then, at the end of 1949 the parliamentary system was restored, but not for long. At first one of the prominent coup plotters Colonel Adib al-Shishakli preferred to work behind the scenes, but after his early attempts at reform (including the distribution of state lands)[15] he was to become increasingly dictatorial and led a military junta which banned political parties and exiled Arab Baʿthists and other dissenters from the Communists and from the Muslim Brotherhood. Democracy was restored in Syria when al-Shishakli was finally ousted from

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[13] Swedenberg, T. (1993) 'The Role of the Palestinian Peasantry in the Great Revolt (1936-1939)', in Hourani, A., Khoury, P., Wilson, M. eds. *The Modern Middle East*, Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California, 467-503.
[14] Kaylani, ibid, 11-12.
[15] Seale, P. (1988/1995) *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East*, Berkeley, LA: University of California Press, 47.

power and fled the country, leading to Syria's 'democratic years' (1954-1958) in which the

Baʿth Party enjoyed increased popularity and representation in the parliament.[16]

There were a significant number of competing parties vying for representation and influence, from the adherents of a Greater Syria (the SSNP) to the Syrian Communist Party and, perhaps inevitably, there was also a level of dysfunction in this particular parliamentary system because the multiple opposing stances of these parties made consensus politics difficult to conduct. One result of this was that the domestic parties reached out to others in the region and beyond to bolster their standing and strengthen their political projects. This included reaching out to the Soviet Union, as the communists did, or looking towards the West. At the end of the 1950s this wrangling came to a head with the union with Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt. This merger lasted from 1958 to 1961. Setting out fully the pros and cons of this union would require lengthy analysis but certainly Nasser's brand of nationalism was very much aligned with Syrian ideas. Nevertheless, the Syrian people were to find that they lost their autonomy: all political parties were dissolved as part of the merger, and the benefits of being aligned with the regional strong man of Egypt were overshadowed by loss of control locally.[17]

Syria's first decades of independence and intermittent attempts at parliamentary democracy had been undermined and weakened by a whole range of competing interests and internal internecine conflicts between political groupings.[18] Flitting among and across them was the

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[16] Martin, K. W. (2015) *Syria's Democratic Years: Citizens, Experts, and Media in the 1950s*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 13.

[17] Kienle, E. (1995) 'Arab Unity Schemes Revisited: Interest, Identity, and Policy in Syria and Egypt', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 27:1, February, 53-71.

[18] See: Khoury, P. (1987) *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945*, London: I.B. Tauris; Kaylani, op cit.

socialist Akram Hawrani, someone who will be discussed in greater depth later in this chapter. Hawrani was an astute political operator with contacts in the Syrian Socialist National Party (SSNP) from his early flirtations with the group, and an influential position among the rural peasantry. Crucially he forged deep ties with the colonels in the Syrian military. At the height of Shishakli's authoritarian rule in 1954 he also instituted a marriage of convenience between his Arab Socialist Party and the Arab Baʿthists when they were in exile and struggling to retain their significance, by amalgamating the two into the Arab Bath Socialist Party. Some of the important differences between the "three professors" (Aflaq, Bitar, and Hawrani) in this merger were to become increasingly difficult to reconcile.[19] The joining of the ideologues with the likes of Hawrani consolidated a formal political party with a wider social base and with representation in the post-Shishakli parliamentary elections of 1954. The crisis culminated in the form of the second and third Baʿth Party congresses held in Beirut in 1959 and in 1960 in which Aflaq's initial decision in 1959 to follow Nasser's requirement for Union and dissolve the party was reversed, showing the fissures between the differing strands.[20]

There were a number of developments during the 1960s in independent Syria which had a profound influence on the authoritarian Syria familiar to us today (before the 2011 revolution). The most significant and much analysed event is the 1963 coup instituted by a small and secret military committee, including Hafez al-Asad.[21] This coup brought the Baʿth Party to power in Syria and continued to illustrate the ways in which civilian party

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[19] Kaylani, ibid., 22.

[20] Seale, op cit: *Asad*, 65-66.

[21] Hinnebusch, R. (2001) *Syria: Revolution from Above*. New York: Routledge; Hinnebusch, R. (2009) 'Syria Under the *Baʿth*: The Political Economy of Populist Authoritarianism.' In Hinnebusch, Raymond & Schmidt Soren. eds., *The State and the Political Economy of Reform in Syria,* Scotland: University of St Andrews Centre for Syrian Studies, 5-24; Seale (1995) *Asad*, op cit.

politics had become enmeshed with army politics and strategy. Before the coup the party was, in any case, undergoing a period of internal contestation about the best way to fulfil its founding ideals. The party was also split about whether or not to continue to support Nasser and the Union. At the heart of this conflict was the struggle between the civilian branch and control of the Arab Baʿth Party, and those of the military wing and their influence in the party. Hawrani played both sides but it might also be argued that he opened the door to the capture of the party by the Syrian military.[22] Equally divisive were the disagreements about priorities, with Aflaq seemingly reaching out to the wider Arab nation, conceived as being all the newly independent Arab states, against Hawrani's more domestic brand of nationalism and focus on the important land and other reforms required in Syria.

Crucially, for the trajectory of the party, the radical potential in the ideas of the Arab Baʿth was dampened and marginalised in the internal struggles for control of the party, especially in the face of the dissolution of the union between Egypt and Syria, and splits between factions in the army and across the parties, who were divided over support for Nasser and his way, or against the excesses of the union. In 1962, after a four year hiatus, Aflaq convened a party congress in Homs. Significantly he sought to exclude Hawrani, the Nasserists, and those who had disobeyed his 1959 pledge to deactivate all Baʿth Party politics as had been required under Nasser's union. The Congress passed a resolution to reconstitute the party. The political manoeuvres at this time were complex but the secret military committee was active behind the scenes, with various players, included Aflaq, who now had mature plans to institute a military coup which they succeeded in executing in 1963. The regional Baʿth Party Congress in September 1963 was the beginning of the end for the

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[22] As argued in Kaylani, op cit. 23.

Arab Baʿthist ideologues Aflaq and Bitar, and they were not elected to vital positions on the Baʿth Party Regional Command.[23]

The other formative event of the 1960s was the 1967 crushing Arab defeat at the hands of Israel, in which the Syrian military was involved and for which a defeated Nasser proffered his resignation. This catastrophe, known as the Naksa, can be considered an existential crisis for Arab nationalism, its intellectuals, and for Arab citizens who had followed events on the radio and had been assured of victory by Nasser. More Arab land was occupied by Israel, serving as a blow to the idea of a unified and strong Arab nation.[24] The Arab leaders had failed. A period of profound reflection and criticism then ensued as well as the consideration of alternatives, such as that offered by political Islam (which I briefly turn to later in this chapter). Having worked behind the scenes since the coup, Hafez al-Asad seized power in 1970 in his corrective coup, and the 1970s saw him consolidate his hold over both the army and the party, each being principally an instrument through which to legitimise and to sustain his rule.[25] Aflaq was to live out his days in exile in Iraq, which had also established its own, mostly competing, brand of his Arab Baʿth ideas.

The dreams of the idealists behind the idea of Arab Baʿthism were to lose out to the realpolitik of the Syrian military and become increasingly marginalised, or mere instruments of power, under Asad's rule. Nevertheless, as it was the specific ideas and project of the Baʿthists which were so influential in the formative years of Arab nationalism and statehood

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[23] Kaylani, op cit.
[24] Kassir, S. (2006) *Being Arab*, trans. Hobson, W. London, New York: Verso.
[25] For a nuanced collection of work on liberalisation during the Asad years see: Kienle, E. ed. (1994) Contemporary Syria: Liberalization between Cold War and Cold Peace, London: British Academic Press, CNMES, SOAS; and, under Bashar al-Asad: Lawson, F. ed. (2009) *Demystifying Syria*, London: Saqi in association with the London Middle East Institute.

and which became incorporated in varying ways into the modern nation state of Syria (and Iraq), I now focus in detail on the founding structures and ideas of the party in its early formation, from a specifically Syrian vantage point. In doing so I recognise that it is not possible to consider Syria completely in isolation from vitally important regional developments.

II The political thought of the Arab Baʿth Party

In the previous sections I have given a broad brush background to regional developments and the rise of the Arab Baʿth movement and party. The formation of the formal Arab Baʿth Party starts to flesh out particular practices and beliefs, as we shall see in this analysis of the founders of the party. I start to carry out a morphological analysis of the party and its core and adjacent ideas as promoted by leading ideologues. The Ba´th Party started out as a small informal network of engaged intellectuals, teachers and other professionals from the newly emerging Arab 'middle classes', who themselves enjoyed some of the fruits of the earlier shift to secular education under the Ottoman rule of the Arab provinces. The movement grew its support through a number of small scale 'cells' which operated in secret under imperial rule. Its members, initially in the tens rather than hundreds, worked in the Ottoman provinces of present day Syria and, alongside their political and intellectual meetings, also carried out practical work to help the poor in rural areas.[26]

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[26] Batatu, H. (1999) *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press; Seale, *Asad*, op cit.

We can pursue the thought-practices of the movement by recourse to the ideas of its founders. The commonly acknowledged founder of the Arab Baʿth (resurrection) party, Michel Aflaq, introduced earlier, came from a wealthy *Maydani*[27] grain merchant family, with the privilege and outlook which the family's social standing conferred upon him.[28] Aflaq read philosophy at the Sorbonne and was influenced by the early European nationalist literature, thus imbuing the Baʿth project with ideas and an empirical record of how to nurture a modern conception of nation infused with national patriotism.[29] Aflaq's intellectual and Baʿthist interlocutors included Salah al-din al-Bitar, who came from another prominent Damascene grain merchant family,[30] and, later on, Zaki al-Arsuzi. There remains some contention around who actually came up with the original idea for the Arab Baʿth,[31] and there were certainly two early competing currents active within historic Syria: Arsuzi's cultural wing, the Arab Ba´th, which was part of a group organising against the Turks in Alexandretta, and Aflaq and al-Bitar's *al-ihya al-ʿarabi* (Arab Revival) group. The latter took in Arsuzi's members and became the Arab Baʿth Party.[32] Arsuzi was born in Lattakia, the coastal city in Syria but had moved around, living in cities bordering Turkey, and fled to Damascus when the Turks annexed Syrian territory – now known as modern day Turkey's Hatay province.

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[27] A district of Damascus which was known to be a diverse mix of sect and religions and an important centre of grain merchant and other trades, linking with Syria's southern Hawran region, acting as an important network in sustaining the Arab Revolt. See Batatu (1999); and, Provence (2005), 12-14, op cit., for a discussion on the social complexities and the period of the Great Syrian Revolt in the interwar period. The social cleavages between and the political economy nexus of the prominent Syrian families and merchants remain important today—see Haddad, B. (2012) *Business Networks in Syria: The Political Economy of Authoritarian Resilience*, California: Stanford University Press.

[28] Provence, 36; Batatu (1999); op cit.

[29] Discussed in Hourani, A. (1962/1988) *Arabic thought in the liberal age, 1798-1939*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 356-7; Batatu, (1999) op cit.

[30] Provence, ibid., 152.

[31] In the historiography on the Arab Baʿth movement, Arsuzi is treated more sympathetically in the narration of the period, which aligns with an account favourable to Hafez al-Asad, but his influence and position is moderated in Batatu's empirical research into this period. See Seale, Asad, op cit; see also Kaylani (1972) op cit., 3.

[32] Batatu (1999) op cit., 135-136.

Despite the conflict over claims to the founding name of the party, the three intellectuals (Arsuzi, Aflaq, and al-Bitar) came to work together at important periods in order to grow the party, and it is perhaps fitting, given the levelling aims of their movement, that they were Alawi, Christian, and Sunni respectively. From these early days a discourse was nurtured which championed a number of key ideas and which engaged with some of the fundamental problems of the period; foreign rule, imperial power, and the social and political fragmentation of the former imperial powers with the attendant upheavals that this caused.

At the core of the Baʿthist ideology that took hold leading up to Syrian independence was an idea of **Arab unity**, conceived of and emphasised at different times as being focused on the spiritual, cultural and linguistic commonality, but increasingly as being part of a distinctly political project. The idea of unity was essential to the future common good of the Arab territories that had been ruled by imperial and colonial powers. This was connected to ideas of independence from colonial rule and the struggle for **freedom**, which remain powerful to the present day in both regional and international contexts. Also central to the Arab Baʿth project were the ideals enshrined in Arab variants of **socialism**.

The Arab Baʿth Party constitution was ratified in Syria by members of the movement on 7 April, 1947. It enshrined the core values as disseminated and promoted by the Baʿthist activists and ideologues, organised around the principles of "*Wahda, Hurriya, Ishtirakiya*" (Unity, Freedom, Socialism). I pick out here the Syrian thread from this wider tradition or "pool of ideas' which had deepened amidst a climate of political upheaval and change in the Mashreq and beyond. In doing so I do not suggest that historic Syria alone was the epicentre of the birth of modern Arab ideologies or that the intellectuals and writers I discuss were the

only, or most influential, producers of the dominant strains of Arab ideologies. The intellectual and political production of ideas historically during the mandate and post mandate period included those of the elite and notables along with, and sometimes in competition with, the popular politics of the rank and file, the people. I do not mean to privilege certain actors over others but the conventional historiography has tended to privilege the elite and the intellectuals. Nevertheless, such knowledge production from the time enables researchers to recover some of the ideas and thinking being reflected, promoted, and disseminated, whether in elite salons and committees or on the streets in mass protests. I turn now to investigate these founding ideas in more detail.

Arab Unity

Arab unity was one of the defining ideas which emerged and became consolidated as a core concept within Syrian Arab Baʿthism. The concept of Arab unity is internally complex and its meaning is contextually driven, and rather than taking it as a fixed and assumed unit of analysis I seek ways to prise it open in order to inspect its contents in more detail.

This seemingly abstract idea of Arab unity was actually practiced and performed in a number of ways which were contingent on a complex of local and specific social, economic, and political dynamics. The concept of unity was based on the idea that there existed a common cultural unity expressed through a shared history, language, and traditions. In this *ideal* formulation, 'being Arab' can be defined on a cultural and linguistic level which includes Arab Christians, Alawis, and other religions, as well as the various ethnicities—such as the Kurds. This idealistic understanding of Arab unity, indicating a kind of cultural nationalism across boundaries of all kinds, was embedded in the earliest iterations of Arabism, as espoused by the Ottoman Arab educator and civil servant Sati al-Husri. For al-Husri,

Arabism is the sense of belonging and commonality shared through language and culture.[33]

He believes that the national unity of Arabs is the first order priority and, as Cleveland

narrates, al-Husri argues that:

> language is the ultimate criterion for membership in these countries, and anyone
>
> who speaks Arabic and is located in them is an Arab, irrespective of his religion,
>
> ethnic background, family history, or official citizenship.[34]

In this reading of unity al-Husri takes his lead from the rising nationalisms in the Balkans,

with new movements emerging and with uprisings against empire during the nineteenth

century.[35] He also looks to Germany as a model of how mass education can be put into the

service of instilling citizen patriotism (wataniyya, in this context). He was particularly

influenced by Johann Gottlieb Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation*, which al-Husri

regards as "one of the most important contributions to the ideology of nationalism". This

conception of nationalism as a complete ideology is typical, and later analysts and political

scientists have produced a vast literature around the topic of nationalism and Arab

nationalism[36]. Of particular interest is the relation between the theory of nationalism and

the idea of the nation-state; and how these interrelate and, in the case of the newly

independent Arab states, how they aid in the project of nation-building.[37] For example, the

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[33] Cleveland, W. L. (1971) *The Making of an Arab Nationalist: Ottomanism and Arabism in the Life and Though of Sati' Al-Husri,* Princeton: Princeton University Press 86-7.
[34] Cleveland, op cit., 118.
[35] On this see Chalcraft (2016) op cit., 91-98.
[36] Some of the most influential theories of nationalism include: Kedourie, E. (1960) *Nationalism,* London: Hutchinson and Co; Gellner, E. (1983) *Nations and Nationalism,* Ithaca: Cornell University Press; Hobsbawm, E. (1990) *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[37] Ayubi, N. (2009) *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East*, London: I.B.Tauris.

concept of nationalism is often treated as a fully formed political ideology.[38] Yet, in this chapter I argue that the idea of Arab nationalism, while important, needs to be clarified in relation to core concepts which serve, in practice, to organise along social and political lines. So I give due attention to the influence of an Arab strain of socialism and ideas of Arab unity. If Arab nationalism, conceived of through the promotion of Arab unity which was inclusive and which overcame geographic and ethnic boundaries, was the ideal, what kind of nation was desired and how was that nation to be organised? I offer some thoughts on this later in the chapter when I look at a distinctive Arab socialism and discuss the concept of freedom, the two other defining principles of the Arab Baʿth movement and party. But first I return to interrogate the complexity of Arab unity.

The early adherents of Arab Baʿthism put their faith in the notion of Arab unity as the first principle and as fundamental to their project, and they believed that "Arab consciousness" would override any other differences that existed in society. So, of critical importance was the notion of Arab unity as a levelling device and as an idea that encouraged an inclusive sense of Arabness. The Marxist historian Hanna Batatu notes how the notion of the Arab nation was the "highest form of social relationship", and that "its followers were enjoined to hold it before their particular region, sect, or clan in favour and esteem".[39] This is recognised in the constitution, which states that: "The Arabs form one nation. This nation has the natural right to live in a single state and to be free to direct its own destiny".

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[38] Freeden, M. (1998) 'Is Nationalism a Distinct Ideology?' *Political Studies*, XLVI, 748-765. See, in the Arab context, B. F. (1997) 'Studying Arab Politics: the end of Ideology or the quest for alternative methods?' *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, 6:10, 109-125.
[39] Batatu, (1999) op cit., 133-4.

Thus this social, or cultural, sense of being Arab is one of the core ideas which is then decontested in light of relational ideas of citizen equality. Such equality is based on the ideals of the Arab nation as set out by the founders of Arab Baʿthism. In its idealised version this equality is one which reaches across to include people of differing tribes, sects and religions. Also, in this conception of the Arab nation, there are no individual nation-states but, rather, reference is made to the Arab fatherland as an "indivisible political and economic unity". Under colonial systems of divide and rule, tribal leaders and local power elites were co-opted, and trade took on a sectarian nature.

Ultimately the call for unity acted to reject the arbitrary boundaries set by the colonialists and saw the Arab *Ummah* (nation) made up of regions (*aqtar)* which were interdependent and worked in unity. Batatu recognised the explicit political sense of the unity project, and this discourse spoke to the fragmenting and divisive effect which colonial rule had had on territories such as Syria. The imposition of colonial rule had enforced fixed geographic boundaries, divided communities along sect lines, and resulted in the brutal putting down of revolts.[40] The idea and absolute necessity of Arab unity was a response to external interference and rule, and unity became the primary idea in the political thinking of the Arab Baʿthists. The formalisation of the party at its founding congress, held in Damascus, announced "One Arab nation with an eternal mission" and called for a unified Arab state.[41] Later events went on to shape the other Arab Baʿth principles in a number of ways, not least of all the goal of obtaining independence

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[40] On dynamics of fragmentation of power and interests and then division of territory and communities along sect lines as introduced during the French colonial mandate see Provence (2005) op cit., Khoury, 23-25 (1983); Batatu (1999) 134-5, op cit.

[41] In Kienle, E. (1995) 'Arab Unity Schemes Revisited: Interest, Identity, and Policy in Syria and Egypt', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 27:1, February, 58.

Freedom

What did the Arab Baʿthists mean by 'freedom' and how was it conceptualised? Returning to think about the Great Syrian Revolt of 1925 is instructive in forming an understanding of the foundations of the Arab Baʿth project and its emphasis on 'freedom'. After five years of French colonial rule this revolt was the articulation of a collective Arab political consciousness. In Provence's study of this revolt he considers it a formative development in shaping the ideas and the language of the kind of Arab nationalism which was to come, and believes that the uprising was a distinctly Arab response to the challenges of French (and British) Mandate rule in the region.[42] The Syrian Revolt was against the indirect Lyautey-style system of political and administrative controls, operated from afar via their intermediaries and bolstered by a military presence. These developments served to sharpen the articulation of a more politically explicit Arab nationalist cause which united diverse social classes, ethnic groups, and sects in the region.[43] Sporadic demonstrations and other skirmishes with French forces in the provinces built up to a full blown revolt that started in the summer of 1925. Notably, the revolt was centred in the 'periphery', or countryside, away from urban centres, and constituted a mass movement which was a "decisive break-down of the elite-dominated system of the 'politics of the notables'".[44] Thus, what Provence finds is that historical resistance to foreign rule is not merely present among a small elite who believed in the Arab nationalist cause. He argues that otherwise few could explain the events leading up to the revolt and:

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[42] Provence, M. (2005) *The Great Syrian Revolt: and the rise of Arab nationalism*, Austin: University of Texas Press.
[43] Hourani (1946); Batatu, (1999); Chalcraft, (2016), op cit.
[44] Provence (2005) op cit., 13.

how such an [assumed] elite ideology of intellectuals and wealthy landowners had suddenly burst forth in 1920 to fill the streets of Damascus with ordinary people protesting for national rights and an end to European occupation.[45]

What was present in the earlier Arab Revolt launched in 1916 and in the later and more widespread and concerted Great Syrian Revolt of 1925 was an "empirically evident Arab nationalism".[46] Taken together with other significant acts of resistance across the Arab speaking world, it is easily apparent that the freedom articulated was a freedom explicitly from the shackles of foreign rule and control. Nevertheless, there are some strong indications that the freedom desired was not only from foreign domination, but also from the stultifying effect of a local ruling elite in the former Ottoman provinces. The Great Syrian Revolt pitted the radical revolutionaries not only against the imposition of colonial rule but also against its local agents: the Arab notables who had for so long negotiated a status quo with their foreign rulers so as to safeguard their own interests. The Arab notables had thus also become part of the problem, but the sheer force of France's military might was to unite across classes and sects and ethnic groups, and this 'domestic' aspect of the demand for freedom (and equality) remained unfulfilled and was relegated to being a lesser priority.

We find from a conceptualisation of freedom that it was manifested as a collective freedom, one for a people in opposition to colonial rule and subjugation. It is indicative of the desire for self-determination, and, by extension, to notions of self-rule. Yet because the struggle

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[45] Provence (2005) ibid., 8.
[46] Hourani (1946) op cit., 117.

against colonial rule spread across vast imperial territories and because systems of governance and control had been centralised under one power and authority, there is a tension in what it might actually mean for the Arab people to be free to govern themselves. The negotiations and government of Sharif Husayn in the immediate post-war period had sought to define a geographic territory under Arab rule from Damascus. However, the cultural and linguistic sense of being Arab, and the ideal of Arab unity, was always to come into adjacency with, and thus qualify freedom in particular ways.

Therefore the idea of freedom can be decontested in relation to the work that the previous core idea of unity does in clarifying what kind of freedom it was that the Arabs demanded and fought for. Such freedom based on unity and the equal worth of all Arabs thus indicates that the context of this freedom demanded a collective and complete freedom for Arabs across all the Arab lands. This, perhaps, served to militate against the factional, individualist, interests of some segments of the community over others. There were fundamental freedoms due to all Arabs. There still remains the question as to how such freedoms were to be formalised and protected and how Arabs were to govern. The next section investigates the importance of Arab socialism in responding to such questions.

Arab Socialism

The ideas of socialism were manifested in the policies of post-independence Arab governments and included land redistribution, nationalisation of economic resources, and mass education.[47] We can thus see how a particular Arab strain of socialism helped to

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[47] Kienle (1994) op cit.

decontest the ideals of Arab unity and of freedom. An examination of the concrete political systems introduced in the independence era shows us forms of Arab Baʿthism in practice. The Arab nation-states became part of the international system of states, yet still retained the language and practice of an Arab unity which demanded organisation beyond borders as well as within the confines of legal nation-states. So a level of regionalism continued within and across the states-system in the Arab region—for example in the way the Baʿth Party organised regional meetings and had some level of political autonomy (which was eroded, especially under Hafez al-Asad's rule and with the promulgation of Syria's new constitution in 1973).

The ideas of equality and social levelling were advanced within Syria's parliamentary system of government (notably through the influence of Akram Hawrani whom I introduced earlier in this chapter and who I come to in more detail shortly) but, equally importantly, also earlier on through local organising under Ottoman and Mandate rule, before the advent of the independent state system.[48] What Arab Baʿthism did was to blend the ideas of being Arab and of Arab unity with the idea of socialism, providing a principled and prioritized framework for organising society and implementing these ideas.

The particular brand of socialism central to the Arab Baʿth project was an Arab strain centred on a need for social reform and modernisation. Hourani describes this particular Arab socialism, in the Egyptian Nasserist state context, thus:

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[48] See Gelvin for focus on the non-elite actors who forged the popular committees in historic Syria: Gelvin, J. (1998) *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* Berkeley: University of California Press.

A system halfway between Marxism, which stood for the conflict of classes, and capitalism, which meant the primacy of individual interests and the domination of the classes which owned the means of production. In 'Arab socialism', the whole of society was thought to rally round a government which pursued the interests of all.[49]

Hourani's explanation of Arab socialism is not dissimilar to Ayubi's idea of state-socialism or developmentalism which he sees as characteristic of the Arab nation-building period after the Second World War and throughout the 1950s and 1960s.[50] Ayubi, however, questions whether the independent states were in fact truly socialist and suggests, rather, that they were *etatiste*.[51] Yet Ayubi's Gramscian-influenced analysis of Arab socialism seems not to take into account the early socialist parties and practices which were present before the independent Arab state formations.

Early inceptions of Arab socialism were more grounded in very local and provincial concerns. The first Syrian Arab socialist movement was formed in Hama, historically a centre of popular dissent, in 1939, as the *Hizb al-Shabab* (The Youth Party). Like its Arab communist counterpart it did not initially focus on representing the peasants until later on when, in 1943, it adopted its slogan of '*hatu al-Quffah wa-l-kurek Lina'sh al-Agha wa-l-Bek*' [fetch the basket and the shovel for the burying of the Agha and the Bey].[52] Agha and

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[49] Hourani, A. (1991/2005) *A History of the Arab Peoples*, London: Faber & Faber, 406.
[50] Ayubi (2009) op cit., 158-9.
[51] Ayubi (2009) op cit., 199.
[52] Batatu (1999) op cit., 124.

Bey here refer to the local notables, reflecting the deep social divide between the elite rulers, who regarded themselves as 'the flower of God's elect' and who typically owned large swathes of land, and the common people.[53] The struggle was essentially one against continuing 'feudal' power.

The socialist leader, Akram Hawrani, felt this inequality was the basis of the subsequent Arab military catastrophe, or *nakba*.[54] Hawrani believed that the economic and political liberation of the peasants was required in order to build unity and fight modern wars against foreign and Zionist colonisers.[55] Hawrani championed the peasantry, was central in the struggle against colonial rule and the Zionist state, pushed for reform when he gained office in parliament, achieved resettlement of landless sharecroppers, sought to reform the legal protections of tribal systems of power, oversaw the enactment of the Agrarian Reform Law of 1958 and built allegiances across diverse sections of Syrian society. As we saw earlier, it was his successes and popularity which led the Baʿthists to seek to merge with his socialist movement in order to bolster their own flagging position.   This was a meeting of popular, grass roots action with the political idea(l)s of the intellectual ideologues.[56]

The inter-war period also saw the emergence of the first communist party, which was in tension with the socialists and the nationalists. It sought to recognise the 'tillers of soil' and forged the first workers' movement from a nucleus in 1924 to an organised association in its later years.[57] Its founder was Fuʿad Shimali, a cultivator of peasant origin, but its peasant

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[53] Batatu (1999) op cit., 125.
[54] Batatu (1999) op cit., 127.
[55] Batatu (1999) 127.
[56] See Batatu (1999), op cit., 124-130.
[57] Batatu (1999) op cit. 118.

roots and leadership were to be overshadowed by the more 'timidly reformist' leadership of Khalid Bakdash[58] when it gained formal party status from 1936.[59] In his assessment of the early Bath period in Syria, Nabil Kaylani argues that whilst Bakdash was well-organized, and despite his group continuing to be illegal and suppressed, the central problem was one of its ideological commitment. It did not see Arab nationalism as a desirable end in itself but rather relied on a dogmatically Marxist-Leninist approach in order to create the conditions for the "successful application of socialism".[60] Others have been critical of the communist leader, Bakdash, who was to reassure Syria's landlords by announcing:

> We assure the owners of land that we do not and shall not demand the confiscation of their property . . . all we ask is kindness towards the peasant and the alleviation of his misery[61]

I have introduced in brief some of the main organising concepts in a consideration of the morphology of the Arab Baʿth ideology. This is an important historical step as we shall see some of these themes repeat and return in Syria's 2011 revolution. The Arab Baʿth Party and the position of Arab socialism in the Syrian and Arab context has led to an enduring and established Leftist tradition in Syria, which connects into Arab and regional groupings around Arab Marxist thought of one strain or another.[62] In the pre-revolutionary period most of Syria's leading dissidents and opposition figures had spent many years in prison,

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[58] His thinking from around this time is captured in this speech to the Seventh Congress of the Comintern (Arab delegation), August, 1935: see https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/7th-congress/arab1.htm, accessed November, 2016.

[59] Batatu (1999) op cit., 118-9.

[60] Kaylani, ibid, 10.

[61] Batatu (1999) op cit., 119. A more sympathetic assessment, perhaps, from the Iraqi perspective, can be found in Franzen, J. *Red Star over Iraq*: Iraqi Communism before Saddam, London: Hurst & Company.

[62] On contemporary Arab thought see: Kassab (2010) op cit.

including Michel Kilo, Hussain al-Odat (who passed away in April 2016), the Syrian communist Riad al-Turk[63], as well as prominent independent parliamentarians such as Riad Seif[64] and others. Syria's dissenting voices have for decades sought to challenge the trajectory of the Syrian state under Asad rule: namely, selective economic reforms absent political reforms and freedoms. When Bashar came to power, a short-lived Damascus Spring[65] saw attempts by Syrians to participate in and present agendas for reforms, including the lifting of Syria's emergency law, the abolition of Syria's special security courts, and freedom of speech, among other things. However, hope for democratization under Bashar al-Asad did not materialize and his first decade in power was characterized by increasingly rampant and unchecked capitalism which served to narrowly benefit a ruling elite and a coterie of business and religious leaders and others embedded into the patronage network.[66]

We will return to these themes in the latter part of this thesis when I investigate the deep political contention which took hold from the beginning of Syria's revolution in 2011. However, for the remainder of this chapter I introduce some other ideational currents which were forming in the twentieth century in Syria and elsewhere. This is a vital part of our

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[63] Turk spent many periods in prison in the 1950s, where he was tortured along with many others, and also served a further 18 years in prison for his communist politics; he was sent back to prison for uttering "the dictator is dead" in reference to the passing of Hafez al-Asad in 2001. His comments were broadcast on al-Jazeera Arabic. Turk spoke many times about his views of the revolution as one of an 'old school' of Syrian opposition, his support is set out in this video posted by the Local Coordination Committee in 2011, where he discussed the demands of the people and their peaceful revolution as well as Syrian unity: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lr6vMd1gBjg

[64] See a profile of Saif on BBC Monitoring: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-20270116

[65] George, A. (2003) *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom*. London: Zed Books; Wieland, C. (2013) *A Decade of Lost Chances: Repression and Revolution from Damascus to the Arab Spring*, Seattle: Cune Press.

[66] Haddad, B. (2012) *Business Networks in Syria: the political economy of authoritarian resilience*, California: Stanford University Press; Kienle, E., ed. (1994) *Contemporary Syria: liberalization between cold war and cold peace,* London: British Academic Press; Hinnebusch, R. (2009) 'Syria Under the Baʿth: The Political Economy of Populist Authoritarianism.' In Hinnebusch, R. & Schmidt S. eds., *The State and the Political Economy of Reform in Syria*, Scotland: University of St Andrews Centre for Syrian Studies, 5-24.

ideational exploration and helps us to trace the continuity and the breaks with established political traditions and ideological families.

The first ideological current I will examine is the rise of political Islam with reference to prominent Muslim scholars and reformists around the turn of the twentieth century. I will then briefly reference some though-practices which are discussed in the most recent scholarship on revolution and on Syria. This relates specifically to some ideas on republicanism with the emergence of Arab independent republics in the postcolonial age: such as that of Syria and Egypt.

III   The Islamic Reformers

So far in this chapter I have necessarily foregrounded the political thought of the Arab Baʿth Party in historic Syria. This is the central focus of this chapter, because it was to become the sole governing party in Syria. However, in this section I want to move to a different period of time so that I can set out, briefly, some of the core ideas which were forming within the, sometimes overlapping and competing, currents of Islamic political thought.

The competing ideas of various strands of Political Islam are important in an understanding of beliefs and ideas, particularly when, as we shall see, such ideas are recovered in Syria's revolutionary situation. The early Islamic thinkers discussed here provide us with some aspects of interesting commonality as well as divergence and contrast with the dominant ideas and logic of Arab secularism— in the form of Syrian Arab Baʿthist ideas and in

Nasserism, for example. The ideas I set out here become important once more in the aftermath of the Arab defeat against Israel, in 1967 and the rise of different strains of Islamism as distinctly alternative political projects, but we need to go back further in time to capture some of the main ideational threads.

As we saw earlier in this chapter, during the late Ottoman period the effects of the *Tanzimat* reforms were being felt. Well into colonial rule Egypt was an intellectual hub of activity for the region's most respected and influential Muslim scholars. Together they can be regarded broadly as the 'Islamist modernisers' who drew influences from the increasing access to western philosophical and political texts as well as frequent travel for learning and study in capitals such as Paris. These scholars, some of whom had fled from oppression under Ottoman rule, shared a common vision. They wanted to preserve and promote Islam (not least in the face of the very real zeal of Christian missionaries seemingly attached to a concomitant military and diplomatic presence) but in doing so they were also critical and self-reflective about where Muslims had gone wrong. The reformist ideas can be seen in the political thought of the Egyptian Rifaʿa Badawi Rafiʿ al-Tahtawi (1801-73) who was deeply influenced by French Enlightenment ideas (during his stay in Paris) and was the first scholar who "articulated the idea of the Egyptian nation, and tried to explain and justify it in terms of Islamic thought".[67] Tahtawi synthesized ideas from many sources, his work being in particular influenced by his interest in Montesquieu's: '*Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence'*, but he retained and remained true to Islamic thought in his "appeal to the example of the Prophet and his Companions and his conceptions of political authority".[68] Tahtawi was part of the first wave in Islamic thought

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[67] Hourani (1983) op cit. 68-69.
[68] Hourani, ibid., 73.

which sought to reform and reinstate the greatness of Islam from its dark centuries in the 'shackles of taqlid'—manifested as an unchanging and literal reading of al-Quran and the Sunna.

The long period of darkness significantly included the turning away from early efforts at *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) to a closed era of *taqlid*, from the tenth century, in which it was construed that all questions had been answered and were available directly from the sacred sources. Such literal adherence to the Quran had led to an Islam which was closed and static rather than dynamic and responsive to change. In Tantawi's mind, however, it was the *Ulama* who could truly represent the Egyptian people (rather than rulers installed by foreign imperial powers). The community of Ulama and religious scholars needed to be reformed so as to accommodate those educated in the sciences, for example. In the later modern period key Muslim scholars advanced such ideas on ways to bring (and revive) Islamic thought and practice into accommodation with modernity, while also separating such moves from the secular influence, and excesses, of the West. There is some overlap and continuity in the common ideas among them and so I set out the most pertinent ideas here.

The Islamic Ummah (nation)

Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839-1897) was a political activist and firebrand and he promoted a broadly pan-Islamist unity which he felt was required and indeed, urgent in the face of European adventures in Egypt and elsewhere. In Afghani's conception of Islam the emphasis was on action and change, not imitation. But all his thinking was predicated on

his fundamental commitment to the transcendence of God and to reason.[69] He was critical of leaders in the region who were beholden (economically or otherwise) to foreign influence or support, and his brand of politics was deeply anticolonial in nature. He travelled often and widely, sometimes due to forced exile; during his time in Egypt Afghani both played for influence with, and agitated against, the Egyptian khedives (Ismail and Tawfiq) and wrote about the need to limit the power of leaders.[70] In his writings Afghani centred on the internal problems of Islam and the effect of European encroachment, although his thinking concerned grand narratives for Islam, as a civilisation, and the ways it could engage with progress, change and human endeavour,[71] and how the *ummah* could work in solidarity for the happiness and welfare of everyone.[72] Afghani's thinking was much influenced by Guizot, among others, but was revised in an important way to underpin a return to a true Islam and the flourishing of the *ummah* civilisation (Islamic nation). Steadfast in his religious commitments, Afghani was sure that men could use their minds freely in the "certainty that what they discover will not contradict the truths revealed by the prophecy".[73]

In his most expansive work, *The Refutation of the Materialists*,[74] Afghani, too, advanced arguments to rehabilitate the idea of *ijtihad* (reasoning), which should be put to new use in the modern era to "apply the principles of the Quran anew to the problems of their time".[75] Afghani was often exiled for his activities; to India and then Paris, where he formed a secret society with Muhammad Abduh (1849-19) calling for Islamic unity and reform, and

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[69] Hopwood, D., introduction in Nettler, R., Mahmoud, M & Cooper, J. (2000) *Islam and Modernity: Modern Intellectuals Respond,* London: I.B. Tauris, 5.
[70] Hourani (1983) op cit. 109.
[71] Hourani (1983) op cit., 114-115.
[72] Hourani (1983) 117.
[73] Hourani (1983) 126.
[74] This was in response to the modernist (secular) writers of the time, western and non-western, who did not believe in the existence of a transcendent God, (Hourani, ibid.,125)
[75] Hourani, ibid., 127. This is a reference to the Quranic scripture.

establishing a new journal, *al-Urwa al-Wuthqa,* (the firmest bond) [76] which had an anti-British and anti-colonial slant.   Afghani's disciple, Abduh, continued with his fierce anticolonial positions but shifted his writing and efforts towards reforms in the religious and education establishment in Egypt, in order to reverse the 'inner decay' which had so damaged Islam. [77]   Abduh was at pains to accommodate and synthesise Islam with the positive aspects of modernity (scientific knowledge), but in doing so he left the door open for a number of interpretations and made himself enemies among both the more conservative Muslim scholars, who felt he paved the way to complete secularization, and among some Arab nationalists of the time, who were more influenced by secular and socialist thought.[78] The debates about governance and preservation of Islam continued in the interwar period and become rather urgent with the abolishment of the Caliphate.

The Caliphate

Rashid Rida (1865-1935) was born in Ottoman Syria and moved to Egypt to pursue his religious education where he was tutored by Abduh. Rida inherited and pursued Abduh's ideas but, it has been argued, sought to articulate them in a more explicitly political direction. Key were Rida's political ideas on how majority Muslim populations should be governed and how that related to or departed from rising Arab nationalist conceptions of an *Arab* state. Perhaps Rida's most important contribution was his treatise on the Caliphate (Al-Khilafah aw al-imamat al uzma, 1922-3) which was actually published on the eve of the abolition of

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[76] Hourani, ibid., 134.
[77] Hourani, ibid., 136.
[78] For criticisms of Abduh's seeming attempts to synergise modernist trends with Islamic precepts see Laroui, A. (1967) *L'ideologie arabe contemporaine*, Paris: Maspero; and, 'La Crise des intellectuels arabes: traditionalisme ou historicisme?', Paris: Maspero, 1974; also, al-Azmeh, A. (1996) *Islams and Modernites*, 2nd edn., London: Verso—discussed by Ansari in Nettler et al (2000) op cit., 158-9.

the Caliphate by Atatürk in 1925[79] and advanced his political conceptualisation of a modern system of governance. Rida set out ideas on how Islam might be accommodated within a modern system of rule. He felt that there must be a caliphate to provide spiritual (and so safeguard ʿ*ibadat*, religious worship) and moral authority but that there also needed to be, following Abduh, more emphasis on human agency and the need for consultation (ijmaʿ) and checks on the ruler in order to avoid any corrupt claims or acting in self-interest. For Rida, too, *ijtihad* and *ijma*ʿ were key tools for the Muslim scholars. This meant letting humans interpret those non-divine and nonessential aspects of life and trusting that "the community will not agree on an error".[80] Rida's work was ambiguous in many respects but was innovative in its political vision for the governance of an Islamically-guided state which would rely on the good judgement and knowledge of the *ahl al-hall wa l-ʿaqd* (those who bind and loose*)*, that is the *Ulama*, *Mujtahid* (those qualified to carry out *ijtihad*) and others who could hold leaders to account.

Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949), born in rural Egypt into a pious religious family, benefited from a religious and secular education and was an activist against British rule from his early teens. Banna's reformist thinking, influenced by his religious upbringing but more directly by his experiences as a teacher in the heart of the foreign occupation in Suez, is significant, as he was the founder of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood which was established in 1928. The Brothers saw Islam as an all-encompassing system of living, based on the Quran and the Sunna, and its efforts were focused on working and preaching at the grass roots, and on social activism. For Banna and his followers, Islam is always applicable; there are no areas where Islam is not relevant in the temporal world. Banna was also critical of the Ulama who

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[79] Enayat, H. (1982) *Modern Islamic Political Thought,* MacMillan Press Ltd., 69-70.
[80] Hourani, op cit.

"saw and observed and heard and did nothing"[81] and had become servants to the rulers and the government of the day which paid them. Banna also saw the deep problems caused by disunity and pleaded:

> Let us cooperate in those things on which we can agree and be lenient in those on which we cannot[82]

In the ideas of these thinkers and Muslim scholars we have found evidence of a particular dialogical approach to the fundamental challenges being faced by Muslims keen to protect the faith and to also accommodate the march of progress. There is an activist emphasis here of doing and acting in the community. But the issue of governance of a Muslim majority and of the nature of a just state were not resolved in during their lifetime, if at all and their ideas go on to influence political Islam in the latter part of the twentieth century.

Din wa dawla **(religion and state)**

The ideas of Muslim scholar Hassan al-Banna and the Brothers reflected common grievances of the time in Egypt and in the wider region: the ways in which elites were working with and benefiting from the rise of capitalism, resulting in what Banna believed to be a kind of 'internal imperialism' leading to: "a dead pacifism, lowly humiliation, and acceptance of the status quo".[83] The sense of humiliation conveyed here is important in a consideration of the concept of dignity in the Arab context. I will be returning to discuss this at important points in the remainder of this thesis and we will find the concept features

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[81] Mitchell, R. (1969) *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, London: Oxford University Press, 212.
[82] Mitchell ibid., Part III Ideology, 214-5.
[83] Mitchell, ibid., drawing on Ghazali, 218.

heavily in discussions of the humiliation of colonial rule right into the twentieth century. Dignity, as we will start to see in this and the following chapter, is the retort to humiliation.

There was widespread opposition in Egypt to the brute force of the occupying foreign power, or the *al-istiʿmar al-kharji* (external imperialism). There was increasing dissatisfaction with the role of political parties in Egypt who served as yet another front for capitalism masquerading as democracy in a system of parliament compromised by continuing British and royal influence and fuelling a climate of divide-and-rule, and therefore, disunity.[84] Finally, consternation about encroaching westernisation was increasing and the Brothers, while critical, recognised the distinction "between Western civilization in its own environment and . . . that which was thrown at the East".[85] Banna and the mission of the Brothers, as his grandson Tariq Ramadan explains, centred on the need to:

> rediscover the living force of their religious teachings, to develop a critical outlook
> and to free themselves from the alienation produced by colonialism[86]

In the formation of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the ideas of the Islamic reformists and modernists discussed above took on a more explicit political form, and in some ways were to depart from the ideas of the Abduh and Rida. In particular the Brothers' central objective was the formation of an Islamic state to take the place of the British, but in the ideas of Banna there was a distinct nonviolent and legalist thread which was to remain a central plank of the project of the Muslim Brotherhood until the 1960s.[87] The focus of the

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84 Mitchell, ibid., 218.
85 Mitchell, ibid., 224.
86 Ramadan, T. (2013) *The Arab Awakening: Islam and the New Middle East*, London: Penguin Books Limited, 75.
87 Ramadan, ibid., 76-77

Brothers' grass roots work was in the social sphere and the literature provided an emphasis to issues of social justice which were central to their critique of the existing system. However, arguably, Banna keeps his writing at a general level and does not specify or clarify in detail how a state based on Islam might actually operate, except, for example, when he expresses his opposition to a parliamentary system and desire to promote the need for mosques to be the centre of life regarding education and so on.[88] Thus, like Rida and others, he too leaves a door open for different kinds of interpretation in the future and for the later ideas of Sayyid al-Qutb to gain influence and to be interpreted in differing ways.

The three core concepts—Islamic Ummah, Caliphate, state—which I have explicated briefly here through the thought and writings of prominent Muslim thinkers have given some comparative perspective to my treatment of the Arab Baʿth movement and party. There are similar ideas of unity and issues of governance and justice which are configured by drawing in adjacent ideas – such as the nation or the ummah. This sets up for us the potential for tension between these ideas and with the desire to retain a religious tradition in the face of external threats, but equally the threats to these core virtues were open to threat from domestic rulers, as we shall see.

The discussions we found here were about religion and the state, how to ensure just rule which is both in keeping with Islam and which also adheres to the national interest (of the people, not its rulers), and the ways in which Islam and the Muslim community could work together to preserve the religion, do good work and create a virtuous society.

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[88] Hourani, op cit., 360.

Crucially for the purposes of our research and in setting the scene for the contemporary period, it is clear that the overall thrust of the Arab and Muslim discourses are of a deeply anti-colonial nature and are thus much engrossed in matters of rule and governance rather than the intricacies of individual human rights and how to accommodate such individual claims within religion. For the Muslim majority, in countries beholden to foreign powers the threats feel more existential. In the Islamic context rights and claims were firmly centred on notions of home rule and of Arab and Islamic authenticity. Islam, as practiced for many centuries, had allowed time to stand still and was now ill-placed to respond adequately to the rapid changes taking place in the world. We will return to these ideas in Chapter Six when we look at an exemplar case of the Islamist fighters in the Syrian revolution, where such ideas become salient once more. In the final section on the multiple currents of Arab political thought and ideas I turn to look briefly at the Arab republican trend, drawing on more recent scholarship which has started to recover the implications for a focus on the citizen rather than the ruling elite.

IV   The promise of citizenship: from subject to citizen

Some of the newly independent Arab states were to take the title of republics (Tunisia and Syria took this title[89] as did Egypt after its 1952 revolution) in contrast to the royal kingdoms of the Gulf, Jordan and Morocco - who gained independence later on) and their direction was one of nation-building and consolidating their positions as independent states in the global state system. As we saw earlier in the chapter, the newly independent Arab states drew on a blend of Arab socialism inculcating ideas of citizenship, and this drew attention

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[89] Libya was initially a monarchy after independence but after Gaddafi's successful coup in 1969 he changed it first to a republic (*al-jumhuriya*) and then went on to proclaim Libya an Arab socialist *jumahiriya* (state representing the great masses).

to the place and role of the Arab citizen in the new era of independence. The relationship between citizen and Arab state was typified in a social contractual arrangement in which citizens would benefit from the social and political policies and reforms of the Arab governments, such as redistribution of land, subsidies on essentials such as bread and fuel and free and expanding education, in return for which they would play their role in building and consolidating the idea and the emergence of an independent Arab state. Much of these Arab policies, popularized during Nasser's rule in Egypt, were attuned to ensuring an equalizing effect for the masses who hitherto had been excluded or marginalized under successive foreign and monarchical rulers. The same policies were rolled out in Syria during the period of the United Arab Republic.

Reminding ourselves of this serves as useful back ground for when I explore later developments and the increasing significance of concepts like dignity in the latest Arab revolutions. While there appears to be no comprehensive or explicit Arab political republican ideology, Takriti notes how Nasser propagated principles with:

> a classically Jacobin republican understanding of the question of representation, believing that in the Egyptian context the will of the people could only be genuinely represented by a revolutionary state that works for their interests, and with their popular backing[90]

Takriti asserts that the Nasserist idea of *Siyadat al Shaʿb* (popular sovereignty) was prominent in his speeches and his thinking ,[91] and during Nasser's speech on the adoption

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[90] Takriti (2013) op cit., 52.
[91] Takriti (2013) op cit., 52.

of the 1956 Constitution, republican principles were to the fore: "Citizens: today, popular sovereignty prevails, not the sovereignty of the princes or the rulers . . . ".[92] The period immediately after Arab independence, at least if we look to Egypt and Syria, showed some patterns in the organizing and framing of relations between the people and the state. Chief in framing the ideological emergence of the Arab state and the Arab citizen were ideas of civic duty and pride. As very recent scholarship by Kevin Martin asserts in the context of the first decade of Syria's independence, a revolutionary rhetoric inspired a particular conception of Arab citizenship; which surmised that the:

> features of the 'virtuous citizen' included a specific set of ideological orientations— non-alignment in the form of Nasser-style 'positive' neutrality, ardent republicanism, and an accompanying conception of pan-Arab nationalism that was pro-Egyptian, anti-Hashemite, resolutely opposed to Zionism and Western imperialism, and committed to the struggle against 'traitors' within Syrian society.[93]

Making citizens from former subjects required "the moral and material uplifting of Syria's population through the inculcation of citizenly virtues".[94] Thus the newly formed state broadcaster went to great lengths to provide didactic programme content aimed at the masses and a broad project of modernity for the Arab state.[95] Ideas of citizenship were constructed around differing roles which included the ideals of the citizen soldier, the enlightened and educated citizen and the morally upstanding citizen.[96] It is useful to bear these constructions

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[92] Takriti (2013) op cit., 53.

[93] Martin, K. M. (2015) *Syria's Democratic Years: Citizens, Experts, and Media in the 1950s*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 82-83.

[94] Martin (2015) ibid., 2; citing a special issue magazine and article by the Syrian Directorate-General of Information in 1953 and reflecting what Martin regards as a common form of discourse of the period, n3.

[95] Cf Abu-Lughod, L. (2004). *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[96] Martin (2015) ibid.

in mind and to note the trajectory of Syria's modern independent state—from that of a state which institutes reforms and claims to act in the interests of its citizens, to that of an authoritarian state structure under Asad rule. In the words of one who was assassinated by the regime: "One cannot . . . speak of 'citizens' in countries where the ruling powers, republicans though they may be, see only subjects".[97]

So that, as Martin notes, the very idea of citizenship is controlled in an authoritarian system in which the "regimes obviously cannot see citizens as autonomous possessions of agency. These rulers see, instead, "objects of governmentality"".[98] Martin's recovery of Syria's all too brief democratic years in the 1950s brings us finally to the return of the 'subject' and the devaluing of the citizen in his relation and position to the state. As Martin notes, the democracy experiments in Syria remind us of "what might have been" and become "prospective nostalgia" that "might inform democratic visions of Syria's future".[99]

This section has shown how scholars are starting to consider the rather under analysed idea of republicanism as it was present in the Arab nation-state and the post-colonial republics specifically.[100] There is a significant pointing towards the privileging of the citizen as active in nation-building and in political participation. This section also helpfully points up the ways in which the ideal of Arab citizenship fell short in practice. The grievances of these citizens made subjects once more is foreboding of events to come.

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[97] Martin (2015) citing Samir Kassir [Being Arab, 26], ibid., 148.
[98] Martin (2015) citing Chatterjee, 148.
[99] Martin (2015) ibid., 149.
[100] See also Tripp, C. (2015) 'Battlefields of the Republic: the struggle for public space in Tunisia', London: LSE Middle East Centre, *Paper Series: Social Movements and Popular Mobilisation in the Middle East and North Africa,* 13, 1-21.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to prepare the ground for the analysis that takes place in the following chapter, where we will be concerned with a particular idea (dignity) in a specific country (Syria) at a time of revolution. This chapter seeks both to describe the vitally important historical context and to begin to show the place and dynamic of ideas in use and as units of analysis.

I have laid out the historical context of the formation of Syria's modern and dominant political ideology, Arab Baʿthism and, more generally, attempted to show how attention to the specifics of the historic political scene, both leading up to the fall of the Ottoman Empire and through the two World Wars, gives some insight into the nature of local and regional political contention and the rise of competing ideological currents. Ideas of Arab nationalism gained momentum and were foregrounded in analysing forms of political organising and contention in the Arab region (in the period after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire), during the drive towards liberation and independence. The end of one empire and domination by others through colonial rule precipitated moves towards putting abstract ideas of Arabism into practice, and filling out the content and structures of this imagined community.

I explored this relational approach to the founding concepts in order to investigate the particular morphology of Syrian Arab Baʿthism, and to look more closely at the principles which its founders espoused: the ideas of Arab unity, freedom, and socialism. In this

analysis we are reminded of how the Baʿthist ideals were held hostage in the complex social and political context in the immediate post-independence era, and how the ideals of the early thinkers were to be tempered and eventually co-opted as instrumental agents in a culture of increasingly frequent military coups resulting in the ascendency of Syria's military to power. Since the installation of president Hafez al-Asad in power these ideas have been embedded in an official discourse, but not as concrete and empirically evident practices.

In summary, the founding principles of Arab Baʿthism and the ideas which flourished in Arabism and Arab nationalist projects were only partly realized with the end of colonial rule. Although the formal party was detached and cut adrift from the original project, the ideas of equality contained in the particular Arab form of socialism, and the urge for change and justice attached to notions of Arab freedom, remain as yet to be achieved. In the latter part of this chapter I gave attention to a competing ideational current in the thought of the Islamist reformers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the final part of the chapter I then turned to draw out some of the republican themes which have been implicit in the Arab approach to citizenship and equality. This gave us the framework for thinking about the emergence of the Arab independent republics in the postcolonial period. What these republican and Islamist currents indicated, at least in the modern history of Syria, was that there remained a project of liberation as yet unfinished and unattained, even usurped, in as much as the very ideals on which the state progressed were held to ransom by more naked forms of power and regime survival.

Slogans such as 'Unity, Freedom, Socialism' become, in this context, empty of any real content and served to bolster an 'ideological pretender'. As Samir Kasir had remarked,

Syrians had become less citizens than subject to arbitrary force, as well as to grossly inequitable deprivation. This land of 'neither bread nor freedom' was thus ripe for a real 'resurrection' by 2011, when the sparks ignited in Tunisia, then spreading to Egypt, Bahrain and Libya, became visible to Syrians. The Baʿth Party had promised Syrians national pride and dignity, as we shall see in Chapter Four in my analysis of dignity in the Arab context. Yet the gap between the ideals and the practices of the Baʿth Party in power created the conditions for and the logic of a revolutionary moment based on the assertion of and the call to dignity, in 2011. The project of freedom as a project (as we saw above) of collective freedom, of self-determination, still beckoned.

This contemporary historical summary gives vital context to my detailed analysis of the concept of dignity, an idea which appears, which is prominent, and which is asserted in a number of ways by actors in Syria's revolution. As I have indicated, the ideals and spirit of the Baʿthist vision is, somewhat ironically and uncomfortably for Syrians who have lived with the actual practices of 'Baʿthist' rule, a visible element in the re-emergence of the idea of 'dignity' in the latest revolution. Dignity has once again characterised the opposition to forms of humiliation meted out to Arab subjects by their rulers. It has also been employed once again as part of a language of liberation used by the leaders of newly independent states, and now by the revolutionaries in Syria.

With the social and political change that the 2011 Syrian uprisings ushered in, we need to consider the (re)entry into the ideological space of old family heirlooms - or renovated ideological furniture put to new uses; dusty and neglected but with conceptual form in Syria's political history. In the remainder of this thesis the particular case of Syria, the

revolution begun in 2011 and the ideas that flowed in and from it, are the subject of detailed analysis and interpretation. Using dignity as my point of entry I consider the political ideas, or the 'ideological furniture', in Syria, and how it has been thrown into disarray with the latest revolution.

We have already seen, in the analysis of the central ideas that formed the Baʿthist manifesto, how important it is to understand their historic development in order to see how persistent and influential certain conceptions are in civilisations over time, and the idea of dignity in Syria is no different. Thus, before I can commence with the contemporary or synchronic investigation into the 2011 revolution (in Chapters Five and Six) and the uses of dignity in it, I first need to investigate the idea in its western and Arab contexts. The following chapter provides such an analysis: gathering to pursue dignity's diachronic sweep, and then, of its synchrony in Syria's revolutionary moment.

Chapter Four

Continuity and change: traditions and uses of dignity
in the West and in the Arab world

Introduction

As I have set out in the thesis introduction, the concept of dignity (Arabic: *karama*) was a prominent idea in the latest round of Arab revolutions that began in 2010, and it was used in the Syrian revolution by activists, citizen journalists and writers who were involved in or commentating on events. The appearance of this idea of *karama* invites an investigation into what was happening and the ways in which this idea was being used. In Chapter One I reflected on the study of revolutions and ideas as a point of reference in pursuit of my research into ideas on and in Syria's revolution. I began by attending to the influential scholarship on modern revolutions and I noted how efforts at producing a generalised theoretical model to explicate revolutionary causes and required outcomes had often obscured other promising avenues of inquiry.

I then considered ideas and ideologies in modern revolutions. The most influential literature tended to concentrate on ideas only in as much as they might explain the *cause* of a revolution. What all these approaches revealed was a concentration on the state and state actors. As a result, and with very few exceptions, the conventional study of revolution has neither given enough attention to the actual people who rise up in revolutions, nor to their ideas. Without suggesting that we discard altogether important structural and socio-economic explanation for modern revolutions, this thesis has taken a different path in order

to get close to the people and their ideas, relying on a non-causal approach to ideas in a time of revolution. In thinking about complex ideas as important objects of study in themselves, we can investigate the appearance of the concept of dignity in Syria's revolution, and its possible functions and meanings.

To this end I have drawn on an interpretive methodology from within a sub-field of political theory which enables me to give due consideration to ideas and concepts, understood as important units of analysis in and of themselves. In the early scholarship of William E. Connolly, which I set out in detail in Chapter Two, we found the concepts and tools with which to think about 'dignity'. Whilst people may seem to share a common sense about the worth and meaning of dignity—as we shall see—Connolly's work on complex and contested concepts suggests that we should investigate and reflect on the possibility of conceptual revision and change and not assume a timeless and fixed meaning. I also utilise Michael Freeden's scholarship, which I examined in Chapter Two, regarding the study of concepts as important units of analysis and as building blocks for the ideational patterns and the ideological traditions which shape our world. In particular I make use of Freeden's elaboration and analysis of the diachronic context and synchronic specificities in which ideas are contained and elaborated.

I began, in Chapter Three, with a diachronic analysis of ideological traditions in the Syrian context, and set out some of the central ideas and beliefs of prominent ideologues and thinkers involved in the Arab Baʿth project and party. In this way we can cross a wide and diverse ideational range: from the core ideas of the Syrian Arab Baʿth Party that I analysed in Chapter Three to the historical threads of the concept of dignity, that I consider in this chapter. Layering an analysis of the idea of dignity in Syria's revolution in this way enables

us to look at elements of continuity and change—in the ways that established beliefs and ideas may re-emerge and be recast to signify new priorities and to indicate a demand for change. We can explore the extent to which long-standing ideas and beliefs such as 'unity' and 'freedom' might be dusted off and brought back into use again.

The historicised approach I undertake in this chapter is necessarily overlaid with the synchronic dimension, which also starts to emerge at points in my analysis here (specific events and time periods are given treatment in this chapter, for example, alongside the broad sweep of history) and which I engage with extensively in investigating the idea of dignity in two ideational exemplars in Chapters Five and Six. In those final chapters I explore the ideational currents which came to the fore at a particular point and place in time - Syria's revolution. We cannot, however, consider the idea of dignity without recourse to its conceptual histories and the ways they trace conceptual changes.

My aim in this chapter is to consider the ways in which the concept of dignity has come to "bear the accumulative burdens" of the past but also how we can see the synchronic aspects at play in particular instances and in differing conceptual milieu.[1] We can start to paint a picture of dignity in a western contemporary context and use it as our starting point of comparison and departure (as researchers situated in the western academy, not as a normative or ideal basis from which to proceed and compare with the 'Other') for an analysis and interpretation of dignity in a different historical and political context, that of the Arab world and of Syria in revolution.

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[1] Freeden (1996) op cit., 98.

I do not set out to separate and reify these two differing conceptions or to suggest they are mutually exclusive. It is, however, an efficient way to organise and to compare differing traditions and trajectories for dignity. In this chapter I show how the contemporary Arab and Syrian context for dignity is importantly different to that of the western individualist tradition. I set out to show that dignity acts as a powerful analytical lens and signifier of the Syrian revolution and, as we will see in my explication of the beginnings of Syria's 2011 revolution, how its meaning is, in vitally important ways, context-driven and how it comes to be clarified in relation to other core and adjacent ideas.

The chapter is divided into two parts: firstly, the dominant western conception of dignity; and, secondly, particular Arab conceptions of dignity. In **Part One** I set out the three commonly found readings and applications which 'underwrite' the western conception of dignity. These three points of understanding are:

i.   Theistic metaphysical notions of human dignity, which consider humans as made in the image of God, centred in monotheistic religion;

ii. Kant's scholarship, which accommodates a protestant religious tradition and a particular rational strand in the Enlightenment, as a foundation for a consideration of dignity;

iii. Cross-disciplinary scholarship, including neo-Kantian influences, which theorises dignity in a contemporary setting and accounts for its social and relational aspects.

There are other ideational threads, of course, relating to these themes and to dignity but these three are, I argue, the most common and influential.

For the first of these threads, in Section One, I examine a broadly Judeo-Christian religious conception of dignity to illuminate the metaphysical sense of the idea based on theistic tradition and texts. I examine the core belief that humans were created in God's image and how this metaphysical conception of the human is further fleshed out by linking it with ideas such as free will and human reason. Then I look at the ways in which a broadly conceived of Christian tradition has responded to and reacted to secularizing pressures and the age of revolutions.

I contrast this, in Section Two, with Kant's rational argumentation which contains, in important overlapping ways, equally foundational conceptions of dignity which are organized around Kant's idea of a rational agent. In Section Three I update our knowledge on dignity by situating a theistic and metaphysical conception of dignity against and in dialogue with some recent contributions. I examine different social and relational approaches through Michael Rosen's historicised analysis and George Kateb's 'existential' conception of human dignity. I argue that this starts to bring us towards productive paths for exploring the internal content of the idea and its use and meanings in our social and political world.

In **Part Two** I turn my attention to a detailed investigation of the idea of and conceptualisations of *karama*[2] (dignity) in the historical context of the Arab region, and to

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[2] In modern standard Arabic (MSA) language usage, dignity is commonly denoted by the noun *karama* and in colloquial transliteration may be written as *karameh*. The idea of dignity, along with associated ideas of honour and pride, is prevalent in the Arab language and culture and can be found, for example, in Arabic music and poetry as with *Umm Kulthoum's* song, *al-saun karamiti* ('preserve my dignity'); and, in the poetry and customs of the Arab tribes: see Stewart, 1994; Chatty, 2010. Related concepts might also be used interchangeably with *karama* to denote dignity – such as the Arabic for pride, and honour which might be used in differing family, kinship, gendered and socioeconomic contexts. A good example of such switching

a consideration of the dominant religious tradition of Islam. This diachronic analysis serves as both a comparison with the Western conceptions of dignity and as a way of exploring the important historical context which avoids making ahistorical assumptions about the meaning and use of *karama* in today's Syria. This moves us closer, spatially and temporally, to my specific research into dignity in Syria's revolution.

In Section One, we see how in Islam, as in Christianity, the human is elevated in God's eyes and humankind has a special place among God's creatures. Second, and in clarifying this metaphysical conception, God endowed humans with the unique ability to reason: that is, to resort to rational human thinking in the temporal world. Thus, humans enjoy a dignified stature and standing above others of God's creatures. Third, in the relationship between humankind and God, humans have free will with which to act.

In Section Two I consider how the idea of dignity gained prominence in response to colonial and mandate rule, drawing on politicians, writers and thinkers from the colonial and post-colonial period. In my analysis of the modern colonial and decolonisation period we will see how dignity took on a radical, collective, and liberatory meaning in its appearance and uses. The Arab context thus departs in important ways from a foundational and individuated conception of human dignity to advance a more *active* and *collective* application of dignity, as part of a particular and important strand of political thought-practice.

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between different social uses is the noun ʿirḍ which appears to denote a traditional sense of honour and might indicate one's favourable social standing, an attachment to Arab land or a women's honour: Stewart, 1994, 143-4; Abu-Lughod, 1986. Another example is the noun ʿizz (this is sometimes pronounced and transliterated as ʿizza in colloquial Syrian Arabic), which can connote honour and strength or pride, as well as dignity, and is suggestive of how one is regarded or perceived of in society. Also, in the Syrian context, the noun *nakhwa* can be used to express a sense of honour and pride, but it can also be a marker of the idea of dignity.

In Section Three I bring us up to date with the beginnings of Syria's revolution in 2011, and I indicate the ways in which the notion of *karama* has been recast and put to use once more in a deeply political and contentious context. I conclude by bringing together these main trends and suggesting some provisional ways of thinking about the idea of *karama* as signifying a particular liberatory and collective resistance.

To return now to Part One, I begin here with western conceptions of dignity and introduce the idea as it has been derived from a broadly Judeo-Christian tradition.[3]

Part one: western conceptions of dignity

I   Religious sources for dignity

Man in God's image

In this section I set out a conception of human dignity which is drawn from exegeses of the Holy Scripture. There is an important strand of religious thought and tradition which has influenced contemporary conceptions of individual human dignity as innate.[4] Across the differing Christian denominations the human species is elevated in 'God's special favour' and endowed with dignity. The metaphysical idea of the *imago Dei*—"the image and likeness of the Divine, with which each human being is endowed"—is a source for theistic

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[3] I am aware that this conflates a very broad family of churches/religious traditions and that a research focus on western conceptions of dignity would require tracing the different threads within Christianity, for example that of the protestant and the catholic trajectory. However, this chapter is limited to a discussion of some of the most influential literature on dignity and it is not possible to provide an exhaustive study of this immense canon of scholarship within this research project.

[4] Though one of the debates has been around the extent to which nonbelievers can make the claim to dignity if it is God-given. I follow the logic that if God made humans and preferred them he therefore endowed all humans with dignity, regardless of their behaviour in the temporal world.

conceptions of human dignity.[5] In the Christian tradition the idea of a particular kind of

human dignity stems from exegeses of the Old Testament. Humans are blessed with an

innate sense of dignity because of the way in which they are made in God's image. In

Genesis 1:26 we find:

> And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have
>
> dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle,
>
> and over all the earth and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.[6]

This central belief has become embedded across the religious traditions of Christianity (in

both the protestant and catholic denominations), as well as Islam which I reserve for

discussion in Part Two of this chapter. God thus elevated humans above all other animals

but in doing so held men to high standards — in that all that they might do would reflect on

God, on his image in them. Humans are made in the image of God and they must therefore

strive to be close to and work towards Godly perfection. To do so, and unlike others of

God's creatures (that creepeth upon the earth), humans are equipped with the ability to

reason and with free will to act.[7]

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[5] Hanvey, J. Dignity, Person and Imago Trinitatis, in McCrudden, C. (2014*) Understanding Human Dignity*, 216.

[6] Biblical quotes from: The Holy Bible (1929) Revised Version, The Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1.

[7] Although, other prominent religious figures left open the idea of dignity in relation to its non-human application: St. Thomas Aquinas suggests, in the definition he offers, in his *Commentary on the Sentences* that: "Dignity signifies something's goodness on account of itself': in Waldron, J. (2012) *Dignity, Rank, & Rights: the Berkeley Tanner Lectures*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 86.

In medieval theology we also find there is an important relation between the idea of human beings made in God's image and the notion of God's gift of free will to men. One of Augustine's many influential arguments in his explication of religious doctrine was that of his religious conception of free will, which he set out in his *De libero arbitrio voluntatis*.[8] This was an important topic because of his theological and philosophical preoccupation with answering the question of why God permitted evil and why men chose to do evil. When humans commit a sin their reasoning is impaired and they fall from grace into sin, as in the story of Adam and Eve, which reminds humans of both their imperfectability and of God's perfection in whose image humans are made and through whom they can seek redemption. This illustrates well the way that concepts are clarified in relation to other important ideas, as in Connolly's notion of cluster concepts. Additionally, the relational nature between God and people is drawn out from, and then interpreted, in new ways in Augustine's writing on the Trinity.[9] Augustine offers a "theological anthropology" in that his extension and analogy of God's Trinity with that of a human trinity (of memory, understanding, and will) "offers a highly suggestive account of the human person and our relation to God's own life".[10]

Augustine's move to conceive of an *imago trinitatis* paved the way for a conceptualisation of rational man *within* the Christian tradition.[11] This is instructive in highlighting how the medieval thinkers were grappling with new questions ushered in by the natural sciences and man-made law and with the necessity of providing a logic and reason to religious faith. These philosophical musings, grounded in metaphysical conceptions of man, show how

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[8] Benjamin, S. and Hackstaff, L.H. (1964) Third Edition, *Augustine: On free Choice of the Will*, Indianapolis, New York, Kansas: The Bobs-Merrill Co. Inc.
[9] Ayres, L. (2000) 'Augustine's Trinitarian Theology', in Dodaro, R. & Lawless, G. eds. *Augustine and His Critics*, London: Routledge.
[10] Hanvey, J. (2013) 'Dignity, Person, and Imago Trinitatis, in McCrudden, C. ed. *Understanding Human Dignity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 218-9.
[11] Hanvey, ibid., 219.

Augustine had started to elucidate the ways in which man has free will and must make the right choices for the common good. In doing so he argued that free will is gifted by God but that "it is man alone who decides what he will do".[12] Men exercise their free will by recourse to human reason, and this was another dimension to an understanding of the relation between God and humans, and indicative of their duties in the temporal world.

Saint Thomas Aquinas advanced Augustine's ideas and drew from a wide range of philosophical texts available—including Aristotle's work—in order to interrogate free will and man's use of reason. One of the theological and philosophical puzzles he focuses on is the nature of man's free will.[13] Aquinas makes a distinction between essence and existence so as to consider the divine and its metaphysical relationship with the human world.[14] He recognises man as a natural being in search of truth and good, but he seeks to make mankind's capacity for reason and rule consonant with that of God's will and divine law for man on earth. He adheres to some of Augustine's exegeses of religious scripture, and the central tenet that Man comes from God and is made in his image. He further extends the philosophical implications of this principle in a dialogical approach in which he seeks to show that human rational thought could be used in the service of a metaphysical and religious conception of human free will.

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[12] Rist, J.M. (1994) *Augustine: ancient thought baptised,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 132.
[13] Hanvey, in McCrudden, (2014) op cit. 220.
[14] See introduction in Clark, M.T ed. (1972) *An Aquinas Reader: selections from the writings of Thomas Aquinas*, New York: Image Books, 7.

Human reason

A third conceptual tool is required, however, for man to choose and decide and therefore to act. In his *Summa Theologica,* Aquinas explicates the nature of human freedom[15] and the way in which man's ability to make choices flows from it. In doing so he separates out the intrinsic and divine known truths from the material, human, world of necessity and choice.[16] Faith in God was the First Truth, and man's ability to act freely flowed from God, "binding together faith and reason".[17] Aquinas writes that, therefore, "Man can will or not will, act or not act"; men may will towards good or will toward evil in their exercise of intellectual, and moral, choices.[18] In the realm of human affairs God's divine intervention can redeem men but cannot necessarily save them from choosing to sin.

From Augustine and Aquinas we find metaphysical conceptions of not only the central first principle that man is created in God's image, but also what that means for human agency and free will: the extent to which man's freedom to act is conceptualized in the Christian doctrine and an explication of a theological and philosophical approach which serves to set the terms in which reason can proceed *with*, and not *in opposition to*, faith. The debates on man's free will and the extent of it, and for example, the question: "Is man merely God's puppet?"[19] This is clarified (and qualified) by the belief that "man is free [liberum] to do what he likes, but he is not freed [liberaturm] from sin".[20]

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[15] See Summa of Theology, q. 82.a. 4,c and ad.1., cited in Clark, M.T. ed. (1972) *An Aquinas Reader: selections from the writings of Thomas Aquinas*, New York: Image Books, 290-300.
[16] This tension seems to resonate with the much later efforts of the nineteenth and early twentieth century Islamic modernists - such as Mohammed Abduh and Rashid Rida, whom we met in Chapter Three.
[17] In Clark, ibid, 18-19.
[18] Summa of theology, I-II, q. 13, a.6., cited in Clark, ibid, 293.
[19] See discussion re this in Rist, op cit., 132-133.
[20] In Rist, ibid., citing Augustine in *Rebuke and Grace*, 13:42, 132.

The freedom to act is, therefore, a defining principle, but there is a normative assumption that man's nature is to seek to act for the common good. The actions of humans are contingent on their processes of human reasoning, which Aquinas pursues in great analytical and metaphysical detail.

I have introduced in basic form the fundamental beliefs which help to clarify the concept of human dignity: man in God's image; free will, and human reason. These ideas have subsequently formed the basis for a theistic conception of human dignity.

Human agency

Coming, to a significant extent, from another tradition, an example of the early attempts to engage with ideas of dignity was the idealistic, and somewhat eclectic, thesis presented by the Italian philosopher Pico della Mirandola (1463 – 1494).[21] Dignity started to attract more careful and concerted attention as part of a "turn towards humanity"[22] exhibited in the Italian Renaissance but found in common (secularising) cause elsewhere. Pico's thesis is an attempt to develop an early modern humanism aimed at marrying (rather than rejecting) Christian religion with concerns for rational human thinking amidst the cultural flourishing of this era. Pico's oration, posthumously entitled 'The Dignity of Man',[23] captures his ideas and the spirit of the time. He starts by pondering questions as to the position of, and the wonder of, man and the source of his happiness. When God had created earth, narrated Pico, this 'Artisan' desired that there would be someone to 'wonder at its greatness' and 'love its

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[21] Wallis, C. G., et al (1965/1998, translation), *Pico della Mirandola on the Dignity of Man*, Indiana: Hackett Publishing.

[22] Steenbakkers, P. (2014) Human dignity in Renaissance humanism, in Duwell, M, Braarvig, J., Brownsword, R. & Mieth, D, *The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity: interdisciplinary perspectives*, 86.

[23] Wallis, C.G. et al (1965/1998) ibid.

beauty', and so God created man in the form of Adam. With no archetype in which to mould man, God said to his creation, Adam:

> In conformity with thy free judgment, in whose hands I have placed thee, thou art confined by no bounds; and thou wilt fix limits of nature for thyself. I have placed thee at the centre of the world, that from there thou mayest more conveniently look around and see whatsoever is in the world. Neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal have We made thee. Thou, like a judge appointed for being honourable, art the molder and maker of thyself; thou mayst sculpt thy self into whatever shape thou dost prefer. Thou canst grow downward into the lower natures which are brutes. Thou canst again grow upward from thy soul's reason into the higher natures which are divine.

Central to Pico's controversial (for its time) thesis is how to consider the ways in which man might honour this God-given virtue of dignity, so that humans do not abuse the "liberality of the Father"[24] in causing harm to themselves instead of moving toward salvation.[25] He deliberates on the ways in which man should "compete with the angels in dignity and glory", and responds to his own questions with: "where we have willed it, we shall be not at all below them".

In pursuing ways to live in dignity, and to reach up to the very heights of God, Pico, importantly, turns to the notion of human agency and concepts of charity, intelligence, and (human) judgement.[26] In Pico, as well as elsewhere, we can see the ideational architecture

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[24] Wallis, C.G. et al (1965/1998) ibid., 7
[25] Here Pico is referencing the Psalms, 48:21 (King James version, Psalms 49:20) cited by translator, in *On the Dignity of Man*.
[26] Wallis, C.G. et al (1965/1998) ibid., 7

for the coming secularising influence on religion and the turn to reason, thus developing notions of what human dignity might consist of and how it should be treated.

In summary, the monotheistic conception of dignity is one which is special to and inherent in humans as it is ordained by God unto man. It is the foundational sense in which we might consider the notion of dignity emerging from a western Christian conception, a view which has taken on important universal meanings. Having navigated a path which sets out a religious conception of dignity, I also indicated the differing ways in which key Christian traditions sought to engage with and adjust to the Renaissance. In a religious conception of dignity the idea must be understood on a metaphysical level.

Continuing with the western tradition, I now trace the conceptual history and usages of human dignity through the writings of Immanuel Kant.

II   Kant, practical reason, and dignity

Immanuel Kant's writing has deeply influenced contemporary understandings of dignity; not least in the human rights discourse espoused by western liberal thinkers and democracy theorists, as well as jurisprudence on matters of human dignity as promulgated through international law and nation-state constitutions.[27] Therefore it is important to recognise Kant's influence on dignity because it has been so great and it shows some important continuity with the foundational conception of dignity we just saw. For Kant, humans have

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[27] Waldron, (2012); McCrudden, (2014) op cit.

intrinsic dignity in virtue of being rational and free – in that they are able to make (morally guided) decisions and to act based on a Kantian notion of 'practical reason'. Thus humans are beyond price as their worth is derived from their being not merely instruments or a means to some end, but from being an end in themselves. For Kant, man's ability for practical reason is the organizing and core idea around which all else flows – thus, it is claimed, providing the opening for non-theistic treatments of dignity.[28]

Kant's use of, and exposition of, dignity is scattered somewhat through his extensive writing, and some have noted how there is some variation in his treatment of the concept.[29] It is not possible to fully explicate Kant's ideas on dignity[30] here as it relies on his expansive foundational ideas, and this would take us away from our central purpose of advancing towards a conceptualisation of dignity in an Arab and Syrian context. However, I draw out some of the important threads from the canon of Kant's work in relation to dignity.

There are some fundamental principles and claims which underpin Kant's conception of dignity. A founding principle for Kant's conception of dignity is that it has an intrinsic value, beyond price, which is vested in the human being on account of his worth as not merely a means, but *as an end unto himself*:

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[28] However, Kant's practical reason stems from the protestant context in which he was writing and to which he adhered. That is certainly what Nietzsche supposed in his assessment of Kant's work: in Hollingdale, R. J. trans. (1990) *The Anti–Christ(ian)*, Penguin Books.

[29] See discussion in Bayefsky, R. (2013) 'Dignity, Honour, and Human Rights: Kant's Perspective', *Political Theory*, 4:6, 813-4.

[30] On this effort see Sensen, O. (2011) *Kant on Human Dignity*, Kantstudien-Erganzungshelle, 166, De Gruyter, especially Part II, 141-213. Sensen pursues a novel non-foundational approach to Kant's conception of dignity which utilises the idea of Kant's Copernican revolution in moral philosophy.

In the kingdom of ends, everything has either a price or a dignity. What has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; what, on the other hand, is raised above all price and therefore admits of no equivalent, has dignity.[31]

Rational beings are above price because of their inherent worth. In recognising the privileged place of humans, rational human actors must bear a responsibility and inner moral duty. Kant stated that:

Every man has Conscience, and finds himself inspected by an inward censor, by whom he is threatened and kept in awe (reverence mingled with dread); and this power watching over the law is nothing, arbitrarily (optionally) adopted by himself, but is interwoven with his substance. It follows him like his shadow, however he may try to flee from it.[32]

So, Kant's 'inalienable dignity' differs, in some way, from an innate religious conception of dignity, in that man possesses an internal 'moral law' and so moral guidance comes from within, from human beings, who were created by God and endowed with reason by Him. Those duties flow from human reasoning and decision-making. Thus, man has to value himself and, in doing so, be in "respect of the dignity of our humanity".

Kant offered us a second sense of dignity, based around the intrinsic value of the human as a rational being with free will who is his own law-maker and must act morally and correctly. Pursuing a conception of dignity from Kant's philosophical oeuvre provides us with an

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[31]Kant, I. (1998) *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed./trans. Gregor, M. New York: Cambridge University Press, 42-43.

[32] Kant. I. (1886) Chapter Three: Of the Duty owed by Man to Himself as his own Judge, *The Metaphysics of Ethics*, 3rd ed., Calderwood, H. trans., Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 254.

example of the way in which dignity has come to be regarded as not just something which is innate and inalienable, but which is qualified, in that men must fulfil their duties and act in a morally correct manner in order to maintain it, thus subsequently providing the groundwork for a universal legal and moral operationalising of the concept of dignity which has, as we shall see in the next section, manifested itself in a normative and individualist human rights discourse.

This is a vital point to take from our analysis of Kant's scholarship. This internal moral law, in following Kant, is held by man; that is, by the individual, and is acted upon by making individual choices, thus providing the basis for a conception of dignity which is *individualising*. We will contrast this with the modern Arab colonial context: in Part Two we see how a *collective* conception of dignity emerged, but next I will look more at contemporary thinking about dignity.

III   Dignity in the social world

In this section I will pinpoint some productive approaches to the concept of dignity which, in some important ways, seek to recognise the social world and a more public and relational aspect of dignity. In doing so it is necessary to problematise the idea, although this does not mean giving in to the weight of dignity's critics. The most vocal criticisms have been in regard to ethical matters. But also, importantly for the trajectory that dignity starts to take us in regarding this thesis, there is potential in arguing that conventional study of dignity has problematically linked it with a dominant liberal and western democratic discourse, and

a false one at that (given the vast inequalities in our liberal societies).[33] These unsettling

ideas about dignity become important in this research study as it usefully interrupts and

challenges the dominant foundational claim to dignity which I have spent time analysing so

far and which I want to move away from to see how else we can understand the concept of

dignity as it is being used.

To begin with, an important juncture in the contemporary conception of human dignity is

the ushering in of the post Second World War peace settlement, which provided the

foundations on which political and legal frameworks and protections were drawn up to

protect humans from the excesses of war, and to guarantee the respect of human rights in

the nation-state system. For example, the *United Nations Declaration on Human Rights*

(1948) and, at a national level, the German *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law, 1949) placed the

concept of human dignity in primary place as a grounding for the protection of individual

human rights which would flow from it.   Protecting and respecting dignity serves as the

basis on which to codify, enact and protect equal human rights in human-made law and

doctrines. Contemporary philosophical, legal and moral commitments to the sanctity of

human dignity can be found in the field of international law and political philosophy, which

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[33]Dignity indeed has its critics: the most cited critics appear to be Ruth Macklin who wrote an editorial in the *British Medical Journal* claiming that dignity is useless. She also conflates, wrongly, autonomy with dignity as she claims them as interchangeable. Then Stephen Pinker who has said that we are "using dignity to condemn anything that gives someone the creeps", in his account of 'The Stupidity of Dignity', cited in Waldron, 2012, op cit., 42, n.55. Not surprisingly, both of these rebukes come from the natural sciences and, specifically, the field of stem cell research against which the Catholic Church has used claims of human dignity to condemn this scientific development and its ethical implications—discussed in Waldron (2012) op cit. 42. Michael Rosen singles out Schopenhauer's critique of the expression 'dignity of man' as "the shibboleth of all the perplexed and empty-headed moralists", thus rejecting the idea as a mere façade with no actual moral substance (2012, op cit., 1-2). Nietzsche takes this much further in his critique of the emptiness of the slogan 'dignity of labour'—this, in my reading, reflects some of the later radical critiques we will encounter in Fanon regarding individualist conceptions of human dignity (see chapter: The Greek State, in Ansell, K. & Large, D. eds. (2006) The Nietzsche Reader, Blackwell, 88-94.

dominates the scholarship on and informs our common understandings of dignity in the West.

However, rather than discuss this canon of scholarship and the normative ideas on dignity which remain close to Kantian conceptions of the concept, I want to explore some alternative paths of inquiry from different disciplines. One of the more interesting international law perspective resides in Bayefsky's approach to dignity and honour.[34] She seeks to excavate Kant's treatment of honour, which she claims has been neglected in a consideration of the concept of dignity.[35] In doing so she reintroduces an important sense of being in the social world and of a relational aspect of dignity which is clarified in adjacency with traditional codes of honour. This moves us beyond an individuated sense of dignity and towards ways dignity might be understood in the social world. Her argument is suggestive of the notion that honour be used as a tool to imbue a collective social responsibility based on doing the right thing and acting with honour and dignity. Her argument seeks to find ways to hold state leaders to account and to curb human rights abuses.[36]

Michael Rosen's useful compact study on the history of dignity attempts to get at this social and relational aspect of dignity from another angle. Rosen argues that we should not see dignity as *only* a timeless intrinsic value. This falls short of providing a full understanding of the range of uses and meanings of dignity. In particular Rosen's interrogation of the ways in which we self-reflect, relate to and respect each other illuminates the multi-dimensional and social aspects of dignity—as reflexive, reaffirming, responsive, and so on. Rosen thus provides an analysis of dignity which recognises that the concept does not and need not

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[34] Bayefsky, R. (2013) op cit.
[35] Bayefsky (2013) ibid., 812.
[36] See also: Krause, S. (1999) 'The Politics of Distinction and Disobedience: Honor and the Defense of Liberty in Montesquieu', *Polity*, 31:3 (Spring), 469-499.

require a foundational basis on which to appear and be acted upon in practice. In decoupling dignity from a foundational 'human rights' discourse, Rosen considers the difference between 'respect' and 'dignity' and suggests that:

> Instead of respecting dignity by respecting a set of fundamental rights, dignity requires respectfulness. Taken in this way, the right to have one's dignity respected is one particular right - albeit a very important one - rather than something that acts as the foundation of rights in general.

Rosen here appears to be pointing towards looking at the way in which dignity appears as a *practice*—in our everyday lives and relations with each other. This helps Rosen to answer one of the fundamental and difficult puzzles he pursues in his book: why do we feel it important to treat the dead with dignity?[37] Rosen begins to answer this puzzle by suggesting that it is not only because humans are ends in themselves that they have a duty to place value on humankind but, moreover, that we hold this value in high regard without needing to rely on a timeless or abstract conception of an objective dignity.[38] It is telling in how Rosen asserts that if a human was the last person on earth alongside one other who died, then the last surviving human would most likely take care to bury the deceased, or otherwise carry out some kind of ritual to mark the death, with respect, of another fellow human being.[39] Acting with dignity and as an upright member of society, for Rosen, requires no metaphysical basis or argument based on the utility of moral concepts such as dignity.[40]

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[37] Rosen, op cit., 10, 138.
[38] It is interesting to point out that Rosen's question represents a rather secularised thinking on death. A theistic response to his question would need to respond on a metaphysical level that considered that humans come from God, belong to God and return to Him. But that is the point of such contemporary theorists- to move beyond religion. See also George Kateb later in this section.
[39] Rosen, op cit., 138.
[40] Rosen, op cit., 143; 156.

Rosen goes along with some of Kant's notions of duty but he appears to be attempting to unsettle and interrupt any fixed ideas or narrowly legal and philosophical conceptions of human dignity.

In a contrasting approach George Kateb offers an 'existential' conception of dignity. He too moves in a direction which takes us away from universalising norms, but has a particular project in mind to promote the need for an urgent human 'stewardship' of the natural world and all its species. In his monograph *Human Dignity* Kateb boldly advances a defence of dignity which purposely puts aside any recourse to theistic claims and justifications for a conception of dignity based on the intrinsic worth of humans.[41] Nevertheless, Kateb's conception claims that humans have unique traits that elevate them from the rest of the natural world.

The human intellect is something that Kateb celebrates, and free and moral agency are central to his thesis on humans and their special place in the order of things.[42] Kateb explicates a particular human trait of human thought and consciousness[43] articulated in speech through complex language systems unique to humans.[44] Interestingly, given his secular claim, Kateb notes: "That God spoke the world into existence is a parable on the transformative power of human language".[45] As a result of this elevation, the human species has a duty in the 'stewardship' of nature. It seems that a tension emerges regarding the level to which Kateb sees dignity 'as if' it is foundational and then the extent to which he is

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[41] Kateb, G. (2011) *Human Dignity*, Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press. Kateb's is a resolutely secular defence of and conception of human dignity though. Similar arguments are, however, made from within political theology: Moltmann, J. (1984/2007) *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics*, trans. Meeks, D. M, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 26-29.
[42] Kateb, ibid., 132-136.
[43] Kateb, ibid., 134-5.
[44] Kateb, ibid., 136-145.
[45] Kateb, ibid., 142.

arguing his secular and secularising human stewardship because of our natural world. I cannot resolve this here but Kateb is useful because of his unsettling treatment of the idea in use and because he also seeks to problematise it and work on it as a theoretical and moral puzzle.

The scholars I have briefly discussed here seem to share the idea that human dignity is an important concept with normative consequences for human conduct and individual human rights. The focus, echoing ideas and exegeses of Kant's scholarship, is on rights and responsibilities, even when metaphysical and foundational claims are being contested. Thus dignity might appear to be settled and stabilised to a large extent in these legal and philosophical moorings to which human rights are tied.

However, we also found indications that the meaning of dignity has necessarily been clarified *in relation to* the external world, in human relations in the social, political and *public* sphere. Virtues such as respect for one another and equality for all have been core in decontesting the notion of dignity. In this respect perhaps Rosen offers ways to conceive of a more dynamic and moving concept of dignity. This is important as it is a challenge to the legalistic human rights and philosophical moorings which suggest that the idea has a timeless essence, whereas the social and relational aspect of dignity suggests that it is more dynamic, contingent and shifts in differing contexts. From Rosen's conceptual history treatment of dignity emerges the potential for a more intersubjective and contingent consideration of dignity which helps us to move between different contexts rather than to try and carry across and enforce any one unitary conception of dignity.

These debates start to open up to recognise certain levels of contestation regarding the idea of dignity in the ways that it appears and is used in our social and political world. In doing so, a certain level of unsettling, and of opening up the concept to investigate its internal contents, and ordering, is required. I have suggested that some of the scholarship relating to dignity tends to box in the idea—in legal and normative frameworks. It is thus productive to also consider, to the extent that we have the space here, other conceptions of dignity.

I draw this section to a close by examining ideas of dignity at the very extremes of human existence. Tzvetan Todorov offers us the clearest and starkest picture of a dignity in *practice*, and (indirectly) for survival. In his exploration of moral life in the Nazi concentration camps Todorov drew on survivor accounts and interpreted survivors' ideas of dignity as:

> The capacity of the individual to remain a subject with a will; that fact, by itself, is enough to ensure membership of the human race.[46]

For Todorov the virtue of dignity is inextricably linked to notions of freedom and the autonomy of humans to act. Thus, he suggests, there were instances of prisoners able to remain 'morally intact' of their own will and through their individual and collective practices, maintaining their dignity in a multitude of ways in the absence of the rule of law, institutional justice and so on. In suggesting this *everyday virtue* of (and resistance in) dignity, Todorov is showing how the camps sought to destroy the autonomy of the individual altogether. He asks:

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[46]Todorov, T. (1991/2000) *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps*, trans. Denner, A & Pollack, A. London: Phoenix, Orion Books Ltd.

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What happens if society not only refuses to recognise your dignity but actually declares you not worthy of life, as Nazi Germany did to the Jews?[47]

From accounts of holocaust survivors, Todorov narrates how dignity was guarded, fought for and retained in the most extreme conditions and in the complete absence of any kind of 'rights' regime for its prisoners. For Jean Amery during his time in Auschwitz, it was the physicality of his resort to violence to defend his dignity which brought him to regard the notion as "a form of social recognition",[48] and in which he appeared to consider it as interchangeable with the concept of honour which, as Todorov points out, can be bestowed through social codes in a way that dignity cannot, although Todorov extends his argument to point out that, unlike honour, dignity can be experienced by the isolated individual.[49]

Human dignity is taken for granted and has an ineliminable innateness. But, it becomes something that we as individuals struggle for, *in relation to* the world and situation around us. We cannot understand dignity just as an innate kernel in the human being. We have to look at the social context for the other, relational, virtues which clarify it. For example, consider the way in which Bruno Bettleheim's account of moral life in the camp shows the relational aspect of dignity at work in "man's internal ability to regulate his own life".[50] Thus it was that extreme acts of autonomy—whether by choosing to kill oneself rather than face the gas chambers or by fighting for one's preservation and position in the camps— characterised individual, and sometimes collective, responses in the most extreme situations.

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[47] Todorov, ibid., 60.
[48] Todorov, ibid. 59-60.
[49] Todorov, ibid., 60.
[50] Todorov, ibid., 61.

Todorov shows for us, by taking us to the extremes of what humans do, how context can shift meanings in use for important and complex ideas like dignity. Such kinds of extremes came to be a reality for Syrians too as the revolution turned to conflict and humanitarian disaster.

In this section alternative avenues for thinking about dignity were briefly analysed so as to highlight some of the strands of thinking on dignity which started to point us to the ways in which dignity is used in our social world and how it becomes a kind of practice—of self and mutual respect and of survival. Rosen and others offer a promise of a relational and social investigation into dignity and this comes directly to bear on conceptions of this idea in the Arab contemporary and revolutionary context, as we shall see shortly. I now move to Part Two of this chapter in order to investigate Arab conceptions of the idea of dignity.

Part two: Arab conceptions of dignity

I   Islam and conceptions of dignity

There is no explicit mention of the precise noun, *karama*, (as it is commonly used and translated today) in the Quran (nor an explicit mention of a 'human dignity'),[51] although

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[51] I am grateful to Dr Omar Imady, email correspondence, 2015, for pointing this out thus reinforcing the need to check with source texts in order to understand the ways in which the idea has then been interpreted (sometimes, seemingly, overly so in a way that has suggested that *karama* itself is present in the sacred texts) in the modern context.

other verbal derivatives are used from the same Arabic root letters for *karama,* such as *karram* (translated as: to honour). However, treatments of the idea of human dignity in Islam rely on and go back to the classical conceptions of the human and of man's place in Islam and relation to God.[52] The idea of human dignity is interpreted with reference to and in exegeses of the sacred texts of the Quran and the *Sunna,* as these represent the "bedrock of Islamic belief".[53] The *Sunna* collectively refers to the chain of evidence and recorded instances of prophetic traditions, which are made up of the sayings and doings of the Prophet Muhammed during his lifetime.

We necessarily start, then, with the religious sources for Islam at its very beginnings: the messages from God which were transmitted orally through the Prophet Muhammad. Later on we have the consolidation of the sayings and doings of the Prophet (*Sunna*) and the received messages from God as they are gathered, authenticated through a chain of authority (*isnad*) and finally written down and recorded (*al-Quran*). Subsequent understandings of human dignity have been derived from a consideration of important precepts and relational concepts which I will focus on here: Man in the image of God; human reason, and free will. I set out here the foundational ideas through which the concept of dignity has then been interpreted and articulated by Islamic scholars.

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[52] So, generally speaking, the four main schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*maḏhab*) in Sunni Islam, including the Shafi'i as it has traditionally been followed by sections of the Sunni population in Syria as well as many other Arab countries. The other three main schools of influence in the Muslim majority countries are Hanafi, Maliki and Hanbali: Esposito, J. 1991. *Islam: the straight path*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 85.

[53] These sacred texts form part of the canon of Islam and its differing strands and schools, as discussed in Ramadan, T. 2012. *The Arab Awakening: Islam and the new Middle East*, London: Allen Lane, Penguin Books, 73-74; see also, Esposito, J. (1991) *Islam: the straight path*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 80-83; also, discussion on the concept of Sunna and origins in Rahman, F. (1996/2002) *Islam*, 2nd edn., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 44-49.

Man in God's image

As with the Christian tradition and its treatment of dignity, which we set out earlier, the idea of dignity in the Islamic world has become intertwined with the privileged place of humans in God's creation and their duties to *submit* (the meaning of Islam) to God. Conceptualising *human* dignity requires thinking about the way in which Islam conceives of human animals. In particular there is an emphasis on the first man—Adam. In the Quran Adam is seen as God's representative on earth, as His *khalifa* (vicegerent), made in God's image.[54] Adam is referred to in the Quranic tradition as Abu-al-Bashar[55] (father of humanity) and is mentioned in several of the Quranic verses.[56] The coming into being of Adam serves as the starting point for "the unfolding of humanity".[57] The scholar of Islam, Mohammed Kamali, refers us to the Quranic source for a conception of the dignity of man in the *Sura:* Children of Israel, (17:70), which declares:

> We have bestowed *dignity* [karram] on the progeny of Adam . . . and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of Our creation.

Here Kamali has rendered the derived verb *karram* as 'dignity' but elsewhere it is translated as 'honour'. [58] In an Islamic conception of humankind, it is God who bestows human virtues

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[54] Nettler, R. (2003) *Sufi Metaphysics and Quranic Prophets: Ibn Arabi's thought and methods in the Fusus al-Hikam,* Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 17-8, who is writing here in relation to particularities of Ibn Arabi's exegesis of the Quran but which nevertheless utilises the Quran which is a source for all Muslims; also, Abou El-Fadl, K. (2004) in Cohen, J. & Chasman, D. *Islam and the Challenges of Democracy*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 6-7.

[55] Nettler, ibid, 18.

[56] See 2:31, 3:33, 3:59, 7:11, 7:19, 20:115, I use the Marmaduke Pickthall translation of the Quran, published by Everyman, 1909/1992.

[57] Nettler, (2003) op cit., 17.

[58] My italics: Kamali, M. H. (2002) *The Dignity of Man: An Islamic Perspective*, Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1, translates the Arabic *karram* (the derived verb form of the word which would mean noble or honour as per the Hans Weir dictionary) as dignity (*karama*). This reflects the ambiguity and the retrospective translation of such ideas; meaning is contingent on context and many Arab nouns can have multiple meanings-so that they form a family of concepts. Notably Kamali specifically translates the Arabic noun used in the Quran, ird, as honour. So he is making a consistent distinction (as set out in his glossary of

such as honour, which are ". . . not earned by meritorious conduct; it is an expression of God's favour and grace" towards humans.[59] In this sense, an Islamic conception of human virtues such as dignity and honour appear similar to the Christian foundational stance on human dignity which we discussed earlier. The relationship between man and God that is stipulated in the Quran is one of submitting to and serving God on earth: "the most honoured of you in the sight of God is the most righteous or God fearing of you".[60] Humans are required to submit to God, their creator.[61] As we saw in the Christian tradition earlier, in Islam humans have certain duties and obligations which relate to the ways in which they are the very image of God on earth. Therefore humans must strive to keep to the straight path of Islam and to live as God would like. As a minimum, believers must adhere to *ibadat* – that is, the duty to worship, and other rituals which are obligatory in their submission to God. We can draw closer to an Islamic conception of dignity by considering two further core and relational concepts that are discussed centrally in consideration of dignity: human reason and free will.

Human Reason (*ʿaql*)

It is the metaphysical considerations and debates (and sometimes very practical matters) about the best ways of keeping to a straight Islamic path which have led to the codification of God's law through a system of Islamic jurisprudence from the earliest period of Islam. Hence we have the weight of God's law, the *Shari'a*, which is the gathering of rulings and legal codification regarding and drawing on that which is in the Quran and the Hadith. Since

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key terms), 33. In the Pickworth translation the phrase is rendered as: 'we have honoured' and the *Surah* itself is translated as 'the children of Israel' in reference to the Israelites.

[59] Kamali, ibid., 1

[60] *Sura* 49:13, cited in Esposito, J. 1981 op cit., 28-9.

[61] There is debate in the literature as to whether this includes for Muslims only or all of mankind. This depends on the kind of interpretation but it can be read with a charitable interpretation as being inclusive of all of mankind, the children of Adam. Although central to a religious conception is a generalisation of submitting to God (Allah) and being religious, something which can apply to all the monotheistic traditions and thus, potentially, exclude those outside of it.

the time of the Prophet Muhammed we find the early codification and explication of God's commands and the development of an Islamic jurisprudence which results in the necessity for consulting the sacred sources in all matters of discussion and contention. A central thread in the pre-modern and modern debates about Islam has been the importance and place of human reason.

Kamali notes how Ibn Abbas, the Companion of the Prophet Muhammad, commented that "God most high has honoured mankind by endowing him with the faculty of reason".[62] Man is expected to be an upright and honourable custodian on earth and to act as the gatekeeper of justice in the temporal world.[63] If we want to think about human reason and its relation to, and use within Islam, we need to attend to the conceptual tools of human reason in early Islam, and the way in which the application of these tools has changed over time. In order to figure out questions of *fiqh* (Islamic law) scholars relied on *ijtihad,* the principle of the use of independent human reasoning to come to informed legal decisions regarding the sacred Quran and the Sunna, and on *ijma*ʿʿ (consensus building).

These tools for reasoning within the faith have been used in markedly different ways across time and by differing schools of thought. Some scholars deemed that only the positions of consensus explicitly reached during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammed were valid and authentic, whereas the Islamist modernists wanted to expand this and put *ijma*ʿʿ to much wider use for new challenges and questions in the present, too. Likewise the usages of *ijtihad* in the early and pre-modern eras were limited to a narrow legal context rather than the suggested individual level and widened application desired by the Islamic modernists

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[62]Kamali, ibid., 1.
[63] Kamali,op cit., 30-31; Abou El-Fadl, (2004) op cit., introduction; and, Esposito (1981) op cit., 71-73 for a discussion on medieval Islamic theology and the *Mu'tazila* school of thought on human agency and freedom in comparison with the *Hanbali* school which was more dominant.

we met in Chapter Three. The debates around Islamic jurisprudence are complex and cannot really be generalised as we find, of course, internal contention among and between the main religious schools and scholars. But, for our purposes, we need to be aware that Islamic scholars and reformers were seeking ways to expand the notion, and application of independent and individual human reason (ʿaql) in modern Islamic jurisprudence. The gatekeepers of this were a community of Islamic scholars consisting of the *Ulama* and those religious scholars were respected as an authority on Islam within the wider community on account of their schooling in, and knowledge of, Islamic scripture.

Islamic scholars face new challenges in the modern period, when matters relating to the advances and pace of change present them with constant new challenges that did not exist in pre-modern times. For example, in the field of medical advances, there is contention about the extent to which it is medically permissible to try to save a foetus in cases where the mother has died while carrying the baby. This is because to interfere with the human form by cutting open her body raises fundamental questions on the innate dignity, invested by God, in the human body.[64] Those Islamic jurists who are less open to innovations using *ijtihad* are unlikely to agree to something which would seem to go against the word of God (Quran) or the sayings and doings of the Prophet. In this case the pertinent text states that: 'breaking the bone of the dead is like breaking one when he is alive'.[65] Advances in medical science arguably make such decisions easier when there is less chance of major disruptive surgery on the corpse.

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[64] See this discussion in Kamali, op cit.
[65] Kamali, op cit., 86-87.

Such debates in medical ethics relating to religious practices echo the ethical dilemmas we alluded to earlier in relation to the Christian tradition and advances in science which have raised ethical issues around abortion, assisted suicide and bioethics.[66] They also indicate the ways in which the divine law and the codes interact with or are in tension with the human, temporal world and the need for an accommodation of Islam with the modern world. Within this metaphysical parameter of action is the question of the extent of human free will in Islam.

Free Will

Related to the idea of human reason is the question of the extent to which man is free to reason and to act autonomously. This extends into the realm of power and the extent to which man must defer to God's will. Kamali indicates how the "dignity of man is manifested, perhaps more than anything else, in his freedom of conscience, moral autonomy and judgement".[67] Human freedom is conceived of, in an important way, through man's choice to come to religion, inferred from the Quranic verse *al-Baqarah*, 2:256: There shall be no compulsion in religion.[68] Kamali shows verses in the Quran which support the idea that God can only warn and guide but he cannot stop humans from going astray. Kamali also indicates the moral basis on which men should act, so that if they see evil they should speak out, according to the Quranic principle of *hisbah* which provides for the moral

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[66] Sherine Hamdy gives a detailed ethnographic treatment to the issue of organ transplants and the medical profession in relation to Egypt and Islamic law: Hamdy, S. 2012. *Our bodies belong to God: organ transplants, Islam and the struggle for human dignity in Egypt,* Berkeley/LA: University of California Press.
[67] Kamali, ibid, 39. ; Kamali cites as evidence: Muhammad Raja Mutajalli, al-Hurriyat wa'l-Huquq fi'l-Islam Rabitat al-alam al-islami bi-Makkah al-Mukarrahmah, Dar al-Sahafah wa'l-Nashr, 1407/1987, 23.
[68] In Kamali, ibid., 39. This Quranic phrase was used by Syrian activists in the Northern parts of Syria in response to the increasing extremism (and threats to secular Syrians in the revolution) and sectarian nature of the conflict; posters and murals on buildings can be found with the phrase in Arabic.

autonomy of humans. This Kamali takes to indicate the 'liberty of conscience', albeit, and as we saw in the classic Christian teachings, within a metaphysical and theistic framework.[69] This freedom to speak out extends to the necessary righteous conduct of speaking out against tyranny, as in the Hadith:

> When you see my community afraid of addressing a tyrant with: 'O tyrant', then it is not worth belonging to it anymore.

Stemming from discussions on issues of free will, we can think about the source(s) of authority and the level of autonomy from divine and temporal rule (however construed) that individuals enjoy, so that in a broadly Islamic setting, human action would be constrained by God's laws through the codified system in *Shari'a*; man is always subordinate to God and must submit to him. Then, within these confines, humans have some space to act autonomously through man-made law, secular and human-made laws and with recourse to constitutions and so on.

Above, I have briefly outlined the three core principles which relate to discussions on Islam and human dignity: that is, the uniqueness of humans in God's image, human reason, and free will. So far these look similar to the core ideas we saw in Christian conceptions of dignity in Part One. But we also need to consider the debate about the place of Islam within a modern nation state system, as this continues to exercise contemporary scholars of Islam and also those within the realm of political Islam. The focus has been on questions about the extent to which temporal rulers and governments can claim and maintain their legitimacy, and the extent to which they must be obeyed. Operating within the confines of

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[69] Kamali, ibid., 40-41.

an Islamic conception of dignity as being dependent on and subordinate to God's generosity, the scholar Khalid Abou al-Fadl asserts that the human social and political sphere stands distinct from (but in important ways, subservient to) the divine, through a reading and interpretation of the *Quran* and *Hadith*.[70] For him here are three central tenets relating to the human social and political sphere in the *Quran*.[71] These are: i) pursuing justice through social cooperation and mutual assistance; ii) establishing a non-autocratic, consultative (*ijmaʿ*) method of governance, and iii) instituting mercy and compassion in social interactions.

In this reading, Islam provides the foundations for a democratic system which ensures equal rights of speech, association and suffrage for all and "offers the greatest potential for promoting justice and protecting human dignity".[72] Abou El-Fadl thus offers an agental exegesis of the sacred texts: "God's sovereignty provides no escape from the burdens of human agency".[73] If God gave humans the unique ability among all his creatures to reason, then one reading is that how could God then deny free will? In the temporal world, Islamic law constrains men's actions so as to act within the 'natural law', codified and sanctioned in *Shariʿa,* or Islamic, law as upheld by Islamic jurists and *Ulama.*

In this section I have drawn on sacred Islamic sources in order to understand conceptions of the human in Islam and the way in which a metaphysical understanding of man and his relation to God has informed subsequent exegeses on human dignity in Islam. I have briefly noted that contemporary writing on Islam has tended to focus on Islam and human rights –

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[70] Abou al-Fadl (2004) ibid., 4-6.
[71] Abou al-Fadl (2004) ibid., 4-6.
[72] Abou El-Fadl, (2004), op cit., 4-6; he cites Quranic verses as follows: 6:12, 6:54, 21:107, 27:77, 29:51, 45:20.
[73] Abou El-Fadl, (2004) op cit., 9.

is Islam compatible with human rights? Can Islam recognise and incorporate democracy? And so on. However, I have not entered into these discussions in detail as they would then risk taking us away from the aim of this research, which is to look at a particular revolutionary situation in the contemporary period. Also, as I discussed in Chapter Two, in relating the debates in Contemporary Political Theory (CPT), there are some problems with taking a western conception of democracy and then seeking to shoehorn Islam into it to 'prove' that the two traditions are compatible and that Islam can be moderate and that Muslims are, in fact, just like 'us'. This account does not give due attention to difference—such as religious sensibilities and pious Muslims living in a secular, western, state.

Another more productive approach would be one which sought to look at new ideational patterns or prominent ideas within the traditions and then to build a contextualised picture of the beliefs and ideas and what might be similar and what might be different. In any case, we need now to consider, more directly, the political context for dignity in the twentieth century. This next section needs to be read whilst bearing in mind the historical context I set out in Chapter Three. In particular we can recall the core ideas which resonated among the ideologues, writers, and also among the people and public which sought to create a society based on the ideas of unity, freedom, and socialism. We saw how these ideas were clarified in relation to the notion of equality and how an imagined community was articulated in its *watan* and *ummah* formations—suggesting some tension between but also some commonality in ideas of the nation, the Arab people and Islamic civilisation.

We saw that, by the 1960s and up to the presidency of Hafez al-Asad the performance of the Baʿth party in power was neutered by the need to sustain power and legitimacy. We can trace this period of time, below, and look at the idea of dignity in the colonial and post-

colonial era where the idea of dignity abounded and came into close contact with a continuing, and postcolonial, ethos of resistance and liberation.

II   Dignity in resistance: colonial rule

So far, in Part Two, we have looked at the ways in which the idea of dignity has come to be conceptualised and understood, drawing on Islamic sacred sources. I now turn to consider the idea of dignity in the twentieth century colonial and independence period in order to provide the context for an analysis of dignity in Syria's 2011 revolution. I move on here to give detailed consideration to the colonial period, as this picks up some of the historical threads, and conceptual linkages, in Chapter Three, and pursues some of the central ideas that I introduced there. I tap into the dominant political discourses of the anti-colonial revolutionary struggles through the thought and practices of leading revolutionary actors and leaders in the colonial and postcolonial eras. This historical setting helps us in situating the current assertions of dignity in the Arab revolutions since 2010.[74]

Utterances of dignity in the Arab, and Syrian, context stretch far and wide in time, place, and thus, in meaning. There are important levels of complexity which range across issues

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[74] Pappé, I. (2011) 'Reframing the Israel/Palestine Conflict', Interview by Frank Barat, 6 March, 2011, uploaded on YouTube on 4 August 2011; Chomsky, N. (2013), 'Violence and Dignity: Reflections on the Middle East', *The Edward W. Said Lecture,* Friends House, London, 18 March. Tripp (2013), op cit., 2; Gerges, F. (2013) Interview for: 'The Making of the Modern Arab World', Episode 2, *BBC Radio 4* documentary series, presented by Tarek Osman and first broadcast in December, 2013; Gerges, F. (ed.) (2014) *The New Middle East: Protest and Revolution in the Arab World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Willis, M. J. (2016) 'Revolt for Dignity: Tunisia's Revolution and Civil Resistance', in Roberts, A., Willis, M., McCarthy, R. & Garten Ash, T. eds. *Civil Resistance in the Arab Spring: Triumphs and Disasters*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 49-50.

of class and gender and thus play out in different ways.[75] Within the scope of this research I introduce a conceptual framework within which these social and political dimension might be productively explored. The idea was, for example, manifested on the airwaves of Arab nationalist radio *Sawt al-Arab* (Voice of the Arabs) during the era of Nasserism, replete with a language and politics of dignity, and also in the liberation struggle for Palestine.[76] In the immediate period of decolonisation the Egyptian leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser, was one of the most influential leaders and earned respect for standing up to British colonial rule in Egypt when he nationalised the Suez Canal. In examining Nasser's speeches we find that the concept of dignity was one that he strikingly made use of. During his visit to Damascus in February 1958, Gamal Abdel Nasser addressed the Syrian National Assembly to announce the new experiment in Arab unity between Egypt and Syria, called the United Arab Republic (1958-1961). This speech is important in the way that it captures a rich discourse spoken whilst the legacy of colonial and monarchical rule was still fresh in the minds of the newly independent Arab states and people:

> We are living in the dawn of independence, we are living in the dawn of freedom, and the dawn of pride and dignity, the dawn of strength, and we are living in the dawn of hope in building a happy society. . . . For each dawn we saw a familiar long night . . . long nights stretched for hundreds of years in a constant struggle with the darkness of colonialism, tyranny, injustices and weaknesses . . .[77]

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[75] There are some useful analyses which can be considered in the Syrian context too; for example, discussion in Singerman, D. (2013) 'Youth, Gender, and Dignity in the Egyptian Uprising', *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 9:3, Duke University Press, 1-27.

[76] Gerges (2013) ibid; Chomsky (2013) ibid; Rogan, E. (2009) *The Arabs: A History*, London: Penguin Books Limited, 305; Wynn, W. (1959) *Nasser of Egypt: The Search for Dignity*, Arlington Books.

[77] Nasser, A. (1958) 'Speech to the Syrian national Assembly on the founding of the United Arab Republic between Syria and Egypt', 5 February, available online at Nasser.org/speeches, Arabic (*my translation*; the audio is also available to listen to).

The speech is redolent of the beginnings of Arab independence and of the promise of a fulfilled Arab dignity. Ideas such as dignity and freedom were to the fore – against different kinds of enemies. Nasser reminded the Syrians of the pain of injustice and weakness – in the face of foreign power and control. Then, during the crisis of relations between Egypt and Syria under this union Nasser can be found again appealing to the idea of dignity to seek to promote the common project and to urge for Arab unity in the face of threats to the Union:

> I ask all popular forces who still abide by the UAR and by Arab Unity to understand now that national unity within the Syrian homeland is the prime consideration. Syria's strength is strength for the Arab nation and Syria's dignity is dignity for the Arab future. Syria's national unity is a pillar of Arab Unity . . . May God help beloved Syria, guide its footsteps and bless its people. This UAR will remain to support every Arab struggle, every Arab right and every Arab aspiration.[78]

These extracts from speeches by Nasser illustrate his articulation of an Arab dignity, one that is distinctly illuminated by the urgency of Arab unity to maintain independence in the face of foreign interference in the region and the instability which had resulted. Here we find direct resonances with the kinds of ideas that I have analysed within the Syrian context in Chapter Three. In particular, the principles of the Arab Baʿth Party, with its core concern for unity, is carried over in Nasser's language and reflects the language and politics of the time.[79] This unity is an immediate and active political call, and it is in close ideational adjacency with the virtue of a dignified Syrian people and a dignity for Arabs. This connects, in important ways, the flourishing of dignity with the necessity to protect Arab

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[78] In R. Hrair Dekmejian. (1971) *Egypt under Nasir: a study in political dynamics, 1st Ed.* Albany: State University of New York Press, n.27

[79] Although I also noted some political contention between competing Arab groups such as the communists, Nasserists, and nationalists in their differing conceptions.

unity, and land, and to support Arab aspirations. The dignity is a kind of dignity in continued resistance and we find it wherever we find injustice, humiliation, and the need to struggle for liberation. Dignity is most present in the absence of its conceptual relations of freedom and of a unified and people.

For some, liberation was yet to come. So it is that dignity has associations with the liberation of Arab land and people, and this politics of resistance and liberation was to continue in the discourses of the 'Third World' struggle. These anti-colonial beliefs were also reflected by one of Africa's most prominent nationalist leaders of the revolutionary vanguard, an ideologue, the Ghanaian leader Kwame Nkrumah, who captured the political mood during a speech to the African Freedom Fighters conference in Accra on June 4, 1962:

> We have achieved some measure of success in this struggle for human freedom and dignity, but we still have a great task ahead. We can only know the extent of our task and our own strength when we have examined and ascertained that of the enemy [imperialism].[80]

Land, bread, and, above all, dignity

This continuing struggle was in recognition of the fact that patterns of neo-colonialism were being reproduced by the newly independent African countries, in the shape of a westernised, political elite, a subject which Frantz Fanon wrote about extensively in his seminal book *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon is searing in his critique of the turn to party and elite national politics, and of a craving for political power:

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[80] Obeng, S. (1997) *Selected Speeches of Kwame Nkrumah,* Volume 3, Accra: Afram Publications Ltd.

The entire action of these nationalist political parties during the colonial period is action of the electoral type: a string of philosophico-political dissertations on the themes of the rights of peoples to self-determination, the rights of man to freedom from hunger and human dignity, and the unceasing affirmation of the principle: 'One man, one vote.' The national political parties never lay stress upon the necessity of a trial of armed strength, for the good reason that their objective is not the radical overthrowing of the system. Pacifists and legalists, they are in fact partisans of order, the new order . . .[81]

Fanon too offers us a radical and critically-minded conceptualisation of the idea of dignity.[82] In his discussions on 'white man's values' he rails against the Christian religion as it is experienced by the natives living under colonial rule. Fanon tells us that:

The Church in the colonies is the white people's Church, the foreigners Church. She does not call the native to God's ways but to the ways of the white man, of the master, of the oppressor.

The Church reinforces the two worlds of the coloniser and the colonised, the brutality and gross inequality of which Fanon drew out in his writings. The natives are excluded from white values as well as from the material resources appropriated by the masters. Not surprisingly, then, Fanon rejects 'white' man's dignity too:

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[81] Fanon, F. (1961/1963) *The Wretched of the Earth*, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 46.
[82] The following critique by Fanon has echoes of Nietzsche's discussion on dignity and labour, op cit; although Fanon can be read here as inverting and offering a much more radical idea of dignity, having rejected the standard western fare.

> For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity. But this dignity has nothing to do with the dignity of the human individual: for that human individual has never heard tell of it.[83]

The struggle for bread and dignity and Fanon's suggestion that there are different kinds of dignity points to his preoccupation, in *Wretched of the Earth*, with the marginalised periphery: the peasant or slave as colonial subject to the urban, bourgeois colonial master. This unequal relationship was based on the domination of, and assumed superiority of the foreign master or the local 'colonialist bourgeoisie'[84] who were placed above the slave or the peasant in terms of worth. In this Fanonian conception of dignity we can find some indications of a dignity which questions, and ultimately rejects, the taken-for-granted innate dignity of the individual. In the struggle for liberation from colonial rule the assertion of dignity is an outright and fundamental rejection of the assumed "triumph of the human individual".

Here we have, once again as we saw it too through Nasser's speeches, this necessary link between the struggle for a collective freedom which must be fought for and which cannot merely be handed down by the colonial powers or in a legal document which recognises individual human rights.

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[83] Fanon, ibid., 34.
[84] Fanon, ibid., 37.

In the Western context the idea of dignity is part of a system of legal protections and proclamations in international law which commit to respecting and protecting the inalienable human dignity which resides in the individual, endowed by God or as inalienable in human law. Whereas, in the colonial setting it became apparent that not all humans are considered to have equal dignity, so that the idea of equal human dignity is not, in practice, attained through the institutions and legal structures of power but is, in fact, in danger of being eroded by them. The response and assertions are from a collective, a people, who assert the struggle for dignity and freedom as a collective response to colonial rule.

We find a necessarily a radical conception of dignity as it resides where there is injustice and humiliation. Therefore dignity is not passive, at all, in the Arab colonial context, but active and actively guarded. The people are demanding radical changes and such change cannot be brought about by the very institutions which are dominating and exploiting them. The struggle moves outside and across (newly independent) state boundaries and outside of the hegemonic power to reside in the people; the shared ideas also come from the people not from official discourses which are rejected.

In this section I have introduced some ways in which the concept of dignity was manifested in the particular context of peoples struggling to shake off colonial rule and to counter imperialist power in the decolonisation era. During this time of upheaval and change we found some indications that Arab and African ideologues, leaders, and thinkers were relying on the idea of dignity which appeared, and was clarified, along with other concepts such as independence, freedom, and unity. I have shown how a distinctly radical conception of dignity had emerged in the colonial and Arab context, and one which was intimately linked

with resistance and the need to struggle for liberation from colonial, but then also from neo-colonial rule.

As I outlined earlier in this thesis, once again, and in new and interesting ways, dignity has emerged as an important idea in the latest Arab revolutions, from Tunisia to Egypt, Yemen and Syria.[85] In the next section I begin to introduce the specific Syrian case and the revolution which started in March 2011.

III   Beginnings: Syria in the Arab revolutions, 2011

Previously I have discussed the ways in which the idea of dignity was manifested during the colonial era and how certain ideologues and political leaders and thinkers responded to, and resisted, foreign control. It is notable that ideas of freedom and dignity were a central plank in anti-colonial discourse, which travelled across national borders. This historical background appears to have important resonances with the current and latest Arab revolutions and, specifically, the 2011 Syrian revolution which is the focus of my research.

The latest Arab revolutions represented a turn to resistance against the domestic tyranny of resilient authoritarian states. Syria's uprising was, in important ways, spurred on by wider regional revolutions and the fall of Tunisia's Ben Ali and Egypt's Mubarak in which we also

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[85] Saleh, Y. H. (2011) 'Thawrat al-karama', *al-hiwar mutamadden*, available online at www.ahewar.org, accessed October, 2015; Tripp (2013) op cit; Pearlman, W. (2013) 'Emotions and the Microfoundations of the Arab Revolutions', *Perspectives on Politics*, 11:2, 387-409; Gerges (2014) op cit; Schielke (2015) *Egypt in the Future Tense: Hope, Frustration, and Ambivalence before and after 2011*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Willis (2016) op cit..

saw the idea of dignity emerge.[86] The collective and popular sense in the manifestations of the latest of the Arab revolutions in the Middle East is captured simply and explicitly in the chant which dominated all the revolutions from Tunisia to Yemen: "The People Want . . . "[87] Or, as Chalcraft explains in his analysis of the ways in which Egypt's January uprising and hegemonic contestation followed in hot pursuit of the Tunisian one: "it was simply the power of an idea that was appropriated across borders, and power-holders largely looked on".[88] Charles Tripp notes, in the case of Syria in 2011, that the utterance of dignity served to highlight "some of the key features of a politics of resistance in action" in which Syrians have sought to 'rupture' the existing systems of power.[89] Syrians talked about their 'dignity revolution', they issued daily and weekly human rights reports (lists of those killed, imprisoned or disappeared) disseminated under the name of their 'dignity revolution'.

Syria's dignity revolution formed part of what Ilan Pappé describes as a new phase for Arabs in "the assertion of self-dignity".[90] In doing so Pappé is reminding us that the freedoms hard fought for against colonial rule have yet to be fully gained. But in this phase it was clearly domestic tyranny, or the dictators at home, who were the enemy of the people. In the case of Syria, sites of protest simultaneously emerged in the capital Damascus and in the southern city of Dar'a, then Banyas and other towns during February and March, 2011, respectively. Initially these were not connected actions but reflected local grievances, and were in some

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[86] See Willis, M. J. (2016) 'Revolt for Dignity: Tunisia's Revolution and Civil Resistance', in Roberts, A., Willis, M., McCarthy, R. & Garten Ash, T. eds. *Civil Resistance in the Arab Spring: Triumphs and Disasters*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
[87] Achcar, Gilbert (2013) *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising*, London: Saqi Books; Chalcraft, J. (2016) Popular Politics in the Making of the Middle East, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
[88] Chalcraft (2016) ibid., 168.
[89] Tripp (2013) op cit., 2.
[90] Traboulsi, F. (2012) 'Syrian Revolutionaries owe no one an Apology', Interview by Mohammed al-Attar, available online at www.boell.de., accessed September, 2015; Pappé, I. (2011) 'Reframing the Israel/Palestine Conflict', Interview by Frank Barat, 6 March, 2011, uploaded on YouTube on 4 August 2011.

cases acts of support in response to developments in Libya and other revolutions.[91] In Darʻa

the March protests were in response to the local security agency detaining some children on

6 March, 2011, the oldest, aged 15, having scrawled graffiti on the school walls saying 'The

people want the downfall of the regime'.[92] The children were held by the local authorities

without any information given out or access to them. The anger about the detaining and

torture of children, and the subsequent response of the local authorities to the

demonstrations, is captured in the folk song called *Ya Hayf* (Oh Shame!) by a well-known

Syrian singer, Samih Shouqair.[93] Tribal leaders and family relatives in Darʻa responded to

the arrest of the children by sending a delegation to meet with the local authorities to have

meetings with the regional security general Atef Najib to obtain their release.[94] An enduring

narrative of this period recalls how the family representatives, who were wearing traditional

Arab head dress (the *keffiyya* and *aqal)* following local custom, removed their head bands

or their black *aqals* and rested them on the table to be taken back after resolving the situation.

The Syrian official is said to have responded by throwing the traditional head bands into the

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[91] Yazbek, S. (2012) *A Woman in the Crossfire: Diaries of the Syrian Revolution*, London: Haus Publishing Limited; International Crisis Group (2011) 'Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (V1): The Syrian Regime's Slow-motion Suicide', Middle East/North Africa Report, 108, July 6, 2011; Ismail, S. (2011) 'The Syrian Uprising: Imagining and Performing the Nation', in *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 11:3, 538-549.

[92]Though revolutionary actors had been discussing the revolutions in Tunisian and elsewhere and daring to think about what they or their friends might do. This feeling of being influenced and inspired by events in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya is mentioned explicitly by prominent Syrian activists who were forced to flee: Samar Yazbek, Suheir Attasi, and Rima Flihan; in their recollections of the beginning of the revolution, in a TV documentary recorded and directed by Nada Abdelsamad (Abdelsamad is a journalist based in Lebanon; information is gathered from my private copy of the documentary which is called 'nuun' (the letter n in Arabic; it represents 'nissaa' (Arabic for women). Filming took place on locations in Jordan and France during 2013. It has never been broadcast.

[93]2011 Shouqair is an exiled Syrian Druze from the Golan. The song is dedicated to the children of Darʻa and asks: who kills their children with live bullets? The song has over 1.5 million views on YouTube (see bibliography for information). It is discussed in the michcafe blog available at michcafe.blogspot.co.uk, entitled 'Syria protest ode on YouTube'. I am grateful to Muzna for introducing me to this singer.

[94] International Crisis Group, op cit., Macleod, H. (2011) 'Inside Deraa , al-Jazeera online, 19April, www.aljazeera.com/indepth, accessed February 2016.

rubbish bin. Further, a common narrative told by Syrians is that the official is said to have offered to impregnate their wives to replace their children.[95]

So, in response, in the first weeks of the uprising the idea of dignity was invoked, with the naming of the square outside the al-Omari mosque in Darʻa as 'Dignity square' on Friday 18th March 2011. On this day, public protests had come under fire and the first martyrs of the revolution fell. Over time, Syrians posted the pictures of martyrs on the buildings around the square, as the numbers of dead grew at the hands of the security forces and army. In subsequent funerals and demonstrations Syrians were shot, beaten and taken by security forces. These beginnings, in particular in Darʻa, are very central to an investigation of the ways in which the idea of dignity took hold. The emotion of sheer anger, a natural and human response by parents and family to a child being detained by the authorities, is further deepened by the breach of social conventions which are meant to respect one's standing as an individual: facing his family and community or tribe. Customs thrown aside and insinuations of impotence show in sharp relief the nature of the gulf between that of the Syrian people in this neglected province and that of the security and authority figures. There is a demand for *karama* at the individual, family and local community levels. So it is in this very ordinary human sense that dignity enters into the uprising in Syria: a sense of *karama* that is, perhaps, felt as innate as it honours the value of all human beings.

Darʻa became a particularly important site of protest because it was where significant numbers of Syrians first publicly gathered and aired their grievances against the government. Also, it is the site of the first martyrs of the revolution as security forces opened fire on

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[95] This is one of the most widespread narratives that emerged from the beginning of the revolution, Syrians sympathetic to the revolution will give similar accounts of this chain of events. Still, it is set out here in summary as a useful insight from this period in relation to dignity and honour.

demonstrators. Thus a cyclical process was set in train: demonstrations, state violence and deaths of civilians, public funerals at which the government forces would open fire on mourners and then more and bigger demonstrations, more funerals and so on. Syrians posted the pictures of martyrs on the buildings around the al-Omari Mosque and the main square outside the mosque, as the numbers of dead grew at the hands of the security forces and army. The demonstrations, killings and funerals were not just in Dar'a, but spread quickly to other towns which came out to demonstrate in sympathy with the residents of Dar'a. So, the uprising quickly began to take on a collective nature.

By the autumn of 2011 there was a major campaign which indicates the performative function in the invocations of dignity – as a mobilisation tool, as a cause and value to fight for and hold to, and as a plea against ongoing repression. The beginnings of the revolution were 'mediated' by local activists, citizen journalists and the demonstrators who uploaded user-generated content, or the raw material, from the protests.[96] This was well-captured in a documentary produced with support from the various local *tansiqiyat* (local coordinating committees and groups), unions, media networks, and journalists operating in the *Hawran* region. The narrator of the documentary told us that "the beginning was 18th March and [this] first Friday was called the Friday of Dignity", with gatherings in the square in the southern city of Dar'a after Friday prayers. Utilising one of the few sites of legal gathering allowed in Syria, the mosques, Syrians could gather to demonstrate straight after the midday prayers.[97] In this documentary we also heard the voice of an old Syrian man explaining

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[96] Harkin, J. et al (2012) 'Deciphering User-Generated Content in Transitional Societies: A Syria Coverage Case Study', available at https://innovation.internews.org/research/deciphering-user-generated-content-transitional-societies-syria-coverage-case-study

[97] Pierret, T. (2012) 'The Role of the Mosque in the Syrian Revolution', *Near East Quarterly*, March 20; Pierret, T. (2013) *Religion and State in Syria: The Sunni Ulama from Coup to Revolution*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

what happened: ". . . we called for dignity and freedom, no-one said anything about toppling the regime until they started shooting at us".[98]

The early demands of the demonstrators were for justice, the lifting of Syria's long emergency law, and for other reforms. This reflected, in a way, the conservative nature of the society in the southern region of Syria. But it was soon to reconnect with its history of revolution and revolt. The determination of the Syrian government to quell the uprising at any cost created the conditions for a national revolution. Once this was in train, we found how words flowed in the most variegated speech-acts of Syrians to express themselves, to speak out, campaign, publish, and to demonstrate in public alleys, streets, and squares. Now I discuss the Syrian *idrab al-karama* (dignity strikes) campaign as an example of one of the ways in which dignity was to develop and manifest itself in the first year of Syria's revolution.

Idrab al-karama (dignity strikes)

The dignity strikes which took place from December 2011 onwards were the culmination of efforts by Syrians to organise acts of civil disobedience inside Syria under the watchful eye of local informants and security forces. The mobilisation of dignity strikes throughout autumn 2011 and into 2012 were promoted by prominent Syrian activists such as Ayman al-Aswad and Fadwa Suleiman[99] and by the *tansiqiyat*. These strikes were in no way comparable in scale with the organised-labour strikes and protests which were well-

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[98] FreeSyrianTranslator, 2012
[99] See: Soliman, F. (2011) 'A call to strike', uploaded online December 11, YouTube channel '*FadwaSoliman*', accessed September 2015.

established by the time of Egypt's 2011 revolution.[100] However, in the context of Syria and given the pre-revolutionary scale of repression compared to countries like Egypt, the strikes are significant. Such small-scale initiatives calling for general strikes eventuated in a national campaigns for *idrab al-karama* (dignity strikes) and also for *idrab al-'izz* (strikes of pride).[101] Syrians were mobilised as part of a collective effort towards civil disobedience against the Syrian government and state apparatus. The dignity strikes campaign resulted in general and targeted strikes in Syrian towns and cities and rural areas throughout December, 2011, and into 2012. Despite the high levels of repression, the breadth of and collective nature of these actions can be seen from material published and uploaded on YouTube and on the Facebook and Twitter feeds mostly by *tansiqiyat* activists but also by others: for example, the Syrian group *ayam al-hurriya* (freedom days) and the *idrab al-karama* (dignity strikes) Facebook page and Twitter account.[102] They consisted of a series of strikes focused on different sectors: education, commercial traders and so on. In the activist material, available in online archives, we can find early examples of revolutionary communications. On December 7, 2011 activists posted a flyer on Facebook which included the following information:

Dignity Strike: begins at dawn, Sunday 11th December:

Until the withdrawal of the army from the cities, And until the release of the prisoners

Look, you are important . . . support your homeland and your strike

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[100] Beinin, J. & Vairel, F. (2011) *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*, California: Stanford University Press
[101] On Egypt see Beinin & Vairel (2011) ibid.
[102] See twitter.com/karamahStrike/media; forfreedom YouTube channel; freedomdays YouTube channel, for example, last accessed December 2015'.

The idea of Syrians being 'important' and active is a theme which can be found in the flyers and can be read as an argument for the agency of the citizen against that of the state and its apparatus of control. The flyers appeal to Syrians in the colloquial language, seeking to mobilise citizens and to persuade them that they are not alone and should not be afraid. On the first day of the dignity strike, Sunday 11 December, 2011, there were over 40 video clips from around Syria uploaded by Syrian activists and the *tansiqiyat*. The clips uploaded onto YouTube accounts from across Syria in one day, Sunday 11 December 2011, were from: 'Izaz in Aleppo, Debassiyeh, Qayseer, Zabadani, Jibleh, Idlib, Jobar, Daraya, Bustan Bashar in Aleppo and Sweida, among other villages and towns. It is hard to find video footage, and perhaps none exists, that lasts longer than 30-40 seconds. This is because it was very difficult to openly 'film' events in public with the heavy presence of security and with the culture of informing which remains pervasive in Syrian society. Activists posted video clips which showed shops with their shutters down and of short and sometimes shaky footage (because it was taken covertly to avoid arrest) of Syrian security officials forcibly opening the shutters.

I have briefly established the place of dignity strikes in the performative milieu of Syria's revolutionary resistance. We have seen how these strikes were carried out at multiple sites as acts of civil disobedience. A highly visible strand in the revolution around these dignity strikes was a progressive, liberal current which was present in the early part of the revolution. These revolutionary practices continued to gain pace, with the securing of districts in liberated towns and villages in Syria in which Syrians started to organise their own affairs, including local councils, rubbish collection, burial of martyrs, human rights activism, distribution of food and local services. But the activists faced tanks and missiles

as well as incursions by Syrian soldiers and the various security branches directed by president Asad's brother. The level of repression built the case, among revolutionaries, for the arming of the struggle and for the militarist strands to emerge from within the revolution.

Having set out examples of a 'dignity in resistance' at the beginning of the uprising in Syria, I want to explore how it continues to develop and manifest itself in the revolution. In the final two chapters I will set out in detail two differing ideational exemplars from Syria's revolution: that of a 'progressive', republican, and intellectual-activist current, in the ideas and writings published on the *al-jumhuriya* (The Republic) website, and then a different perspective from an armed Syrian brigade of fighters: the case of the *liwa al-tawhid* (Unity Brigade). Before we come to these two exemplars, in the following and final section of this chapter, I start to draw together some of the ideas and conceptions of dignity that I have set out in this chapter, and I offer some provisional thoughts on the political dimensions and implications of the concept of dignity, both in the Western and Arab contexts and across them both.

IV   Conclusion: dignity as praxis

Central to our understanding of dignity in the West is the domination of a conception of human dignity clarified in relation to the *individual* in society and a protection of *individual* human rights, both within a state system and in the transnational realm, beyond borders. Thus the western tradition of human dignity is dominated by a rationalist conception of humans which relies on a broadly Kantian understanding of our world. Dignity as an idea

and an ideal is constitutive of a broader human rights regime and judicial system of protection based on the notion of it as intrinsic and universal. In this way it has been generalised and universalised, as we see in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, so that all humans are beyond price.

In codifying the concept of dignity in legal and philosophical foundations the danger has been that we have closed off any consideration that the idea might be importantly contingent and contested, and therefore maintained in different ways, because of its complexity. Scholars have started to address this complexity, as we saw earlier in this chapter. More specifically for my research, the emergence of dignity and its operationalising on a number of levels in the Arab and Syrian revolution presents new puzzles in our understanding of what it is that Syrians were doing when they made 'dignity' so central an idea in their revolutionary project.

In the later scholarship I introduced, in the modern western and Arab contexts, I started to show how dignity might be decontested in differing political contexts; that is, beyond one which foregrounds the metaphysical, timeless 'rational dignity' and legalistic arguments I have considered here. Dignity in the Arab world is, of course, appraisive too: in all our common human understandings. But the political context shifts the ideational context in which dignity can be achieved and maintained. This is especially important to think about in the context of authoritarian and non-democratic contexts as well as those of revolutionary situations.

We have seen indications that dignity cannot be understood in complete isolation. In practice it is an organising idea and an idea which can also have an illocutionary force. The way dignity is felt is dependent on the ideas it gathers in. In this way, dignity is decontested in relation to related concepts we find in use alongside it. In the Arab case we saw how a tradition of resistance had emerged and that ideas such as equality and freedom decontested dignity in ways which signified its (and their) complete absence. Human dignity, it seems, has the potential to gather a vital political meaning and force when it is under attack. We might consider how an ineliminable aspect of dignity, that is, its innate quality unique to humans, is maintained, in practice, in differing historical and in (hostile) political environments.

The potentiality of dignity as a practice is, perhaps, rendered most starkly in the earlier discussion of Todorov's writing on the Nazi concentration camps. Todorov's dignity, as an everyday virtue, is an example of retaining and protecting dignity in the most extreme of circumstances. Whereas Christianity might condemn suicide as playing God, in the Nazi concentration camps it can be read as an act of human free will – to choose the moment for the taking of one's own life rather than leave it to the Nazi machinery. But, as well as radical acts such as suicide it is also the small and everyday things by which people can honour themselves.

This is close to Rosen's ideas about self-respect and about acting with dignity. But I mean to extend this self into its relational and social space—as Rosen also does when we think about how we treat others and respect each other. So it is that we see this relational and social dignity emerge within the context of colonial and liberation struggles and in the face of humiliations from dominant imperial powers.

Therefore 'context' serves to change the meaning and the uses of complex concepts such as dignity. In an extreme context such as in the concentration camps the idea manifests in our social and political world in a different way. There are a number of reasons for this; prime among these we should give careful attention to the concrete empirical differences between western and Arab political trajectories and, in particular, the distinctive colonial context and period of decolonisation. Most distinctly, we saw how dignity was appropriated and asserted within a collective struggle and resistance against colonial and foreign rule. The virtue of (Arab) unity was central to a decontestation of dignity in this context—because it spoke to a community, to a people. This political and collective dignity is given its most radical articulation in the ideas of Fanon.

Therefore, there are important contrasts in a consideration of the western and the Arab conceptions of dignity. Although, as I summarised above, there is a basic and shared common sense of dignity—as intrinsic to humans—there is also an important way in which dignity is internally and externally contested in our social and political world. This is because I have been comparing a liberal democratic framework with that of a modern liberation struggle against occupation and foreign rule. In the former, the logic of the individual, as autonomous actor free to make choices, is privileged. In the latter, the struggle for freedom is, necessarily, a collective one which has imbued and embedded a deep logic of resistance. Inculcating practices of resistance requires a commitment to organising and to struggle in a shared social and political arena, or theatre. In this context there is little space, and perhaps no desire, for the individual, but rather for the growing of a collective struggle for dignity, freedom and equality.

This collective logic of resistance is brought out in the case of Syria and its 2011 revolution. The instances and uses of dignity in the Syrian revolution have important political dimensions and constituted the forming of a dynamic and fast-developing new revolutionary practice and culture. The idea of dignity, as we saw, was expressed at a basic level of common humanity, by Syrian families and a community outraged by the treatment of their children by the Syrian government and its local representatives. Then, we investigated some of the uses of and the force of dignity which developed in the revolutionary moment. The concept was used to motivate and build support among Syrians, as well as to express the reasons for the uprising in reaction to the brutal and violent put-down of dissent, something which has not been seen on such a scale since the 1980s in Syria (but, crucially, in this instance such 'events' unfolded during a widespread Arab uprising in the region).

Dignity's emergence signalled the ways in which Syrians had not gained their full citizen hood or freedom; how the social contract between the people and the Arab state was never fulfilled. For Syrians the revolutionary utterances of dignity appear in a 'live' political context and attach to practices of and the performance of 'resistance'.[103] There emerged a new peoples resistance and bitter contestation of established political traditions and ideas, and of the very terms of Syrian, and Arab, political discourse.

In the final two chapters I undertake a detailed analysis of the concept of dignity in Syria's revolution with recourse to two dominant ideational exemplars: the case of the Syrian revolutionary website *al-jumhuriya*; and the Syrian armed brigade: *liwa al-tawhid.*

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[103] Tripp (2013) op cit., 2.

Chapter Five

Ideational Exemplar: *al-jumhuriya* (The Republic) Website

Introduction

In Chapter One I set out approaches to the study of modern revolutions in social and political science. I argued that the focus on establishing fixed definitions and causal links, and of dictating required revolutionary outcomes, obscured important processes and developments which happen from the very beginning of revolutions, regardless of their eventual outcomes. I also showed how the treatment of ideologies had often been confined to establishing the extent to which ideas are a causal factor in revolutions or not. In Chapter Two I proposed an alternative line of inquiry, drawing on the work of political theorists of political discourse, attuned to conceptual contestation and change, and to the dynamic and changeable world of political ideologies. In that chapter I argued that it is important to reconfigure our understanding of ideologies and, by extension, the ideas or concepts which they prioritise. In particular, I argued that ideas are important as units of analysis in themselves. In times of flux it is vital that we consider how existing and familiar ideas might be refashioned and/or if new ideas might gather pace and emerge from an ideational and political periphery.

My aim in this thesis is to *think* 'dignity' in this way: to understand how it is embedded in and shaped by the political and social contexts in which it is used, and thus to analyse and assess its meaning and function beyond its mere positioning as a word in a sentence. This is an important methodological distinction which I elaborated on in Chapter Two. The focus of my research is on an ideational 'infrastructure'. Drawing on Freeden's concept of

ideological morphology I have set out to examine how dignity is embedded in a particular revolutionary period of time in Syria. In Chapter Three, I examined the ideologies of anti-colonialism and of Ba'athism that provide the key historical background for understanding the events of 2011 and beyond. In Chapter Four I gave a macro-level, diachronic analysis of dignity and of the extent to which the idea has been stable over time. I also started to indicate the ways in which the synchronic immediate and concrete instances of dignity interplay with a sedimented tradition of dignity in the slow burn of history, with specific reference to the Syrian Revolution that began in 2011.

Having examined religious sources in the western and the Arab context, I illustrated the extent to which dignity had become a virtue that was felt by many to be innate to all humans. In religious conceptions, both Christian and Islamic, dignity was God-given, in that God had elevated humans above all other creatures. This metaphysical conception of dignity has been of great politico-historical significance and there is continuity between it and contemporary conceptualisations. I then explicated two broad traditions within which dignity has been encompassed, in both the western and Arab contexts, showing that the idea is far from unitary. The first of these was a western and liberal concept of dignity which has become embedded in democratic societies, in legal frameworks, and in a human rights discourse which emerged after the Second World War. Such notions of dignity have become enshrined in international and national legal codes and declarations, such as the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. I noted how this conception is evidenced in many of our current understandings of dignity, and how the idea that dignity is innate in all humans can be regarded as an *ineliminable* criterion of dignity. In this tradition I found that the concept of dignity was intimately attached to notions of individual freedom, and further clarified by the idea of an *equal* dignity. The ideas of equality and freedom helped to

decontest the idea of dignity, showing us the extent to which it had become dependent on, and privileged, individual human rights.

I then contrasted the western context with that of the colonial and Arab context and showed how the struggle for independence produced a different kind of conception and other uses of dignity. In the conditions of colonial rule we found that *in its usage* the concept of dignity performed specific functions and exhibited different meanings. This anti-colonial concept of dignity was clarified in opposition to foreign and imperial rule and humiliating policies and control over colonial subjects. This was an important feature of dignity in the material I drew on from the colonial period, and during the long and difficult process of decolonisation and self-determination. I indicated, drawing on the utterances and speech-acts from this period, that the dignity appealed to by the anti-colonialists was one which had an important public and collective force to it. It moved away from our familiar conceptions of a legally derived and based individual dignity, to one of a *collective — people's — dignity* which has new resonances through the struggle for the self-determination of a people, for the liberation of land from foreign control and for political freedoms and full and active citizenship.

In the Arab context the idea of dignity was found to be adjacent to other important concepts such as freedom, justice and equality. Although these ideas echoed the concepts adjacent to and in relation to dignity in the western context, there were, nevertheless, important distinctions to be made regarding the dynamic development and use of dignity, its functions and the ways in which it constituted a 'politics of resistance'. This tradition of Arab resistance, situated in the anti-colonial struggles for liberation, is – as we will see – a vital

part of the context against which I will analyse Syria's revolution, its revolutionary discourses and practices and the place and functions of dignity within it. This time, as I mentioned in my analysis in Chapter Four, the important difference is that this latest revolution was not against foreign and colonial rule but against domestic tyranny and illegitimate rule.

As I first set out in Chapter Two in discussion of my 'Method and Material' for an interpretive analysis, I chose to focus my detailed examination on two different but important ideational exemplars from within Syria's revolution. I narrowed down my analysis in order to gain some insight from within the discourse and practices of two differing, sometimes competing ideational currents. The ideas contained in the exemplar cases do, importantly, permeate across assumed divides. Both, however, offer us different conceptions of, and performances of, a 'dignity in resistance'. In adducing both these ideational exemplars I seek to highlight the way in which dignity can be clarified: from writings, speech-acts and the practices of Syria's revolutionary actors. I take into consideration the positionality and function of these actors—selecting material from the intellectual, the activist-writer, the media activist and, in the next chapter, the armed fighter. Importantly, my approach across these exemplars applies Freeden's morphological analysis, attending in particular to the adjacent or associated ideas we find along with the appearance of dignity, ushered in from the ideational periphery, which help to decontest its meaning.

For the first exemplar I have chosen the revolutionary website *al-jumhuriya* because the content on the website at once represents, reflects, and critically analyses the different aspects of Syria's "*thawrat al-karama*" (dignity revolution). This website is an important

exemplar of a liberal, progressive trend which has, over a number of decades, and during the latest revolution, been marginalised in the politics of Syria. This is because of the severe repression exacted on any political trend (for change or reform) which might threaten one party rule and the leadership of the Asad family. Since the latest revolution of 2011, progressive activists, artists and intellectuals have been targeted and incarcerated by the Syrian government.[1]

In preparing and selecting published material from the website I conducted a provisional survey of the articles that were posted online during 2012 and 2013. This period of time is my focus, so that we can concentrate on reflecting on the ideas in the formative years of the revolution and so that I can narrow down the themes and challenges to a manageable degree for this thesis. My research aim was to get a deeper sense of the conceptual positioning of the idea of *karama*. I therefore mainly concerned myself with drawing out some key concepts and themes which were embedded into the revolutionary discourse and practices. From my extensive reading and monitoring of material posted on the website during this time period I have then selected three articles which form the basis of my analysis in this chapter.

Drawing on and working across the three selected articles, the general information on the website and other material I utilise for an analysis of *al-jumhuriya,* I argue that the website and its collective of revolutionary actors and commentators serves as a receptacle for, and as a producer and disseminator of, major 'belief challenges' — from within the revolution,

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[1] See Halasa, M, Omareen, Z. & Mahfoud, F. (2014) *Syria Speaks: Art and Culture from the Frontline*, London: Saqi Books.

to the Syrian government and state. The idea of dignity is constitutive of a partially novel revolutionary practice, a collective project the contours and contents of which are being refined in the everyday utterances and actions of the people. The 'ideas from below', as I will show, cluster around the virtue of a Syrian dignity and can be clarified in relation to other revolutionary ideas flowing in the demonstrations, acts of civil disobedience and so on. I turn to start to look at these ideas now. I conduct my analysis using these articles so as to trace the conscious and unconscious[2] ways in which dignity appears in the writings and content published on the *al-jumhuriya* website. I now introduce the website, the thought-practices of one of its key founders (Saleh), and then move on to analysis in detail the three articles I have selected.

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[2] I draw on this from Freeden (2003) op cit.

I The *al-jumhuriya* website

The *al-jumhuriya* (The Republic) website sits within a—broadly defined—liberal and progressive ideological current. As its name infers, it speaks to a republican potential (as yet unfulfilled, as we saw in Chapter Three) and urges a practical and 'civic republicanism' based on a people-centred notion of sovereignty.[3] I investigate the ideas attached to this website through recourse to the political thought and activities of one of its most prominent founders: the dissident intellectual Yassin al-Haj Saleh (Saleh). This historical backgrounding of a republican revolutionary current through the political thought of one of its most prominent thinkers, is important, as it provides context and understanding when we move on to investigate selected writings from this website. This then clears the way for my analysis of material published on the website, the details of which I discuss further below.

The website was launched in 2012 in recognition of the first anniversary of the '*Thawrat al-Karama*' (dignity revolution).[4] It was established by a group of Syrian writers, bloggers and researchers, who were volunteers working for the website and based inside and outside Syria. No published information about the founders existed until articles and analysis started emerging (in English) sometime after the website was established. As I have mentioned, most prominent among its founders was the Syrian dissident and former political prisoner Yassin al-Haj Saleh. Saleh is from an older generation of Syrian dissidents who gained

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[3] See Nabulsi, K. (2013) 'The 'Treasure' of Revolution: a tradition of thought and practice'; ASEN Lecture, Nationalism and Revolution, Plenary 1, http://www.lse.ac.uk/ASEN, accessed December 2016.
[4] Though there is some internal disagreement among supporters of Syria's revolution as to which day the revolution 'started'.

prominence because of his political writing and long periods of time spent in Syrian prisons. Also involved was a younger generation of writers such as Yassin Swehat[5] and Karam Nachar.[6] Swehat and Nachar adhere to a broadly conceived Arab leftist tradition. Nachar is a Syrian exile and lecturer at a university in Turkey and Swehat is a Syrian blogger who resides in Spain. There were a number of Syrian writers who began to contribute to the website in the first few years and some of these writers used pseudonyms—especially if they were very active in the revolution inside Syria.

In its first years the website provided a rich source of material and a useful point of access to the revolutionary ideas and practices in the revolution. The website published material in a number of genres: short commentary; long-form analysis; reportage; human rights information; activist discussions; witness accounts from within the revolution. The material ranged from sharp polemic to analysis which was more reflective and attempted a critical distance (albeit from a position of support for the revolution and its aims). For example, in the first year the website published articles about the ideological aspects of the Syrian government army, sectarian massacres, rape as a means of humiliation (by Syrian security forces) and the implications of the revolution for Palestine and the Palestinian refugees in Syria. Throughout 2013 the site included analysis on the Egyptian revolution, the Islamist extremist current in the revolution (i.e. groups like *jabhat al-nusra*, and the rise of ISIS), issues of Arab unity, critiques of both Islamism and secularism, and coverage of fighting in local regions, as well as the challenges for civil and humanitarian work in conflict, the effect on schooling and so on. In the second year, the website also included extensive dialogues

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[5] In Arabic I would transliterate this name as Suweiha, but I use Yassin's own transliteration into English: Swehat – as it appears on his personal Facebook account.
[6] See profile of Yassin Swehat on muftah.org: 'It's as if there is only Islam', (no date), available at http://muftah.org/its-as-if-there-is-only-islam-exiled-writer-yassin-swehat-fights-for-syrian-thought/#.VzYK-stIjcs

with Syrian and Arab intellectuals and academics, such as Sadiq al-Azm, Burhan Ghalioun, Ziad Majid, and Hosam Itani.

One of the stated aims of the website was to create a space for intellectual production in order to contribute to the building of a new Syria. The outlook was, in spring 2012, optimistic, in light of developments elsewhere where leaders had relinquished power. The website's *min nahnu* (Who are we) section—as it was when it was launched—published information about its aims.[7] A central aim was stated as offering "support for the dignity revolution" in Syria. The contributions were to advance an "intellectual revolution in thinking" and to look at the "related issues and problems" of Syria and the Syrian revolution. The group aspired to contribute to the building of a new "pluralist, democratic, Syria".

There was no explicit mention on the website as to why this intellectual project was called *al-jumhuriya*, and there is no explicit explication of republican ideas. However, I include discussion of this, below, in Saleh's analysis—given that the name of the website was his.[8] In the next section I introduce Saleh as an exemplar of a key progressive current and indeed as a creator of a Syrian ideological current.

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[7] The website was reorganized in 2014 and a new 'about us' section was published.
[8] Swehat, K (2015) 'It's as if there is only Islam: Exiled writer Yassin Swehat fights for Syrian Thought', published online: www.muftah.org, December, 17, accessed December 2016.

II   Yassin al-Haj Saleh: the conscience of the revolution

Saleh is significant in my analysis because of his high profile as a long time dissident among the Arab and Syrian intelligentsia and, in particular, the Arab progressive and Leftist current which had long been agitating for political reform in Syria, Lebanon and beyond. I highlight Saleh not as an individual thinker or actor but as a way in which to sketch a more detailed picture of this significant current. Such a point of entry helps us to navigate through the selected publications on the *al-jumhuriya* website, which tend to offer highly historicised and deeply analytical accounts of Syria's revolution and require detailed knowledge of Syria's contemporary history and its social and political structures. Also noteworthy, is that Saleh was actively participating in the revolution in the first years from the suburbs of Damascus before eventually fleeing north to his home town in Raqqa and then to Turkey. Saleh thus represents not a distant commentator on the revolution but a writer and intellectual who is very much a revolutionary too. This somewhat breaches common notions of, and attempts to pigeon hole, who is an intellectual, an activist, or an external commentator or onlooker. Saleh might be seen as a contemporary example of a Gramscian 'organic intellectual'; his multiple 'hats' are indeed reminiscent of Gramsci's own.

Yassin al-Haj Saleh was born in 1961 in a village near what is now the Islamic State's *de facto* capital *al-Raqqa*, a northern city by the Euphrates River in Syria. Saleh was educated at Aleppo University and joined the Aleppo branch of the Syrian Communist Party-Political Bureau (SCP-PB) whilst at university there. The SCP-PB was later to oppose Hafez al-Asad's dictatorial rule over Syria, notably his crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood in the

1970s, and his policies relating to the Lebanese civil war. For his political positions Saleh spent sixteen years (1980 to 1996) in Syrian prisons, sharing crowded cells with members of the Syrian Muslim Brothers as well as other political prisoners.[9]

Saleh became part of an established Arab communist tradition in his early life. The Syrian communist branch he joined was a breakaway from the earlier-formed Syrian Communist Party which was dominated by Khalid Bakdash, who I discussed in Chapter Three. After his release from prison in the 1990s Saleh was to move away from what he considered to be the more dogmatic communist ideology, in advocating for a democratic system for Syria. This, for Saleh, was a turn away from ideology towards a humanist outlook centred on critique and action for change.[10] In my reading of his work, what this turn away from ideology meant was a particular rejection of party and formal politics and representation in formal bodies or aligning with established ideological traditions.[11]

Saleh is known for his published works on sensitive (taboo) but important questions of Syrian society, including critiques of both the official Syrian secularism and of political Islam.[12] When the Syrian revolution started these existing questions became urgent (and activated in new ways), and exposed the pre-existing and underlying problems in Syrian society under Asad's authoritarian rule. Saleh became active in the nascent Syrian civil society grouping inside the country and was a signatory to the Damascus Declaration, 2005

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[9] Saleh also wrote a book about his prison years: Saleh, Y. (2012) B-il-khalas ya shabaab: 16 aman fi al-sujun al-suriyyah 'Salvation oh youths: 16 years in Syria's prisons', Beirut: Dar al-Saqi.
[10] As explicated in Massouh, F. (2015) 'Searching for Salvation: Yassin al-Haj Saleh and the Writing of Modern Syria', Unpublished thesis, *School of Social and Political Science, University of Melbourne*.
[11] This seems to cohere with Massouh's analysis on Saleh, ibid.
[12] His sole authored book publications are listed here: http://www.yassinhs.com/books/; a detailed bibliography of Saleh's work has been prepared in Massouh (2015) op cit.

which, drawn up by Syrian intellectuals, artists, journalists and political actors, called for fundamental political reforms in Syria. As we will see there remains a Marxist influence in Saleh's writing, but one which is balanced by the central importance he began to place on working in a cultural sphere of intellectual and knowledge production towards social and political change in Syria. A functioning Syrian democracy would finally bring about some of the demands Syrian dissidents and activists had long struggled for.

In the latest round of Arab revolutions which swept across the region, starting with Tunisia in 2010, Saleh quickly became a prominent figure, regarded as the conscience of the revolution. His elevated position was because of the active intellectual role he had carved out through his writing and analysis of Syria during the decades since he had been released from prison. His popularity might also very likely be in part due to his legitimacy as a dissident who had spent years in Syria's prisons, and possibly also because he was, somewhat unusually, not one of the Damascus elite clique but hailed from one of Syria's forgotten and neglected provinces.[13]

Also noteworthy is that Saleh had remained in Syria throughout the first years of the revolution, seeking to remain close to his fellow Syrians and to the revolution, and was thus regarded as a 'revolutionary intellectual' and 'participant-chronicler'.[14] He was eventually forced to flee to Turkey to relative safety, in 2013; shortly afterwards, his wife and three other prominent Syrian human rights colleagues were kidnapped by Islamists in the

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[13] For recent analysis of Saleh and his life and thought see Massouh, F. (2015) op cit. Massouh draws on email and Skype communications with Saleh to paint a picture of the intellectual in the revolutionary moment.

[14] These are Massouh's formulations: the first draws on conceptions of the intellectual by Laroui; 22; 25, ibid.

Damascus suburb of Douma. At the time of writing they are still missing and have become

known as the "Douma 4".

In an analysis of Yassin Haj Saleh, by Syrian philosopher and writer Odai al-Zoubi[15] and

co-authored with Hosam al-Din Mohamed, we can also find reference to explicit discussion

on conceptions of ideologies and the role of the intellectual.[16] Interestingly, Zoubi describes

Saleh's thinking as against fixed ideology and foundational understandings and for an

approach which flows from moral stances and the place of the intellectual in discussing and

debating such notions. Zoubi's analysis of Saleh's contribution suggests a critical turn away

from the Arab leftist Marxist tradition and from assuming the validity of any essentialising

and foundational claims in understanding and analysing Syria. This turn may be partly

traceable to the disillusionment with explicit and explicitly-political ideologies; for which I

traced some key reasons in Chapter Three. Saleh's work is best done, according to Zoubi,

by focusing on the 'microcosmic' world of Syrians and by being close to it, rather than

promoting theories or foundational claims which may or may not be applicable to the Syrian

case.

Through this analysis we can start to see the ways in which Saleh conceptualises ideology

and how he has been interpreted. Saleh appears to avoid the essentialist and dogmatic

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[15] Zoubi is one of the co-founders and writers of *al-jumhuriya* and has become one of the main editors of the
online website.
[16]In Zoubi, O. & al-Din Mohammed, H. (2013) *'waʿy al-thawra: fakkar* Yassin Haj Saleh *namuthijan'* (The
conscience of the revolution: the thought of Yassin al-Haj Saleh as an exemplar), introduction entitled
'*asalat al-thawra*' ('Questions of the revolution'), *Awraq* magazine, Issue 3, published online, Middlesex:
Syrian Writers Association, available at http://syrianwa.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/awraq3.pdf

problems with ideology by relying on a cultural understanding of ideologies (he is certainly influenced in this by the work of Gramsci) in as much as he is committed to operating in a cultural sphere in which intellectuals such as he can critique and act on ideas counter to the hegemonic power structures. More recently, in the period of 2012 to 2013 which I focus on here, Saleh has stressed the importance of the cultural sphere as a site of struggle against the "extreme political poverty" of a Syria in the shadow of totalitarian rule and dictatorship.[17] This follows an established tradition of cultural production from within the confines of Syria's authoritarian structures, across cinema, theatre and literature[18]

This cultural production has only intensified and was, ironically, 'set free' at the start of Syria's uprising and in the face of brutal repression.[19] For Saleh, it now seems as if the production and dissemination of 'ideas' and values takes place in a cultural sphere and not what he might consider as a political, ideological one. Although Saleh, and analysts disseminating his ideas, such as Zoubi, might be keen to reject ideology altogether—because of the limits of classical Marxist configurations and the pejorative association of the term ideology due to their lived experience of Syrian Baʿthist rule— Saleh's thought and ideas might also be recast and interpreted (drawing on the theoretical frames I outlined in Chapter Two) as a move towards a distinctly alternative political imaginary which also creates possibilities for new ideological formations and for the reconceptualization of the political as it has hitherto been understood.

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[17] Saleh, Y. H. (2015) 'Syria interview: Culture is part of the Struggle', interview by Scott Lucas, *EA Worldview*, published online December 27; see also: Haugbolle, S. (2015) *Our Miserable Country.*
[18] Wedeen, L. (1999) *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*, Chicago: University of Chicago; Wedeen, L. (2013) 'Ideology and Humor in Dark Times: Notes from Syria', *Critical Inquiry*, 39, 841-873, Chicago: University of Chicago.
[19] Harkin, J. (2013) 'Is it possible to understand the Syrian revolution through the prism of social media?' *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, 9:2, London: Communication and Media Research Institute, University of Westminster, 93-112.

We can explore through Saleh's writing whether his articulation and development of an idea of 'republic' might be suggestive of alternative thinking about ideas and beliefs which might, at least in Saleh's conception, form a kind of republican practice, as opposed to a thick and well-defined political ideological project. To help us in gaining insight into the thinking behind *al-jumhuriya* as a project I draw on Saleh's reflections on the very idea of republic.[20] In an article published on the Arabic online site *kalamon* in 2011, called 'From the Kingdom of Asad to the Third Republic – Statehood and Participation', Saleh reminds us of the origins of the modern Syrian state as the *Syrian Republic* (later Syrian Arab Republic). The idea of the Arab republic was an alternative to, or rejection of, the monarchical systems such as those of Morocco, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. Saleh notes how:

> The Syrian Republic contained no republicans when it first came into being; that is to say, no intellectual or political school of thought centred around principles of active citizenship, the rule of the people, freedom and equality, and strong opposition to inherited titles and privileges and the arbitrary exercise of power.[21]

So, although we do not find a fully articulated conception of *al-jumhuriya* on the website, Saleh does, in his *kalamon* article, set out what he thinks a republic should be comprised of. We find reference to some normative frameworks for conceptions of a republic. For example, Saleh argues that "power exercised by the people should not be inherited" and goes

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[20] Saleh, Y. (2011) 'From the Kingdom of Assad to the Third Republic – Statehood and Participation' *kalamon, 4, autumn, Beirut: Dar al-Saqi.*
[21] Saleh, ibid.

on to say that the existence of a "master of the nation" essentially "abolishes the republic in one fell swoop", and therefore, too "all equality between its inhabitants". With the replacement of Hafez with his son, Saleh opined that this was another fatal blow to the idea of 'republic'.

Of vital importance in any analysis of Syrian ideologies is Saleh's exposition of a distinctive and exclusionary ideology which was consolidated under the rule of Bashar al-Asad. Saleh labels it a peculiar form of 'modernist ideology' and discusses how:

> The ideologues of modernism have an essentialising view of Arab societies in which [it is assumed that] Islam is the main, if not the only, determinant of people's behaviour. It is the well spring of all backwardness, stagnation and despotism. . . . 'Homo islamicus' is a different breed to other men; whatever he might claim about himself, he is fanatical, violent, backward and irrational, all qualities that stem in turn from his religious beliefs.

From Saleh we receive a stinging critique of the secular claims that Syria is a tolerant and diverse society or, in official parlance, 'a mosaic'; claims which have come to make up an established part of the official, state, Syrian discourse. Bashar's Syria effectively 'institutionalises' ties of personal allegiance and a culture of political appointments and privilege and divides society along sectarian lines. According to Saleh, the rule of Asad, through a complex system of nepotism, "undermined the epistemological credibility of concepts like 'the people', 'the citizen' and 'equality'" and created instead "mutually antagonistic identities". Instead of a collective Syrian people, Syria had a powerful ruling clique which was to regard Syrian society as:

A patchwork of different social groups—tribes, religions, sects and neighbourhoods—and not as a people. . . . Ba'athists received preferential treatment in education, employment and positions overseas, while those related or affiliated to the party members also obtained privileges, most notably appointments on diplomatic missions.

Saleh claims that the regime and its planners thus focused on "religion, ethnicity and sectarian affiliations, with scant regard for republican categories such as state, citizenship and community".[22] What has resulted, according to Saleh, is a new "feudal regime" in which "class-based and political privileges" are "bequeathed to a narrow segment of the population and … are concealed behind a religious and sectarian heterodoxy that makes them defensible". As a result, Asad's Syria has been underwritten and "sheltered from criticism" based on these patronage networks of privilege and access. In countering this picture, Saleh puts forward a future alternative, writing as he is in 2011, as being centred on the recasting of the very 'idea' of Syria:

Syria is the true foundation of citizenship, freedoms, and rights. Pan-Arabism can function as a cultural and strategic support while Islam provides an over-arching cultural and value system. Syria must not stand in tension with pan-Arabism and Islam; in our view the proper relationship will be one of inclusive dominance: Syria outranks them, and assimilates them.

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[22] Arabic terms used are al-dawl, al-muwataneen, and al-shaʿb.

However, Saleh's ire is not reserved only for the secular rulers:

> The reality is that neither 'Islam' nor 'Islamic man' exist; instead we have attempts
> to define Islamism carried out by both Islamist ideologues and their secularist foes,
> whose relationship with secularism mirrors that of Islamists to Islam: one of blind
> faith and fetishization.

We will encounter more of Saleh's ideas about Islam and Islamism in the article by him that I analyse later on in this chapter. But, more broadly, I have sketched out some of the ways in which the early revolutionary moment in Syria provided a new testing ground for alternatives in the strange space created in the revolutionary interregnum.[23] In bringing together the ideational threads I have traced out above, through Saleh's own analysis on the very idea of 'republic' and through recourse to the statements and information about the aims of the website published on their 'about us' page, we find that three central ideas emerge.

Ideological assemblages

In Saleh's conceptualisation of republic we saw a particular assemblage which drew together ideas from established ideological traditions and attempted to reintroduce certain virtues centrally into a configuration of a Syrian republic. Saleh shows how the idea of the people, as **popular sovereignty**, was a core concept, in close adjacency to the central concept of republic. This exhibits some normative ideas about classic republicanism but Saleh is working in the very concrete conditions of revolution: he is seeking to both critique and

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[23] Haugbolle, S. (2015) 'Moving through the Interregnum: Yassin al-Haj Saleh in the Syrian revolution', *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 8, 13-36.

expose the defunct republic, and also to usher in a new assemblage which is closer to reality and to the Syrian people.   Saleh is foregrounding people-led rule rather than a populist authoritarian ruler and he is both reflecting actual on-the-ground actions and contemplating the implications of this present revolutionary moment. In doing so he is reflecting upon the ways in which Syria has been polarised into two extremes: that of Islamism and Secularism.

The republic offers an alternative to the status quo, but there are indications that Saleh is not suggesting abandonment of any particular forms of life, but is seeking to suture the wounds inflicted by polarising positions and claims.   This requires the recovery of another core concept, in Saleh's analysis, and thinking about a new republicanism for Syria: that of **equality**. The Baʿth version of the ideal of equal citizenship and the levelling of social and economic inequality is a completely failed project in Syria, at least for the majority outside the formal patronage networks.   So Saleh refashions ideas of equality and, in doing so, reminds us of how much the Syrian state and government machinery has strayed from the founding principles of Arab Baʿthism, and from the socialist ideals of equality in particular. We find an ideological 'pretender'[24] in the form of secular rule failing to uphold its founding virtues and instead meet the sectarian way in which the ruling elite and the executive powers have governed Syria.

In this context Saleh's reimagining encompasses a recasting of the very idea of 'Syria'. His critique of the ruler and the state opens up to the need for differing levels or kinds of

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[24] See Freeden on Liberal Pretenders, chapter seven (1996) op cit., 276-314; in the case of Libertarianism and discerning such pretenders in an analysis of the concepts, or contents, of an ideology: in this case conceptions of and the morphological placement of ideas of state and of private property and economic beliefs were regarded as sitting outside of the liberalism ideological family.

freedom, which he does not expand on beyond mention of a conception of Syria in which the people are assimilated and in which inclusiveness dominates. We can garner from his analysis that he is concerned with a return to the idea of a kind of unity which is based on Syrian-ness and which works towards inclusivity, respecting all Syrians and not essentialising or demonising religious Muslims. This Syrian republic is one which puts a stop to the endless antagonisms between communities and which is a real collective and bottom up, people-led project. Saleh is, as I have indicated, writing these ideas in the first years of the revolution, but he is no romantic; already he is wary of unleashing the multiple-headed monsters of forms of extremism.

To discuss these ideas further I now move to investigate more deeply the material from the *al-jumhuriya* website.

Introduction to the three selected articles

In the remainder of this chapter I analyse in detail three selected articles from the *al-jumhuriya* website; the full information for these articles is listed in the **Appendix**. The first article which I examine below is an *al-jumhuriya* editorial published on line in March 2012, at the launch of the new website project. This contains an analysis of the first year of the Syrian revolution, from the perspective of the Syrians simultaneously active in the revolution and writing about it. It gives us a good introduction to the emergence of new revolutionary ideas and to new practices that were starting to take shape. The article shows how the *thawrat al-karama* (dignity revolution) started to recast the very idea of a 'Syrian people' and contest the limiting discourse of the official government discourse and its claim to represent and reflect the Syrian people. This contestation recalls Connolly's ideas on the

way in which commonly perceived and widely used concepts can *become* deeply political. The concept of dignity can be further clarified in proximity to a distinctive 'dignified Syrian people'. The ideas 'Syria' and 'the people' helps to decontest the meaning of dignity in this revolutionary moment.

The second *al-jumhuriya* article I draw from is a much shorter analysis and critique of an official Syrian state discourse of resistance. The previous hegemony of this was challenged with the emergence of a new revolutionary resistance countering the claims of the Syrian government to be leading an axis of resistance in the region. This commentary adds an important dimension to our understanding of dignity in that it considers a vital *moral* (and universalising) dimension to a decontestation of dignity as a demand for all peoples who rise up against tyranny. In this framing, dignity takes on and gathers meaning as something which is or ought to be universal to all humans and, in a political context, the struggle for dignity should not end at or be confined by geographic borders. Dignity is clarified in adjacency to resistance. The struggle for dignity and freedom is a moral imperative and a core aspect of a leftist politics of resistance.

The third selection from *al-jumhuriya* is a very lengthy and in-depth analysis of Syrian society with a focus on the socio-economic divides in the country which have created 'two worlds' and which have led to large segments of Syria's Sunni population feeling 'estranged'. The emphasis of the analysis is on injustices and the responses to them from those Syrian communities excluded by a ruling elite, its state apparatus and its patronage networks. The dignity we find among this community echoes many of the aspects of the concept we have met so far in this thesis. It can be conceived of as a dignity clarified through

social relations and positions, ideals of justice, and respectful treatment. It is also a dignity signifying deep political contestation (of the status quo) and an activation of particular conceptions of citizenship and, in particular, carrying a new Syrian (Sunni) consciousness.

III   *First article: al-shaʿb al-suri al-karim [the dignified Syrian people]*

Here I draw out some of the key ideational threads from a long form editorial published to coincide with the launch of this website on the first anniversary of the Syrian revolution. The editorial was entitled: *'An analytical survey of the first year of the Syrian revolution: "Asad and no one else", against "The people want the fall of the regime"',* published online on 30 March, 2012. [25]   This report on the status of the revolution discussed key developments, highlighted some of the internal problems and challenges faced by the Syrian revolutionaries and suggested some ways forward. It is an important article as it shows how the concept of dignity was retrieved from the ideational margins and the way in which it developed and took on political significance in the first year of the revolution. This occurred with and through the mobilisation of a new Syrian revolutionary subject position which ushered in a popular politics from below.

To begin with, a central claim in the *al-jumhuriya* editorial is that *karama* (dignity) is a core idea and overarching priority in the latest revolutionary project:

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[25] Refer to the Appendix for full information about this first source article and all subsequent articles.

The principle of *karama* occupied an important position in all of the Arab revolutions and in the Syrian context it meant that the Syrians are *al-shaʿb al-suri al-karim* [the dignified Syrian people] who will not be insulted [humiliated] and treated with violence and with contempt, which is what they had become used to from the regime.[26]

The sense of a visceral human dignity is present here. The idea appears embedded in the social world, and pivotal to it. Here we can acknowledge a settled, universal dimension of human dignity, in this context. However, we need to know more about what this dignity meant for the Syrian people when it was *acted upon* at this particular time. The people were demanding to be treated decently by those in power, a demand we saw in Chapter Four made by the families of the children who were incarcerated by the local authorities in the southern city of Darʿa. These people are conceived of, in the editorial, as being a 'dignified Syrian people'; a people who reject the humiliations visited upon them by the authorities. Thus the dignity is appealed to and is acted on, or *performed*, through the Syrian demonstrations, in direct opposition to the humiliations being visited on the people by the state:

On February 17 [2011] the first of the Syrian revolutionary slogans was coined: *al-shaʿb al-suri ma biyanzil!* [The Syrian people will not be humiliated]. This was following a policeman attacking a young man in *al-hareeqa*, a commercial area of Damascus.[27]

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[26] Editorial, 28 March 2012.

[27] This has obvious echoes with Tunisia and the case of Mohamed el-Bouazizi. Certainly Tunisia's revolution also held the idea of dignity as central to its struggle- see Willis (2016) op cit.

So it is the Syrian people, as a collective, who move to voice this rejection: in the alleys, streets and squares of Syria. 'The Syrian people will not be humiliated' was the first slogan of the emerging revolution: a powerful demand in support of the important role assigned to dignity in the present thesis. We find, adding to ideas of an innate and universal notion of dignity, the development here of a collective conception of the people, played out in the public demonstrations and in the challenging of representatives of authority. The Syrian people launched spontaneous (and as the demonstrators and revolutionaries quickly found out, dangerous) public acts of defiance in the face of such disrespect for the Syrian *people*.

In doing so the demonstrators contested the very legitimacy of the government and the authorities. The popular nature of the first demonstrations and uprising are recorded in the editorial which also describes the security response to other actions in Damascus in the first part of 2011:

> In the middle of March tens of people demonstrated for a short while in the same area of Damascus [al-hareeqa], and the next day a sit-in was held by tens of people in front of the building of the ministry of the interior . . . around forty of them were arrested and humiliated by the special security apparatus, the air force branch. This is the branch that would be at the forefront of terrorising civilians throughout the coming Syrian revolution.

Two days later, the editorial narrates, a sit-in took place at the Omari mosque in the city of Dar'a and then in Homs, on the 25th March, where, the editors state, over 3,000 people

gathered at the clock tower square ensuring that the people's response quickly took on a national character. The editorial goes on to note this:

> This was an unprecedented number in Baʿthist Syria . . . .This suggests that a spirit of opposition had existed, buried in Syrian society, that the traditional opposition had never managed to make use of to build its movement, and indeed, when new, popular opposition emerged the traditional opposition had hardly any impact on it.[28]

The concept of dignity can be decontested, or clarified, here, specifically in relation to a new mobilised opposition. The people started to organise and to air their grievances, which gave a clear message to the government that it was no longer, if ever, acceptable for authorities and officials to humiliate the Syrian people. Through this action the Syrian demonstrators and revolutionary agents had not lost their dignity but were acting on a dignity in resistance. This editorial indicates how the social contract long assumed between a state and its people had been undermined and then, in the actions of the state against its people in Damascus and in Dar'a and elsewhere, broken. The state could no longer assume, or claim, that it spoke for the people. As the editorial notes, in a media interview in the Wall Street Journal in February 2011, Asad asserted boldly that the revolution would not come to Syria because the positions of the Syrian government are in "close proximity to the beliefs of the Syrian people". Yet, since the fall of Ben Ali in Tunisia, the writers question this confidence; Syrian security forces had been more visible and active than usual in the streets of Damascus,

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[28] References to the traditional opposition likely relate to an established older generation of intellectuals and dissidents such as Michel Kilo, although it is difficult to generalize this point without giving detailed context and space here to the domestic opposition in Syria.

suggesting that the government actually knew that Syrians too could rise up, as did their Tunisian and Egyptian counterparts. The Syrian writers noted:

> The slogan [The Syrian people will not be humiliated] carried two important messages: the first was that there was such a thing as the *Syrian people*, and those protesting the attack of the young man immediately based their protest on this entity [the Syrian people], which previously only the regime had spoken on behalf of, and usually as the *Syrian Arab people*.[29] The second message was that this people would not accept humiliation. It also implied that the source of the humiliation of the Syrian people was the regime.[30]

This clarifies the concept of dignity in the Syrian uprising through making focal the aligned concept of the Syrian people. The people rejected the established order based on coercive, violent, and centralised power, and radiated instead, a bottom-up people's sovereignty— thus countering and turning the power dynamic upside down. The revolutionary nature of the demonstrations served to stress the idea of dignity as being revolutionary praxis involving the organising and articulating of new 'belief challenges' to the Syrian government. Thus recalling here our consideration of the morphology of ideologies in Chapter Two with Freeden's notion of ideas which move in from the periphery.

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[29] Here, the editorial implies that the Revolution was achieving an anti-sectarianism never attained by Baʿthism. This is a vital point, in that the cross-sect nature and non-sectarianism of the Revolution is a key underpinning for the bold claim that it was *the Syrian people*, including Alawis and non-Islamic religious minorities, who opposed the corrupt and ultra-authoritarian Government. I expand on this point below, in discussing the Revolution's deliberate self-positioning as deeply non-sectarian.

[30] My italics.

The *al-jumhuriya* report also discussed the ways in which the government responded to these mobilisations of widespread and peaceful protests and gatherings across Syria. The state tried to stop this counter-hegemonic dynamic by completely shutting down all kinds of dissent and any vague threats of dissent:

> The intellectual class[31] in Syria was weakened in two ways. The first was that many of the most progressive minds in the country were detained, killed, sent into hiding or forced to migrate. These were the people who had the most influence on the revolution in terms of progressive, democratic and nationalist thinking. They included Hadi al-Jundi from Homs, Ma'an al-Awdat from Dar'a, Ghiath Mattar from Daraya as well as people who are now in prison such as Yahiya Shourbaji from Daraya and Mohammed Arab from Aleppo and others. The other way that this class was weakened was that the psychological and physical violence over the months meant that most Syrians reacted with anger and emotion rather than rational thinking. It is difficult to remain rational when facing an irrational regime.

Here the editorial is at pains to highlight the progressive voices in the Syrian revolution, mentioning the names of prominent activists who became known for organising and participating in nonviolent acts—through demonstrations and other measures of civil disobedience.[32] The other way in which the Syrian government sought to quell the dignity

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[31] The Arabic used is *al-tabqa al'aqlaniya*, indicating revolutionary actors who were progressive and rational (rather than traditional and closed minded), perhaps reflecting the positionality of the editorial writers for this report.

[32] For example Ghiath Mattar is now the subject of a documentary on Syria called *Little Gandhi*; discussed on this blog: https://en.qantara.de/content/syrian-civil-war-the-end-of-a-dream

revolution was through instilling fear for a sectarian-fuelled war and through claiming that the revolutionaries were all *salafi* extremists. The *al-jumhuriya* editorial details how it was the government spokesperson Bouthaina Shabaan who, just weeks into the protests, first played on the fears of the people that there might be a *fitna taʿfiya* (sectarian conflict),[33] at a time when Syrian demonstrators were saying "wahid, wahid, wahid, the Syrian people are one". The editorial mentions that in the Syrian town of Baniyas the demonstrators responded to government claims and retorted with: "Not Salafiyya, nor terrorists, our revolution is a people's revolution!" Official attempts to undermine the revolution by sowing seeds of fear and sectarian conflict were countered by the actions and practices happening on the streets. The challenge was immense though, as the report recounts how:

> Syrians, with the rest of the world as their witness, have experienced scenes bringing together brutality, hostility and sectarianism, such as the events in the village of Bayda near Banyas, and the shelling of the minarets of mosques in Homs and in Deir Ezzour, and other famous examples, such as forcing a soldier to testify that "there is no God but Bashar [al-Asad]" and "there is no God but Maher [Asad's brother and head of security]". The aim here was to send a message that the regime was willing to kill (and indeed it killed some of those targeted in these events), and to humiliate and undermine the values and symbols of Syrian Muslims. In fact, it was an attack on all Syrians, because when these limits have been reached, nobody is safe unless they accept this absolute slavery.

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[33] On which see Ismail, S. (2009) 'Changing Social Structure, Shifting Alliances and Authoritarianism in Syria', in Lawson, F. H. *Demystifying Syria*, London: Saqi books; and, Ismail, S. (2011) 'The Syrian Uprising: Imagining and Performing the Nation', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 11:3, 538-549.

These pro-Asad slogans mock the Quranic *shahadah* (bearing witness): the recitation of 'There is no God but God' (or, put more idiomatically: there is only one God) is one of the five pillars of Islam and a core part of the Islamic rituals of worship. The editorial reminds us that there was a new collective of Syrian people who were not motivated by belonging to a particular sect, but only organised in unity against "absolute slavery". The Syrian writers were at pains to show the ways in which the revolution was one which had an inclusive conception of the Syrian people; whereas the government was willing to institute a security policy to crush dissent and moreover to activate and instrumentalise sect.

I have drawn on this editorial so as to begin to understand the place of dignity in the first year of the revolution. We saw dignity's emergence in responding to humiliations exacted on the people by the state through its police and security forces. I noted how the idea of dignity, in this particular setting, quickly took on a very public nature and exhibited a growing collective sense. This quest for (Syrian) dignity is in close conceptual proximity to the (diachronic) conception of resistance for dignity (and freedom) as we saw already in Chapter Four. Such a compulsion to collective action was present in the history of anticolonial resistance to all kinds of oppression, in the writing and speeches of Fanon, Nasser and Nkrumah. The articulation and rising consciousness of a 'dignified Syrian people' showed how revolutionaries were seeking to extricate themselves from being beholden to an official discourse and politics which claimed to speak for the people but did not. When we have the concept of dignity adjacent to the idea of a Syrian people and to that of citizen action we can see an important political dimension emerging regarding (the idea of) dignity in the revolution. The appearance and assertion of dignity conveyed, in this early stage of the uprising, an assertion of a 'dignified Syrian people'. It was also the beginnings

of a battle between the state and the people for ownership of the terms of political discourse. This 'politics of language' is the subject of the next article.

IV   Second article: The battle between state and people

The idea of resistance, which I have started to illustrate above, in the first year of Syria's revolution, continued to gain pace and is most interestingly analysed by the Syrian activist and blogger Yassin al-Swehat in a much shorter article entitled: 'How the Left 'Resistance' failed Syria', which was published online on the *al-jumhuriya* website on the 12 April, 2012.[34] This article serves as a valuable point of entry to considering the important moral dimension of the idea of dignity in the context of a revolutionary struggle aimed at achieving dignity and freedom. As Swehat is of a younger generation of Syrians, and is a blogger and journalist active in and reporting on the revolution, it is useful to pursue his line of thought. Through this article I can expand on the relation between the idea of dignity and that of resistance. I pursue this through Swehat's conception of a (leftist) resistance.

Swehat's article is a polemic against the Arab Leftist intellectuals and commentators in the Arab region regarding their scepticism at the outset of the Syrian intifada. He saw their positions — in particular, their unwillingness to enter the fray against Asadism — as flawed on account of their "insistence to remain outside of history". This criticism is interesting as Swehat is clearly suggesting a historicised approach to thinking about the leftist tradition and about revolutionary action. He does this in order to claim that the leftist stances

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[34] Refer to Appendix for full bibliographical information on this and the other two source articles.

regarding the Syrian revolution were historically, and morally, untenable. That is, if one takes resistance to oppressors to be one of the core virtues of the Left. Thus Swehat makes some connections for us to a diachronic tradition of resistance—as we discussed in Chapters Three and four—which suggest that resistance against oppression is actually an ineliminable component of the Arab leftist and progressive ideological family.

This opens into a consideration of the logical and cultural context which might justify, and impel, Arab Leftist thinkers and activists to rise up, or to support in solidarity the people or the masses who resist. In this context Swehat focuses on a particular strand of the Left in the Arab region which had long entered into political and strategic alignments with Hizbollah and other forces of resistance against the Zionist enemy. Swehat notes how the first of the latest wave of Arab revolutions did not pose any ideological dilemmas for them in their support for the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, for example. However, as Swehat explains:

> The test did not come until the 15th March with the intifada against the system of 'resistance' [the Syrian government] the trusted ally of Hizbollah. The left resistance was surprised and did not expect the Syrian intifada. It found that it was forced to take a position [vis-a-vis] the regime and it could not defend its position in the moral language of the left and it could not take a stand against the [Syrian government] 'resistance' because it is an ally of Hizbollah alone among many other Arab countries. Faced with this dilemma most of the left decided to (exceptions exist, fortunately) take the middle road politically [and were] morally elusive and heavy with ironic language.

The test of Syria's revolution represents a significant ideological contestation which can be seen in the ways in which the idea of resistance, in this particular context, became one which was deeply contested *within* and across a sedimented ideological family and grouping. The competing claims were and are made through recourse to a language of politics within which this contestation is played out and continues to play out, creating an historical split, and polarisation, between different strands of the Arab left. Here the ideological furniture within a progressive tradition has been thrown into disarray and political actors and activists are keen to align with the resistance; but who now is the resistance? This contestation, Swehat goes on to argue, must be settled through recourse to the moral arguments which underpin the tradition of the Left resistance in the Arab world. According to Swehat's analysis, taking the "moral stance *[al-mawqif al-akhlaqi]* is central to any politics of the left" but he laments that there was no such firm support, as while the Left could not:

> deny the Syrian people [the right] to rise up against the system of tyranny: the economic, political, cultural, and moral impoverishment of the political system of the government, [but] it must be acknowledged that there was also a conspiracy against the [Syrian] government, from afar.

This 'moral dilemma' is mediated, by Swehat, with recourse to what he conceives to be at the very core of the Arab leftist tradition in the region. Swehat argues that supporting resistance against tyranny is a principal organising idea for the (Arab) Left without which they cannot claim to be a part of it. He laments how:

Dignity and freedom are deemed worthy for some and refused for others, to make [such] principles fixed in some places and to avoid [zigzagging] them in other places. Geo-politics, it seems, is a test of the slogans and the raised fists, not only for the Arab left . . . but in Latin America in particular and the world in general.

Here dignity and freedom are the principal values of the people, not merely symbols, and thus form a central project for the Left resistance. Swehat condemns the response by sections of the Leftist political current for being:

morally elusive [ambiguous] in their writing…; while they recognised the socio-economic grievances of the demonstrators, they also cautioned that the 'fingerprints' of imperial powers seemed present – powers that sought to undermine the Syrian state as a leader in the resistance against the Zionists and American Imperialists.

So, as Swehat asserts, sections of the Arab left became the doubters and the sceptics as to the authenticity of Syria's intifada. I have drawn out these threads from Swehat's analysis because they offer insight into both the ideological and conceptual levels. Swehat's analysis illuminates how the concept of resistance has changed over time. The tradition of resistance, long seen as a vital adjacent concept in the arsenal of the Baʿth party and Syrian state, is now, suddenly, deeply contested, thus unsettling assumed ideological traditions. The second important thing illuminated here is that, through the concept of resistance, we can trace linkages to the ideas of freedom and dignity which are foregrounded by Swehat and by the Syrian revolutionaries, as we have seen elsewhere. The revolution is a dignity revolution and those supporting it and acting in it are responding to and contesting the excesses of

power. For Saleh this holds universally, and across all revolutions which make a claim for and strive for dignity and freedom in the face of tyranny.

We find in this article a return to the kind of discourse present in the anti-colonial movement, with the struggle for dignity and freedom and the delineation of a tradition of resistance which has become part of a leftist tradition and that was, historically, aimed, as we saw in Chapter Four, at colonial or imperial powers. The language of resistance resonates across time and space but plays out in different contexts. The concept of dignity is decontested in relation to a 'moral notion' about when to resist and to what ends. Thus resistance is intimately linked to dignity and freedom in the Arab context. It is inconceivable that a government intent on crushing dissent can be deemed to be acting for the resistance and in pursuit of dignity and freedom for its people.

Now the people's resistance has turned against domestic tyranny at home instead of enemies next door. This rapidly shifting landscape in Syria has created an ideological dissonance. The position of a vocal Arab Left is that the Syrian people had needed to have a foreign enemy in order for any intifada to fit into rigid ideological patterns and norms. The 2011 people's resistance against the government of Bashar al-Asad represented a new era and unchartered ideational territory. It is through a pursuit of the idea of dignity and its emergence and attachment to the ideal of freedom and to the tradition and practice of resistance that this ideological blind spot has been illuminated. The consequent contestation and dislocation is reflected the world over among seemingly progressive Leftist groupings. As Swehat describes it:

The Syrian intifada has reached a point of no return and we have plunged into it, insisting on continuing until the end, and it was against the Fascist dictatorship of the regime and against any local or regional forces which wanted to deprive us of our rights to build a state of dignity, equality, and freedom. There are many difficulties and the road is long. It may succeed, it may fail. Either way, it will miss the comrades who I believed, a year ago, would align their slogans with our slogans and put their faith in the rights, freedoms and dignities of the people before any other reason, and would be next to us and with us. I was mistaken.

In short, Swehat shows how fixed leftist notions of resistance were unsettled by new assertions of popular resistance against a government which had long based its own legitimacy on claims to be leading resistance against foreign interference and imperial power. In analysing Swehat's ideas through the prism of the concept of dignity we have started to see the deep level of contestation between the state and the people from the very beginning of Syria's revolution—as soon as Syrians themselves *resisted* power and coercion. The emergence of dignity in the revolutionary discourse, as we see it here and elsewhere across this chapter, helps to clarify a new kind of resistance in Syria: a people's resistance, rather than merely a Government-sponsored 'resistance'. Dignity is clarified in relation to this idea of resistance which gives form to the idea of dignity in the revolution. The Syrian revolutionaries have a moral argument which underpins their actions and justifies their resistance. This makes assertions by the Syrian government that *they* are the chief resistance a false claim to dignity on behalf of its people. The demonstrations and civic action by Syrians in the name of their dignity and freedom exposed the illegitimacy of the Syrian government and leadership and forced a recasting of the very idea of resistance.

V   Third Article: activating citizenship

In this section I discuss some of the most pertinent ideational threads from a very long form analytical article written by Yassin al-Haj Saleh: 'Those left over: the Syrian Sunni and politics', which was published online on 18th October, 2012.[35] Saleh's writing is dense, sometimes opaque and bitingly critical in his determined efforts to reflect on how things came to be as they are in Syria, and on what they might rather be. In particular this analysis illuminates for us the ways in which the logic of dignity emerges in the revolution to signify the need for the repair of a marginalised, numerically significant, segment of Syrian society. This reparative dignity is largely unconsciously rendered in Saleh's writing: historically, politically, and in a social and cultural framework of analysis. It is from his multi-faceted intellectual oeuvre that I draw out the full power of the idea of dignity in the revolution.

The title of the article is a reference to a segment of Sunni society in Syria which is 'left over', or marginalised by the social policies and strategies employed in sustaining power during the period of Hafez al-Asad's presidency; as well as that of economic liberalisation – in particular as accelerated under Bashar al-Asad.[36] Saleh's analysis takes us to the heart of the grave social, political, and economic injustices visited on this segment of Syrian society over the decades, and especially since the new constitution of 1973, which finally put paid to any pretences of an autonomous political Baʿth party and confirmed the all-encompassing power of the president. In noting the social complexities during this period, Saleh indicated how the rise of favouritism in the years of Hafez al-Asad's rule stripped

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[35] Refer to Appendix for full bibliographical information on this source article.
[36] See Kienle, op cit.

communities of formal state and universal party support and increasingly encouraged a reliance on:

> networks of favouritism made up of senior influential people, officers, religious men, the authorities, rich people, tribal sheikhs . . . and these networks gathered together as points of cohesion and nodes which strengthened their web and provided solid foundations [of support]. These networks were made up of Alawi officers and leaders, archbishops, businessmen, Druze thinkers and party officials, and Shiite businessmen and men of religion, in particular. These social and religious groupings were formed in such a way that almost none of them are excluded from *wasta* [an intermediary in the network who can help someone access government sector resources, jobs and so on] or deprived of influential connections which allow access to [party and state] bureaucrats to support his interests.

These networks of patronage and privilege, whilst also co-opting significant elite Sunni businessmen and religious leaders or sheikhs, [37] for example, nevertheless excluded significant segments of Syrian Sunni society—in particular, poor Sunni communities, religiously pious and conservative Muslims, and those regarded as sympathetic to political Islam or, specifically, the Muslim Brotherhood, membership of which was illegal in Syria and punishable by death (and so a disparate grouping of Sunnis). Saleh sought to analyse these segments and, in doing so, exposed the wide gap between those who were attached to and benefiting from the system and those who were not. Saleh captured well the extent of alienation, or what he describes as a deep level of "*ightirab*" [estrangement] between the

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[37] See Haddad, op cit; Pierret (2012) op cit.

different social strata in Syria. Saleh adheres, to some extent, to a Marxist analysis which gives due attention to social class, although the perimeters of those social cleavages have been complicated and blurred somewhat since earlier social class-based analyses.[38] In particular, one should note the emergence of a new social class, a new 'labour' bourgeoisie (typically, cutting across: urban, commercial, industrial sectors).

Saleh introduces the Syrian *shami.* Saleh is referring to the term as used to indicate those who have deep historical and commercial links to the capital, loosely, a middle class bourgeoisie which cuts across religious cleavages: it includes a distinctive middle class urban Sunni bourgeoisie as well as, for example, a significant Christian commercial segment. He contrasts the *shami* with the *shawi,* a reference to the poor, rural Syrian labourer, from the neglected provinces such as Raqqa, Hawran, Deir Azzour; they are numerically typically Sunni but they can also be from the lowest social strata of Alawis[39], or other minority sects and ethnicities. Saleh paints a picture of "two worlds" — a picture which is also evocative of some of Fanon's anti-colonial writing, discussed in Chapter Four. Saleh related the way in which Syrian society had been polarised before the revolution of 2011:

There is nothing in common, for example, between the rural labourer, the *shawi*, who works in construction or who gathers with his friends in the squares in Damascus

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[38] Batatu (1999) op cit.

[39] Of course neglected and marginalised rural Alawi and other minority peasantry benefited in the 1960s from the levelling effect of the Baʿth Party in power and then also from Hafez al-Asad's populist policies which favoured such communities for recruitment in secure state jobs, the army and the security forces. So in referring to the rural and provincial communities it is literally about what is left after such social mobility and privileging is complete; following Batatu this (still) included an elite class too - such as in Derʿa and elsewhere, but the rampant poverty, neglect and prolonged droughts in the provinces and villages of Syria resulted in urban migration to Damascus and other centres to search for work.

waiting to be hired for work and [. . .] and…the scions of the authentic Damascene [families], the *shami*, commercial trading families. Indeed, the typical Damascene stance of the middle classes is still one of hostility to the rural Syrians, regardless of whether they are Sunni or not. . . . [t]he commercial middle classes in particular speak of their utter contempt for the outsiders, who are not *Shami*, who ruin their city, especially the rural Syrians.

This portrayal of the "two worlds" of the *Shawi* and the *Shami* shows, for Saleh, how the middle class urban Syrians have little to nothing in common with the poor, rural and marginalised Sunnis who are condemned as 'outsiders'. Having set this context, Saleh explores the ways in which Syrian society has been fragmented so that issues of Syrian identity have become confused or contested by differing groups and communities. Saleh exposes the sectarian and corrupt policies of the 'Asadi system' of rule. As we saw earlier in this chapter, the official state discourse which was reinforced through policy and through the language of its representatives and agents in the executive and in government had inculcated the idea of Asad's Syria as a modernist state which accommodated and protected a diverse 'mosaic' of ethnicities and religions. Yet the ruling elite cliques actually served to malign the conservative and provincial Sunni Muslims and their traditions and culture, especially those in the provinces who were looked down upon.

What Saleh gets around to arguing, many pages into his exegesis of the history of Islam as it relates to modern day Syria, is that "the issue of sect is a question of policy and power and not a question of religion or religious doctrines". It is Asad's policies which have created a distinctly politicised and disgruntled Sunni subjectivity. Saleh is at pains to illustrate the

ordinary, everyday nature of religion as a lived experience and not as a label with political or extremist connotations. Saleh talks about his own upbringing in Raqqa: ". . . in my childhood I heard from my father that we followed a school of thought in Islam but I did not hear from him that we are 'Sunni'". The use of the concept of Sunni as a social marker and identity was simply not present in Syria, historically. In reflecting on Islam and Syrian society Saleh goes on to note that:

> the foundations of Islam were not shaken until the nineteenth century with the beginning of a Muslim consciousness in the face of distant global [imperial and colonial] control and dominance in the world. Until today this [historical] reality did not reconcile Islamic consciousness and did not find what caused the self-rupture and what the intellectual solution is.

It was the encounter with modernity which necessitated, among some Muslim intellectuals, a push for change or reform—Saleh references Afghani, who we met in Chapter Three. This intellectual production was aimed at finding ways to enable reforms in Islam whilst simultaneously protecting a metaphysical commitment to Islam. Whilst he recognises the diversity of the Syrian Sunnis who range from pious to atheist with diverse lots in between, Saleh's analysis goes on to interrogate the way in which a specific Syrian Sunni consciousness was activated, especially since the 1960s in Syria, set against an increasingly extreme version of Baʿthist secularism. According to Saleh, there emerged a narrative of Sunni injustice which served as the 'gelling agent' for a new grouping and consciousness which was slowly emerging under the unsettling policies of Baʿthist Syria, but was fully

'activated' under Hafez al-Asad's rule. Saleh refers to the events in Hama in 1982 in Syria as a pivotal point in history resulting in 'piercing the dignity' of the Sunni community:

> in the Baʿthist era and in the era of Hafez especially, there began to emerge a narrative of Sunni injustice in reaction to the Asad system which discriminates in employment, in the army and security and in the media especially, against the Sunni; and, regarding the conservative Sunni groups, the system deliberately corrupts the morals of the population (sexual morals in particular) and the system oppresses Muslims (=Sunni) . . . the focus is particularly on what happened to the Islamists who were tortured and the denying of the massacres, especially in the city of Hama in 1982, and before that the massacre in Tadmor [Palmyra] and its prison.

I have attempted here to weave a path through Saleh's nuanced and deep thinking on the condition of, and new consciousness of particular Sunni communities in Syria. I have sought to illuminate the places where a deep injury was felt by this community, described by Saleh as a piercing of the dignity of Sunni communities in Syria. I have picked out the ways in which Saleh attempted to demystify Syria's power structures so as to show that the subsequent revolution did not start due to sectarian divides but that, instead, under President Hafez al-Asad resources and opportunities started to be based on privileging the Alawi sect and co-opting key social and political actors so as to ensure his longevity and hold onto power. This resulted in a complete **estrangement**, which was felt by a large number of Syria's population, especially the rural poor and neglected provincial populations, the majority of whom were Sunni, but also an urban and provincial political Sunni elite who were sympathetic to the banned Muslim Brotherhood. We see how the piercing of dignity

goes very deep and is historically situated in the machinations of Baʿth party and presidential policies over the decades. Saleh also gives a sense that this community of Sunnis felt the injury to their dignity because they were outsiders to the dominant ruling ideology and discourse - that of a modernist, secular state against which a conservative tradition of Islam and Sunni culture and morals were anathema.

In Saleh's political thought we can find a resolutely socially-situated conception of dignity: one which resides and takes hold, or is activated in reaction to slights against a particular segment of society. We can find in the socio-economic inequalities in Syrian society the emergence of an increasing consciousness of these Syrians who came to be considered as outsiders and who were excluded from official networks of privilege and support. Saleh indicates how the treatment of pious, religious Sunnis in the neglected provinces and also in the cities, and the 'events' of Hama and the massacre of 1982 contributed to the 'piercing' of Sunni dignity.

Through this article we can see a process of decontestation in the way the concept of dignity appears and is used in relation to adjacent notions of *injustice* and of *estrangement.* These grievances reflect the flaws in governance and in the social and economic policies of the Syrian government and leadership. But, significantly, the lack of justice for the segment of society delineated by Saleh goes beyond economic considerations to relate the deep nature of the injustices visited on the Sunni communities. Their political and religious freedoms have been fundamentally constrained and their religious sensibilities have become alien to the grand narratives of the Syrian state which has promoted the 'modernist' ideology discussed earlier in this Chapter (and in Chapter Three). In essence the state had long

demonised those conservative and pious Sunni Muslim communities which had not been bought into or co-opted in some way into the Asadi patronage network. The Asad leadership had already set in train an official discourse of a war on terror and a security discourse which worked to demonise Sunni Islam (as it did in the 1980s against the Muslim Brothers).

Saleh's article, together with the other two offerings analysed above, has helped us to work out some synchronic conceptions and inflections of dignity within the revolution moment. The strands which have been drawn out so far begin to help us understand more about why the idea of dignity came to be so potent, and indeed, why it moved in from the ideational periphery to be ascribed to and represent the revolution itself. It was, after all, these Syrian Sunni outsiders who were to go on to play a pivotal role in the revolution, especially in the armed wings of the revolution.

VI   *Conclusion: situating dignity in Syria's revolutionary moment*

In this chapter we began our immersion into a broadly-conceived Syrian, and Arab, leftist and progressive tradition (in the revolution) with an introduction to the Syrian website *al-jumhuriya* and its most prominent founder Yassin al-Haj Saleh, before then turning to analyses of material from the *al-jumhuriya* website. The launch of the *al-jumhuriya* project one year into the revolution gave space for Syrians to start to imagine alternatives to inherited, authoritarian rule.

We found Syrian writers, thinkers, and activists producing a new language of politics; imagining, recasting or rejecting the existing terms of political discourse which had dominated an authoritarian Syria until the outbreak of demonstrations across the country in 2011. What might a future Syria look like and what might *being Syrian* be? To have these conversations Syrians needed to expand beyond a limited and, sometimes, dogmatic political discourse; they needed to emerge outside the dark tunnel of authoritarian rule.

In reflecting on my research question I sought to show what kinds of conceptions, understandings and uses of dignity were we seeing through the speech-acts and the writings on the *al-jumhuriya* website. Firstly, Yassin Saleh's 'thought-edifices'[40] of modern Syria and of an Asadi 'modernist' ideology helped us to see inside the 'black box'[41] of Syria's dominant political ideology: Arab Baʿthism. What Saleh shows us is the extent to which the core ideas of the Syrian Arab Baʿth movement and party—the tripartite Baʿthist principles of unity, freedom, and socialism—were not only appropriated, to add a veneer of legitimacy to the Asad 'dynasty' in power, but were in fact severely undermined by recourse to a 'modernist' ideology which claimed to be a champion of economic progress, secularism and a bastion of a 'mosaic' plurality.

When we understand the problems inherent in the ruling ideology and (more importantly) the gaps and hypocrisies which existed in practice we start to build an ideational picture and to see where ideals floundered and how dignity then rapidly emerged from the neglected margin and moved to the centre. The idea of dignity as a core principle, as a call to action,

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[40] Freeden (1996) 144.

[41] I refer here to Freeden's term in analysis of political ideologies; but, equally, this relates back to Saleh's earlier work and his critique of the system in Saleh, Y.H. (2010) '*Suriya min al-zil: dakhil al-sunduq al-aswad*' [Syria from the Shadows: Inside the Black Box], Alexandria: Jidar for Culture and Publishing—cited in Massouh, F. (2015) op cit., 55,59.

and as a revolutionary idea and mobiliser, emerged from and illuminated the gap between that of the ideological precepts and traditions in post-independence Syria and the actual official practices. We can, I believe, now identify three core clarifying strands of conceptual thinking in relation to the core concept of dignity. These are summarised below.

Syria was experienced as 'two worlds', where the 'Shami' and 'Shawi' had nothing in common and where the concept of **equality** was all but absent. The core idea of equality which had been so central a tenet and so closely related to the struggle for the ideas of freedom and dignity (recall for instance the quotation from Nasser on which I dwelt in Chapter Four), had completely disappeared from the Syrian system of government. With the idea of equality pushed to the margins, other core concepts which had been importantly proximate to equality, such as the idea of unity, were also put under a direct threat of marginalisation. The project of Arab Baʿthism had bound equality, unity, and socialism together; without that binding, the Asad leadership did not enjoy any real legitimacy among its people, as we came to see in the Syrian uprising of 2011.[42]

In 2011 we found the demand for recognition of **a dignified Syrian people**. The notion of a new revolutionary subject emerged: that of the Syrian people (not any sect or subgroup) who gathered first to demand decency and dignity from, then to contest, and then to outright reject a system of rule which they had found to be unjust and unequal. The very idea of Syria and what it constituted, ideationally, as well as the notion of being, or becoming, 'Syrian' was being challenged and deconstructed and reconstituted in the writings of Saleh

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[42] It should be noted that the concept of Socialism given its particular Arab gloss—as I discussed in Chapter Three—works across the assumed ideological divides of Arab Baʿthism/Secularism and of Islamism. This can be seen to an extent in Egypt before its revolution changed the dynamics between the Left and the Brothers, but also a distinctly Arab socialism captures some of the core concepts of political Islam relating to social justice, for example. See, for example, Tripp, C. (2006) *Islam and the Moral Economy: the Challenge of Capitalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Chapter Three, 46-76.

as well as being articulated in the streets and in the squares in Syria. We saw this in the chants of the demonstrators who refused humiliation, asserted that they were a unified people, and demanded dignity and freedom.

The third core idea is that of **resistance** which helped to further clarify the concept of dignity in a revolutionary situation. Swehat clarifies the concept of resistance as necessarily based on a moral commitment and on solidarity for and with those acting against tyranny. In doing so, Swehat reflects the way in which a radical notion of resistance enters into adjacency with the virtue of dignity, and thus offers ways for us to conceive of dignity through a truly radical and leftist commitment to resistance.

Amidst this unsettling of the political and social order it would nevertheless, I hold, be a mistake to consider the emergence of the idea of dignity as operating *outside* the ideological world we inhabit. Rather, the force of dignity signifies a level of deep ideological contestation of an ideology betrayed, and an unrequited social contract between the people and the state.[43] The project of *al-jumhuriya* signals the interrogation of the ideological claims and assumed legitimacy of the Syrian government and executive power, and it reminds Syrians of the republican ideals implicit in the independent nation state but which were never actualised.[44] In the analyses of the concept of dignity as a central principle in the revolution we can shed light on an emerging civic Syrian republicanism in the first years of Syria's revolution. At least implicit in this Syrian Republican thinking is a focus on

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[43] On the idea of the social contract see: 'Towards a National Social Contract in Syria: Issued 14 April 2001' by the *Constituent Board of the Committees for the Revival of Civil Society in Syria*, a document made public and signed by prominent Syrian intellectuals and oppositional figures, including Michel Kilo, continuing a long struggle in Syria to nurture a civil society outside of government and party control.

[44] Syria's constitution was promulgated in 1950 and revised under Hafez al-Asad's corrective movement and brought into being in 1973. Article 12 states, for example, that "The state is in the service of the people", in George, A. (2003) *Neither Bread nor Freedom*, Zed, 2.

practices and *doing* or *acting* in newly created free or liberated public spaces and towns.).

Equally, the ideas propounded by the *al-jumhuriya* contributors adhere to a series of moral and political arguments for a new Syria, based on the equal value of the Syrian citizen and the centrality of the people in the social and political ordering and governance of the country. It rejects outright corrupt and unaccountable government as well as hereditary rule. The idea of *al-jumhuriya* itself promotes an alternative 'third way' which weaves a path between the binary assumptions of an either/or 'choice' between Islamism and Secularism. The *al-jumhuriya* project problematizes both these traditions.

In the next and final chapter I give consideration to the second exemplar which is situated in a distinctive but, again, variegated ideational current: that of Islamism and political Islam. The *liwa al-tawhid* (Unity Brigade) is understood, for my research purposes, through the exemplary activity of its most prominent brigade leader, Abdel Qader Saleh (Abdel Qader). I examine the force of his speech-acts and the ideas flowing through the political discourse which has built up around the armed fighters, through mediated material online and through his interviews and interviews about him.

Chapter Six

Ideational Exemplar Two: Syria's revolutionary fighters

Introduction

In Chapter Five I investigated the meanings and uses of dignity in Syria's revolution through an examination of the material published on the revolutionary website *al-jumhuriyeh* (The Republic). In the first of the two 'exemplary' currents in the revolution, I sought to highlight the beliefs and ideas which were prioritised and advocated by 'progressive' revolutionary intellectuals, writers, and activists. In pursuing the threads of dignity through the thought-practices of these actors in the revolution, I started to examine the ways in which dignity was articulated, tracing a particular conceptualisation of a *dignified Syrian people* together with other core concepts such as *freedom,* and in adjacency with concepts such as *equality*. I looked at how these concepts flowed from and attached to the idea of dignity, thus decontesting it in a particular time and place.

We saw how the revolutionary discourse which developed through the activities and actions of Syrian revolutionary actors centred on the idea of nonviolent struggle and civil disobedience. For example, the *al-jumhuriya* editorial had highlighted how democracy activists had been tortured, imprisoned or, as with Ghaith Mattar, killed. We also saw how, in the first year of the revolution, a plurality of views emerged about how best to pursue and maintain the revolution in the face of a full military and security response to the dissent across the country. In Chapter Four I noted how the way was opened up to the proliferation of fighting groups. Principally these were made up of Syrian army defectors and civilians, principally the *al-jeish*

al-hurr (the Syrian Free Army), some elements of which increasingly took on an Islamist tone as the revolution moved fully into an armed conflict against the state army, the security forces, and its supporters.

In this chapter I shift the focus to analysing a particular exemplary case from among the numerous fighting brigades in Syria. This is in contrast to the previous chapter, where we examined the intellectual writers and activists in the revolution. In contrasting different ideational currents within the revolution we can consider the shared aspects of dignity which are held in common across ideological currents in the Syrian revolution, and where they diverge. This is important as it allows us to see how a shared idea such as dignity can function in different ways.

I have selected one of the most well-known northern Syrian fighting groups, *liwa al-tawhid*, for my second exemplary study. This regional brigade is considered here as an exemplar because of its vital significance as a fighting force in northern Syria; crucially it was one of the first and main rebel groups to take and hold territory in what became regarded as the Battle of Aleppo which raged in 2012 (and beyond). Another important consideration regarding this brigade is that they were, early on, considered to be a moderate Islamist voice and force which was closer to the Syrian revolutionary aims and principles than some of the other fighting groups.[1]

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[1] See report: Syzbala, V. (2013) 'A power move by Syria's rebel forces', blog report for the *Institute for the Study of War*, 22 November.

As I will discuss, *liwa al-tawhid* gained a high public and media profile because of one of its highly respected regional commanders who was killed in November 2013: Mujahid Abdel Qader al-Saleh (Abdel Qader).[2] Abdel Qader, as a vocal representative of a major military group in Northern Syria, can help us to gauge the context for the emergence of the idea of dignity in armed struggle.

A detailed analysis of the utterances and practices of the *liwa al-tawhid* military group is vitally important if we want to obtain a more rounded and nuanced picture of the revolutionary actors during the first two years of the revolution—and not just the liberal trend we encountered in Chapter Five. There are constraints, however, on access to relevant source material, especially given that the group were, to all intents and purposes, fragmented and co-opted into other fighting blocs after the death of Abdel Qader in November 2013.[3] Information and communications by and about the group and about Abdel Qader were posted on social networking sites such as Facebook and YouTube, and Abdel Qader himself had a twitter account.[4] Some of these accounts have changed or are no longer active or accessible.

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[2] See: BBC News (2013) Top Syrian Rebel Commander Dies", BBC News report online, 18 November, 2013, available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-24984365; Lund, A. (2013) 'The death of Abdul-qader Saleh' Syriacomment blog published online, 17 November, 2013, available at: http://www.joshualan-dis.com/blog/death-abdelqader-saleh/?print=true

[3] It is important to be aware of military and political shifts regarding the brigade. I am here focused on the period 2012 to 2013 and up to and around Abdel Qader Saleh's death. The liwa brigade has joined other groups, split, and been subsumed into larger fighting forces since this time. So, we cannot look at social media activity by the group today to discern what was happening in 2013.

[4] However what appears to be the official YouTube channel for the brigade in these first years is still available online: https://www.youtube.com/user/leuaalTawhid1/videos?flow=grid&view=0&sort=da. The channel was established in October 2012. The last video posted is dated as two years ago (so in 2014). See below re Abdel Qader's twitter account.

I conducted online searches for the brigade and for Abdel Qader and watched video material posted by the group or by its supporters or other revolutionary groups. I also reviewed interviews of Abdel Qader and analysis about him and the brigades as broadcast by major Arab news channels and made available online, on official and nonofficial content-sharing channels, after the broadcast. Much of the raw material I viewed consisted of short videos of battle ground footage, shelling, and other military activity as well as videos and images of civilians dead in the conflict.[5] On Abdel Qader's official twitter feed (which is no longer accessible) I found tweets about military battles, meetings with other prominent brigade leaders in the region, links to communiques issued by the brigade, and retweets of announcements of appointments to the local *Shura* council (presumably in Aleppo city), as well as announcements about martyrs killed and words of support to other parts of Syria, such as Homs and the district of *Muadimiya* in the Damascus suburbs (areas which would have been under heavy military attack during this period).[6]

From my review of the available material relating to the brigade and to Abdel Qader I have selected four video sources (VS 1-4) for detailed analysis. I focused in detail on the period from early 2012 and throughout 2013, as this is when the revolution was militarised and when *liwa al-tawhid* was consolidated into a significant fighting force.[7] The videos I have selected provide more detailed insight than some of the raw footage of battles and casualties might tell us about the political thought and practices of the armed wing of the revolution. The video

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[5] Sites referred to included YouTube channels set up by media groups and individual activists in the area, as well as the official YouTube channels for al-Jazeera Arabic, Orient TV, al-Arabiya. See my selective list of internet sources in the bibliography.

[6] I was able to download the tweets from this official site which was registered as @abdulkadr_Saleh on Twitter.

[7] The arming of the revolution was, of course, happening alongside militarisation of pro-Asad militias, also from 2012 and before. See a recent analysis by al-Tamimi, A. J. (2016) 'Syrian Hizbollah militias of Nubl and Zahara', SyrianComment blog, 15 August, available online at: http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/syrian-hezbollah-militias-nubl-zahara/.

sources also address somewhat differing audiences, as we shall see. I now turn to elaborate on the selected material.

The first video source (VS1) is an informal interview with Abdel Qader which was aired in July 2013 on the pro-revolutionary satellite channel Orient TV. This is a rare take on Abdel Qader as the family man rather than the fighter, and during the interview he talks about life before the revolution and he emphasises the desire for a "life of honour and dignity". Abdel Qader opines that a return to dignity must include a return to 'our religion' and 'our country' and that Syrians want to be 'free'.

In the second video source (VS2) the pace changes, with Abdel Qader being interviewed for a flagship current affairs programme aired by the Arabic language satellite channel al-Arabiya. This is a more combative interview focused on the big political questions around governance in the liberated areas of Syria. It offers us another piece of the ideational puzzle in pursuing the thought and practices of Syria's rebel groups and ties in to ideas emerging across the other video sources in this chapter. How might Syrians be free and under what social and political system will they live? These political questions help us to understand more about the kind of dignified life which Abdel Qader alluded to in the first video. What he is advocating, if we consider the wider terrain in which these ideas emerged, is, not surprisingly, a better accommodation with Islamic religion and traditions and a more just state; a reparation of Syrian 'pierced dignity', perhaps.

The third video source (VS3) is very different again, as here we see another side to Abdel Qader as he is motivating his battalion on the frontline, among fighters who have more in common with the *Shawi* we met in Chapter Five than the political and media elites who he was addressing in the first two interviews. He refers to an important traditional notion of honour which I introduced in Chapter Four (in holding and freeing Muslim land), relating to the idea of dignity he mentions elsewhere. The focus here is on the importance of continuing the armed jihad, and this provides us with some linkages in thinking across the Syrian revolution as a whole, in comparison and contrast to other forms of resistance we have already considered previously. In this material I trace (what Freeden might term) an 'unconscious' appeal to dignity in relation to honour and in relation to metaphysical commitments to 'aid God' and to protect Muslim land and Islamic religion.

As I have indicated, the reported 'martyrdom' of Abdel Qader was a key moment in the Syrian revolution. I selected video source four (VS4) in order to hear reflections and analysis from media activists and political analysts about Abdel Qader's death, his role in the revolution, the fate of his battalion and the fight against the state—now that he has gone. There is an appeal to Abdel Qader's *akhlaq* (morals) and *qiyam* (values) which are highlighted as being representative of not just an individual but the collective struggle and revolutionary spirit. The ideas of the revolution are discussed and summed up by one interviewee as being based on freedom and dignity in being able to choose the shape of the country and how politics should be done. Along this path is the way to 'live a dignified life'.

I also supplement the selected video material with other secondary material; in particular, analysis by scholars and policy experts who have followed the rapidly shifting terrain of these fighting groups since their inception.[8] These analysts have a very specific research agenda and set of questions which focus on the military and geopolitical aspects of the brigades rather than the ways in which ideas and beliefs might appear and be crafted and acted upon in revolution. However, the depth of their empirical investigations and tracking of the fighting groups provides a supplementary resource of secondary material with which to layer my analysis here.

I   Liwa al-tawhid

Throughout the summer of protests in 2011 there emerged, locally and through the representatives of the newly established formal opposition of the Syrian National Council (SNC), internal debate and disagreement among Syrians about whether or not to take up arms. During this period Syrians who had either defected from the army ranks or taken up arms as citizens had a sole purpose of protecting the civil disobedience activity and the demonstrations in their home towns or villages—representing a novel application of nonviolent struggle as one which is necessarily protected by local armed Syrians.

Syrian army defectors set up a revolutionary military command in Istanbul as a way of coordinating and directing the increasingly organised revolutionary brigades and emerging army defectors and armed fighters.[9] Hundreds of local brigades were formed and then joined

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[8] For academic treatments see: Lefévre, R. (2013) *Ashes of Hama: The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria*, London: C. Hurst & Co., Ltd; Pierret, (2012); (2013), op cit.
[9] Tripp (2013) op cit. 57.

by foreign fighters from Iraq and elsewhere. The brigades carried diverging and crisscrossing ideological stances—from broadly secular and nationalist to conservative Sunni and Islamist—and they all vied for outside funding and support from governments and individual donors. *Liwa al-tawhid* was regarded by some as a 'moderate' Islamist brigade which gained prominence around July 2012 as a newly merged umbrella group gathering local units fighting the government forces in northern Syria.[10]

Liwa al-tawhid is usually translated as the Unity Brigade; however, it is important to note that as well as meaning 'unity' the concept of *tawhid* in classical Islam refers specifically to the oneness or unity of God, from which all else flows, pointing to the monotheistic nature of Islam. Some commentators of the Syrian fighting brigades have noted the Islamic nature of and symbolism in naming brigades and the use of 'unity' in the naming of brigades is present across the warring parties. This concept of unity, which we met in Chapters Three, Four, and Five, is shared across ideological and battle divides. The names used commemorate events and famous battles in Syria's long history and reference the names of heroes (e.g. against the Crusaders) and martyrs, monuments, local mosques, and so on. Therefore, pro-Syrian government Lebanese, Iranian, Iraqi and other groups fighting for Bashar al-Asad use very similar symbolism – Islamic, Secular, and Christian; as do the Kurdish fighters.[11] In modern usage *tawhid* is commonly used to refer to unifying, and the brigade did serve this purpose in the Syrian revolution, bringing together disparate local fighting groups.

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[10] For example, it was not placed on any international designated terrorist lists: Stanford University (2016) 'Mapping Militant Organisations: Liwa al-tawhid', narrative summary, published online at http://web.stand-ford.edu/group/mappingmilitants.

[11] This is discussed by Yassin-Kassab, R. & Al-Shami, L. (2016) in *Burning Country: Syrians in revolution and war*, London: Pluto Press. There are also countless blogs on these topics on the SyriaComment blog and on aymnennnjawad.org blog by A.J. Tamimi.

Syrian citizens took up arms to protect their villages in Northern Syria: such as *Marea*, *Anadan* and *Aazaz*. By 2013 the brigade claimed to number around 12,000 fighters and their most celebrated military operation was the first Battle of Aleppo, which began in July, 2012, and went on through 2013, during which the Syrian rebel fighters were hemmed in but gained and held liberated territory from the Syrian government. The battalion was to obtain funding, especially from sympathetic Gulf countries – from the outset this is likely to have included Qatar, France[12] and Turkey as well as private funders. However, in holding the liberated territory and in governing and working with hundreds of other brigades there were, increasingly, reports of internal disputes between the different Islamist groups and the more extremist elements.

Patterns of corruption persisted and a war economy emerged which was based on narrow interests and profit extraction (sometimes for weapons but sometimes for personal gain). It became increasingly common for rival brigades to kidnap members of rich families, or others, for financial gain, to commandeer property, factories and equipment for self-aggrandisement and personal profit, and there were also reports of human rights abuses against the government and militia prisoners of war (execution without trial, for example).[13]

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[12] Chulov, M. (2012) 'France funding Syrian rebels in new push to oust Assad', *The Guardian* online, 7 December, 2012.

[13] See for example the interview of Abdel Qader by al-Jazeera Arabic anchor Taysir Allouni, published on the official YouTube channel for al-Jazeera Arabic, for the *Meeting Today* programme, on 16 June 2013. Taysir presses Abdel Qader on corruption within the brigade ranks and thus rankles him:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_xXU9YaRLc

The brigade is considered Islamist in nature and is commonly assumed to be linked to the Muslim Brotherhood current.[14] But when Abdel Qader was a leading regional commander he also took pains to keep good relations with all the fighting groups, including the Salafi-influenced fighters and the al-Qaeda affiliated group, Jubhat al-Nusra (the Victory Front) who were Islamists of a different stripe. The brigade gained a reputation for their military operations and, when under Abdel Qader's direct command,[15] for ethical (moderate) conduct in the revolution. The brigade mostly worked under a general Syrian Free Army banner and Abdel Qader represented the northern Syria fighters within the Free Army command structures. I now consider Abdel Qader in more detail so as to contextualize him as an exemplar of the armed revolutionary struggle.

II   Mujahid Abdel Qader al-Saleh

Mujahid Abdel Qader al-Saleh was a young and wealthy grain trader from the village of *Marea* in Northern Syria. Before the revolution he was known for his pious religious nature and for proselytising for Islam, at home and abroad. It seems the case[16] that Abdel Qader was active in a religious movement claiming to be fundamentally apolitical called the *Juma'a al-Tablighi* (Group of Preachers), which emerged from India in the 1920s, and which has a presence in

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[14] The situation was very fluid, with rebel brigades following the money for weapons as well as negotiating differing ideological positions; see Syzbala, V. (2013) 'A power move by Syria's rebel forces', a blog report for the Institute of the Study of War, 22 November, available at: http://iswresearch.blogspot.co.uk/2013/11/a-power-move-by-syria-rebel-forces.html. Abdel Qader Saleh was publicly interviewed on his political stances, during military operations, by the local Aleppo Media Centre: 'exclusive interview with Abdel Qader Saleh', posted on the YouTube channel '*tujama' al-shabab murek al-ahrar'* [The Youth Group of Murek for Liberation – a provincial village in Hama, Syria], available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eviYiTRnrnk

[15] Abdel Qader was not the most senior commander. He was deputy to the co-founder of liwa al-tawhid: Abdel Aziz Salameh, or Hajji Anadan, who went on to form the military coalition called the *al-jabha al-shamiyya* (The Levantine Front) in December 2014.

[16] I gained this information having asked Syrians based in the UK. To protect their privacy I do not name my sources.

Pakistan, with adherents across East Asia and among Muslim populations worldwide. [17] There is a vague reference made by a prominent Syrian activist paying tribute to Abdel Qader, to his travelling and preaching before the revolution (VS4).

As we will see, Abdel Qader claimed that he was not political; that he was not a politician but that he did undertake jihad for the cause of the revolution and the Islamic *ummah* (nation). However, what this chapter reveals is the extent to which, and the way in which, Abdel Qader was to *become* political, exhibiting a more explicit political Islam bent.[18] Islamist ideas did take hold and were instrumentalised on the front lines to encourage and sustain the armed jihad, or struggle, for a life of honour and dignity. I focus here on the speech acts and practices of these Syrian fighters and build a picture of the ideals they ascribe to and how dignity is central to their ideational vision of a future Syria.

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[17] This fundamentalist religious movement is a transnational project to proselytize for Islam, but claims no political agenda, It is difficult to find scholarly treatments of the beliefs and practices of the group in Pakistan outside of the literature on security and terror studies, but see Ali, A. (2006) 'Tabligh Jama'at and Hizbul Tahrir: Divergent Paths to Convergent Goals, Education to Counter Extremism', Dialogue & Alliance, Newsletter, 20:2*, Interreligious Federation for World Peace*, available at: http://www.irfwp.org/files/20-2co-tent.pdf#page=51. On the Pakistan dimension in Syria's conflict see: Sherazi, Z.S. and Mohsin, S. (2013) 'Pakistan Taliban arrive in Syria, and more are to come, CNN told', CNN, 24 July, 2013; Mohsin, S. and Sterling, J. (2013) 'Syrian opposition questions Taliban rebel role', CNN, 18 July, cited by Siddique, A. M. (2015) 'Drones Do Not Contribute to Counterinsurgency, *An Analysis of the Strategic Value and Humanitarian Impact of US Drone Strikes in Pakistan',* Islamabad Papers, 25, *Institute of Strategic Studies*.

[18] I use this term reluctantly here and do not want to get diverted to the vast debates on the term, its use, and meaning. I have sympathy with a memo prepared as a result of scholarly debate regarding the problematic nature of the concept; see Philbrick Yadav, P. (2016) 'Rethinking Relationality: Abductive Reasoning, Action Research, and Islamist Politics', prepared for the Evolving Methodologies in the Study of Islamist Politics Workshop, 29 January, *Project on Middle East Political Science* (POMEPS). Generally I use the concept of Islamism and political Islam to refer to an ideational current which seeks to order society based on and prioritising Islamic precepts. However this leaves lots of space for very divergent practices and implementation. For the specific Syria context and overview of the Islamists see: Pierret, T. (2012a) 'Syria: Old-Timers and Newcomers', in Wright, R. ed. *The Islamists are coming: Who They Really Are*, Herndon, VA: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 71-80.

On the 17 November, 2013 news spread quickly on social networking sites such as Facebook that the revered revolutionary fighter Abdel Qader had died from his injuries inflicted during a Syrian government strike on a liberated zone in the northern city of Aleppo. Abdel Qader was killed in a targeted aerial attack during a meeting with other military leaders in Northern Aleppo. Abdel Qader was aged 33 and left behind a widow and five children. Over the following days those involved in or researching Syria's revolution found our news feeds flooded with pictures of a smiling Abdel Qader, as mediated by the brigade's supporters as well as Syrian activists generally, on online social networking sites set up by the various revolutionary groups. The day after his martyrdom the Syrian government pounded his home town, *Marea,* with aerial and artillery bombardments. After Abdel Qader's death the brigade was to eventually leave the Free Army stable and merge under the banner of the *jaish al-Islam* (the Army of Islam).[19]

The very striking thing in all the commemorations of his death was the extent to which Syrians sympathetic to the revolution lamented and expressed sorrow in hearing about his death. Twenty-something Syrian media activists and artists who might usually post avant-garde art and photography by their Syrian compatriots, or pictures of revolutionary cultural festivals in *Idlib* and *al-Raqqa*,[20] often juxtaposed with ubiquitous images of Syrians mangled and killed under the bombs, were now posting images of a smiling bearded man pictured on Syria's front line and affectionately known as Hajji Marea.[21] Most striking was that this outpouring of grief

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[19] Lund (2013) op cit.

[20] The Syrian Media collective 'The Street' organised a number of revolution festivals in northern Syria, for example: see content posted on their channel: YouTube channel: *muwassasat al-shara'a al-'ilaam* (The Street Media, Incorporated), accessed September 2015.

[21] Hajji (Syrian dialect; masculine) being a term of respect for one who is older and/or has completed the Haj (pilgrimage) to Mecca or is very religious/respected in the community; and, Marea being his home town in North Syria and the site of active uprising and fighting against the Syrian government. But, as Abdel Qader

was stark in the way in which it seemed to bridge across assumed ideological, sect, and ethnic divisions. Facebook status updates, content sharing and commemoration came from revolutionary supporters who were Kurdish, Druze, Sunni, Christian, and Alawi on the days in which I monitored Facebook.[22] The response to Abdel Qader's death and his iconic status in the revolution signifies why he serves well as an exemplar of Syria's armed revolution in 2012 and 2013. We will bear this strange meeting of Syrian-ness in mind and return to reflect on this in the concluding part of this chapter, having outlined a particular thread of the Islamist current in Syria's armed struggle with the government.

Abdel Qader worked to resolve local disputes around self-government of the liberated areas, resource control and access among the fighting groups. Abdel Qader cooperated with and recognised the newly formed Aleppo Sharia court which operated in the liberated city. He also represented the positions of the armed rebels and Islamists in the formal Syrian opposition (Syrian National Council; this became the Coalition and underwent further name changes and restructuring), and will have had some form of cooperation with Western government representatives, even if it was through the Syrian National Council (SNC) in Istanbul. These factors make Abdel Qader, and his command of the brigade, helpfully exemplify this current, and provide a rich source from which to access the Islamist tendency of the revolutionary fighters and to explore the idea of dignity through this martyr and his brigade.

Saleh explains (in VS1) the name 'Hajji + hometown' was used as a common pseudonym for Syrian revolutionaries needing anonymity.

[22] I monitored social networking sites and the accounts of Syrian revolutionary groups and individuals for the days following Abdel Qader Saleh's death. Most activity was happening across Facebook pages and through the sharing of YouTube material, comments or status updates by activists, reflections on why Abdel Qader Saleh was so loved: his ethics, his good nature, lamentations about the prospects for the battalion and for Aleppo after his demise, and dedications through texts about and images of Abdel Qader Saleh. See my selected internet sources in bibliography.

I now turn to explore in detail the ideas on the battlefield and I do this by discussing each of the video sources I have selected in turn and by giving details about the selection and importance of the material as well as analysing it in relation to the idea of dignity.

III   Video source one (VS1): a life of honour and dignity[23]

Here I present and analyse the first video recording: a television interview with the *liwa al-tawhid* regional commander, Abdel Qader. The interview took place in Aleppo during the holy month of Ramadan on 15 July, 2013 and was published online on the official *Orient News* YouTube channel.[24] The Orient YouTube channel is managed by the pro-revolutionary Orient satellite television channel with headquarters in the United Arab Emirates. The channel's footprint, or reach, includes Syria and large parts of the Middle East. This interview segment, just ten minutes long, was aired during an Orient TV flagship programme *Huna Suriya* (Here is Syria)[25] and was billed as 'a private and exclusive interview with Commander Abdel Qader talking about the human aspects of his life'. This interview helps us to get a sense of the man and his ideas and it provides us with a slightly less-guarded insight into Abdel Qader's thoughts. Abdel Qader's utterances are significant as they provide an important piece of the ideational puzzle we are seeking to put together. In particular, we can explore, through the

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[23] I am thankful to Muzna for translating some of this video interview with me. I withhold her full name for her privacy (see my acknowledgments page). All the material is selected and analysed solely by me. The material from this video is mostly in summary or paraphrased form based on Abdel Qader's answers to questions posed by the Orient TV presenter. The register he uses is conversational Arabic and he speaks in his Syrian dialect (some Arabic speakers switch to a more formal media Arabic, but it is becoming a bit more common for inter-viewees to speak in their dialect on major news channels).

[24] Refer to Appendix One for full bibliographical information about this video and subsequent video sources.

[25] More idiomatically, in English: 'This is Syria'.

idiom of a Syrian fighter, what kind of "life of honour and dignity" fighters like Abdel Qader might aspire to and how he conceptualised the notion of being free.

Abdel Qader was interviewed in situ by an Orient correspondent based in Aleppo and they were linked via satellite to the Orient's studio presenter in Amman, Jordan. In this interview, over two years after the start of Syria's uprising, the presenter asked Abdel Qader to focus on his personal life, before the revolution, and now. The Orient presenter and the correspondent with him in Aleppo were very friendly towards Abdel Qader and this VS is therefore very different from the more combative current affairs format. In this relatively unguarded Ramadan interview Abdel Qader contrasted the days before the uprising with living in the present revolutionary situation. Abdel Qader is first asked where his family are and how often he sees them. Then, he is asked by the interviewer: "What about your smile, it never leaves you, even in difficult situations, in battle?" Abdel Qader responded:

> I don't know how to answer. It is the nature of the human. . . Whatever God has written is going to happen to you . . . Your smile to your brother is considered an act of charity [this is a reference to a Hadith]. . . You should always greet your brothers with a smile and God will reward you for that. This is just my nature. I don't know how to speak much, my education was simple; I am a simple man. . .

Continuing to elicit information about Abdel Qader the person, the interviewer then asked him: "How much do you miss the days of Ramadan before . . . your family, breakfast together . . .?" Abdel Qader replied:

Let me be honest, the days that we lived as a family were good days, but we weren't comfortable and were living in an unjust situation of oppression. The life we want to return to is a life of honour and dignity.[26] We don't want to go back to being slaves to Bashar and his supporters and his regime.

Abdel Qader is placing central importance on the ideas of honour and dignity,[27] in talking about a possible future Syria. The central aim of the fighters is the struggle for the repair of their honour and dignity. The appearance of dignity here is allied by him with ideas of obtaining a just situation for Syrians: specifically, with escaping slavery.

This presents us with a useful insight into his motivations and seems to echo some of the material we have looked at in the previous chapter. The pervasive sense of injustice and not feeling comfortable or at home *in their own country* is something which points to an unfulfilled life for conservative and pious Sunni Muslims in Syria; not unlike the *shawi* and the 'Sunni's left behind' whom we met in the previous chapter.

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[26] He uses both *karama* and *'izz;* I have discussed this elsewhere in the thesis: in Chapter Four. The noun *'izz* can also mean pride but I have translated it as honour, because of the context here. There is a possible connection with the nuance of its use in rural and more traditional communities where the word is used along with *karama* or on its own.

[27] In Arabic the use of nouns together for emphasis is called *taradof*. This means to add a word which complements the other or which acts as a synonym. When this device is over-used, and becomes too much, it is referred to in Arabic in the pejorative: *itn'ab*. I am grateful to Bissane el-Cheikh, a Lebanese writer and journalist, for clarifying the terminology for me, via a Facebook exchange on 20 June 2016. I was aware of *taradof* as a literary device and in my research specifically the complementary noun used with dignity: pride or honour, is sometimes dropped altogether in translations into English.

Abdel Qader's utterances can be considered within a broader Islamist milieu. Although Abdel Qader and his family lived well they were not 'comfortable'. This resonates with the writings of the Islamist thinkers and modernists we met in Chapter Three, and it reflects a desire to go back to a purer way of living as a Muslim and submitting to God. Abdel Qader is articulating a general sense of the absence of the good life, from his perspective. Further on in the interview we are given some more information about what priorities might be in an ideal society and for a comfortable life. Abdel Qader goes on to explain that:

> If someone is imprisoned and is provided with all the luxuries he wants he will not be happy because he will be humiliated. Now we break our fast on the simplest food of onion and bread [on the front lines in Aleppo] and even if we only break our fast on that [food] we are happy and satisfied and free as we are fighting for what we believe in.

It is striking that he talks here of *freedom*, in a situation of some privation and danger. We find reference, in the above quotation, to a state of being free which comes from *within the revolution*, for the fighters on the front line as they break their fast in the holy month of Ramadan. The picture emerging appears to be one of a simple life in which Syrians have a level of freedom which allows them to comfortably practice an everyday Islam. The idea of freedom is one that we encountered in the previous chapter in considering the new kinds of 'activation' of Syrian citizens and a new consciousness. In both exemplary currents there is an idea of being free for the first time, despite the violent put-down of their demonstrations and the dangers of undertaking acts of civil disobedience as well as taking up arms.

Just as we have seen elsewhere, notions of being free are related to an end to humiliations by the state. Abdel Qader is fighting to achieve an end to the 'injustice' and 'oppression' meted out by Bashar and by the system which sustains him in power. He presents the situation on the front line as necessary and as a way to be free from slavery (again we have seen this phrase already, in Chapter Five).

In these quotes from Abdel Qader the idea of being free is one which flows from living a dignified life fulfilled by pursuing what one believes in. Being free, for Abdel Qader, is certainly not about materiality; it is nothing to do with, for example, freedom to choose which consumer goods to buy. Rather, he conceptualises freedom in the nonmaterial, and in a theistic sense. Returning to the video interview (VS1) Abdel Qader seeks to convince viewers watching the programme that:

> No matter how much we sacrifice now, it is worth it to return to the country we want and we don't want to go back to being the slaves of Bashar and his supporters or the regime. No matter how much we sacrifice now it is worth it because we can return to our religion.

Abdel Qader places this sacrifice, and duty, on the shoulders of the Syrian people who need to struggle against the regime. Later on in the interview Abdel Qader states that it is according to God's will that the fighters will remain, together, with 'love and compassion', defiant on the front line. Abdel Qader, it seems clear, was reinforcing the case for continuing the armed struggle so that Syrians could truly be free. Within this dialogue, however, there is a distinctive thread which shows itself and sets this exemplar fighter apart from his intellectual, progressive

(secular) compatriots whom we met in the previous chapter. Here we can see it enunciated by Abdel Qader in his describing liberation as a path to a 'return to religion'.

There is a general sense throughout the interview that Abdel Qader is genuinely reflecting his conservative, pious religious position and suggesting that his community will return to dignity and honour when they are free to return to their religion. This desire for a return to religion reaffirms the analysis — of the seeming wound felt by a segment of Syrian Sunnis as a result of the injustices inflicted by the regime — which I discussed in the previous chapter. In particular I picked out there a reference the Syrian intellectual Yassin Haj Saleh made to a perceived 'piercing of dignity', as inflicted on the Syrian Sunni Muslim community by Hafez al-Asad and the regime, with the discriminatory policies of the Syrian government and state and then the massacre of the Sunni community in Hama in the early 1980s. Implicit in this video (VS1) is the sense of injustice felt by a Syrian Sunni majority whose conservative, pious religious traditions were deemed as primitive and as counter to the state's interests and a threat to its hegemony.

So, in calling for an end to a system of oppression and slavery it seems apparent that Abdel Qader is seeking to represent and reflect a Sunni Muslim consciousness to itself. He is on the one hand an esteemed brigade leader, but on the other hand he is of the people and, as he describes himself, 'simple' (or humble). It seems appropriate to ascribe Abdel Qader's beliefs, those worth fighting for, to a religious sensibility. His beliefs, or his ethical stances, flow from God's will, as we will see elsewhere in this chapter (VS3). As we discussed in Chapter Four,

it is God who bestows dignity and enables freedom[28] to humans on earth, so that they might

act as He wills, and it is thus a duty of believers to struggle for their God-ordained dignity when

it is taken away.

However, there are important and direct political implications in his speech-acts. Having

advanced some of the implicit theistic aspects of Abdel Qader's utterances, we can also

investigate the important political dimensions to the revolutionary ideas which he reflects and

inflects. Abdel Qader inevitably strays from his personal life to talk about what he describes

as the 'criminal regime' of Asad, and to comment on military developments, such as

Hezbollah's advance onto 'our land' to 'enjoy Ramadan' and to destroy the town of al-Qusayr.

Even though he might not use this language, an idea of an alternative political ordering of

society and its resources is present. When asked what his message to viewers was during this

holy month, Abdel Qader responded that he wanted to convey a *Ramadan Mubarak (*happy

Ramadan) to:

> the Islamic *ummah.* I send my greeting to all the Syrian people without any exclusion
>
> with all its variety and they are all our family. We will all be relieved when we get rid
>
> of this criminal regime which has enslaved us.

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[28] Here the first, opening, verse of the Quran, specifically Sayyid Qutb's exegesis of it is very instructive for me in conceiving of this notion of freedom: one which transcends the present and man's "earthly desires" so as to aspire to a "moral and intellectual freedom" which takes into account man's future: judgement day, and so encourages an Islamic belief based on a "well balanced and conscientious humanity and not an egotistic, self-seeking one", in *al-Fatihah* (The Opening), Qutb, S. *fi dhilal al-Quran* (In the shade of the Quran) *Surah* 1, trans. Adil Salahi. This can be compared with conceptions of freedom set out by the Sudanese Muslim intellectual, Taha, M.M. (2000) in Cooper, J; Nettler, R. & Mahmoud, M. *Islam and Modernity: Muslim Intellectuals Respond*, IB Tauris, 109-111.

Then, in this same interview Abdel Qader notably attempts to show concern for those Syrians in "areas controlled by the regime" (who are sometimes considered to be mostly loyal to the regime). In response to the interviewer's last question asking Abdel Qader if the rebels will help to aid the delivery of food and other supplies to a government-held village, he replies "God willing we will stand by the people until they receive what they need".

This is an attempt at negotiating the political context he is in, with an assertion of a commitment to an all-inclusive Syria, which includes the government strongholds. Abdel Qader has attempted in this dialogue to present a narrative which seeks to marry the notion of an Islamic nation with that of a Syrian nation which is for all the Syrian people. Abdel Qader sought to show a face of Syrian unity, between an imagined and expansive Islamic *ummah* and that of a bounded but contested Syrian nation which he claims to recognise, including those Syrians in Asad loyalist areas. But an alternative life and project is not fully articulated, here or elsewhere.

It is, perhaps, an awkward attempt because it hopes also to appeal to the increasingly diverging Islamist brigades whom Abdel Qader was trying to keep unified in the military struggle against Asad in Northern Syria. It is cautious because Abdel Qader is aware of the need to gain and sustain approval from Western powers (mainly the USA) who, indirectly, put pressure on or fully open or close the various taps which supply the limited arms and resources to the brigades. Abdel Qader finishes the interview by saying how he and the fighters will stand by the Syrian people who are all one family until they get what they need.

In this first video we have heard personal reflections from Abdel Qader during the holy month of Ramadan. His locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary speech-acts here — that is,

through his statements about himself and about the revolutionary cause, his promises, and his attempts to mobilise the fighters and others — help us to envisage the context and the wider meaning of the idea of dignity (and adjacent ideas) as it is being used in the idiom of a Syrian armed fighter and commander. We've seen here how the idea of dignity was clarified in relation to notions of honour and how these were closely correlated with and reflective of a community ill at ease with, or uncomfortable with, the life they lived before the revolution. Adjacent to these core ideas we have found the desire for both a metaphysical and a political righteous, just and free existence.

There is another crucial (and, again, related) concept which we have seen present in this video: that of religion, and a return to a religious way of life. Abdel Qader alludes to a humble life lived in piety, in contrast to Bashar and his regime; this is the alternative future which is tested and performed through and in the revolutionary moment for these fighters and believers. Despite the surface-level attention to and performance of religiousity, there is a vital move towards the political which Abdel Qader has made—both in taking up arms and in seeking to reach out way beyond his religious 'constituency'. It was the emergence of the idea of dignity which served both as a clear ideational marker for the absence of justice and as an assertion of the needs for it, a demand for its return.

This constitutes a deep contestation of the Syrian polity and the government. The details had not been thought through, so the potential problematic aspects, as well as the positive potential, of the highlighting of this ideational and political gap are immediate. The struggle for the ideational ground and dominance in the revolution had been, in some ways, neglected in the taking of physical ground. Those who were contesting the dominant ideas of the ruler more

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deliberately and systematically were the writers and intellectuals we met in the previous chapter. But evidently it is not the case that the two currents—leftist progressive and Islamist— were on the same ideational page. I continue to explore these central ideas in the following videos.

IV   Video source two: becoming political[29]

In this section I examine video source two (VS2), a television interview with Abdel Qader conducted by the presenter Hassan Muawad for a current affairs programme called *nuqtat hiwar* (Talking Point), on the Arab news and current affairs channel, al-Arabiya.[30] This exchange is important as the discussion provides us with some insight into how fighters like Abdel Qader conceive of themselves and opens up the important political dimensions of this revolutionary current and the ideas, centred on a core demand for dignity, flowing in it. This video aids in pursuing the ways in which dignity is decontested relationally, and this is pursued with reference to the conservatism of the Syrian Islamist fighters. It enables us to investigate other adjacent and core concepts which help to clarify dignity.

In context of this thesis it is vital here to continue to explore *the move to the political* that Syrian citizens such as Abdel Qader made when they first marched and then took up arms for change. We need to know what kinds of ideas came to the fore in the armed wing of the

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[29] I am grateful to Abu Nina for translating this television interview in full for me. If key concepts are being used I refer to the original Arabic in brackets. See my acknowledgement page re translations.

[30] Refer to Appendix One for full bibliographical information about this video and subsequent video sources.

revolution, what was changing and becoming more central, and how dignity might relate to these other ideas.

Before analysing the raw material it is worth noting that the al-Arabiya[31] channel has had a broadly pro-Syrian revolutionary editorial line and benefits from private investment from members of the Saudi royal family.[32] The segment was billed as 'an exclusive interview with Abdel Qader, leader of liwa al-tawhid in the Syrian Free Army', and it was broadcast and then uploaded onto the revolutionary YouTube channel *Syria4Allnews* on 20 April, 2013. The interview lasted for just over twenty minutes and mainly focused on military strategy, relations between the different Islamist groups and issues around human rights in the liberated areas of Syria. There are a number of pertinent conceptual questions which emerge and these are important for my investigation, albeit sometimes incidental to the main thrust of the interview.

Muawad introduces the interview as a discussion about the rebels and the jihadi fighters in Syria, relations between the groups and whether the jihadists have taken over the revolution, as well as whether or not these fighters in Syria are protecting human rights in the liberated areas in which they operate. This dialogue between the presenter, Muawad, and Abdel Qader gives us a sense of the emerging ideas among the Islamist brigades:

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[31] The channel is owned by MBC and funded by Saudi Arabia. See Sakr, N. (2007) *Arab Television Today*. London: I.B. Tauris.

[32] Though the channel has only elevated certain aspects of it. For example, it is argued that channels such as al-Arabiya gave too much prominence to the armed, Islamist, and jihadi fighters. The politics and editorial decision-making processes behind al-Arabiya are complex and not the subject of this thesis, but suffice to say the channel is offering a particular world view of the Arab revolutions and is in direct competition with al-Jazeera Arabic in Qatar (which also provided sympathetic coverage of most of the Arab revolutions, but especially focused on Syria, after the first few months of 2011).

Muawad:	Mr Abdel Qader, you said that you agree with al-nusra [*jabhat al-nusra* (Victory Front); al-Qaeda-affiliated brigade in Syria] about military affairs, but you disagree with them politically. How do you disagree with them and on what?
Abdel Qader:	To begin with, I am not a politician. I don't have any political experience.
Muawad:	But you [have] said you disagree with them politically. What is the difference?
Abdel Qader:	Maybe we do not agree on their [*jabhat al-nusra's*] vision for the future, but the important thing is that we, Nusra, and other groups are in [military] agreement. Our main goal is to bring the regime down. Once the regime has fallen the political vision will be decided by politicians. For now, we are just military fighters and that is it.

Abdel Qader is claiming to operate outside the political realm. This is a noteworthy conception of the political realm in the Syrian revolutionary context and one which was common among the revolutionary progressive current I examined in the previous chapter. Its roots arguably go back in part to the loss of faith in politics consequent upon the failure of the legatees of the anti-colonial struggle, and especially the profound failure of Baʿthism (that we explored in Chapter 3). Here Abdel Qader is speaking about and setting himself outside a formal political realm where formal politicians represent positions, make decisions, and set out policy and governance issues.

How does this claim relate to Abdel Qader's earlier discussion of the struggle for a return to a life of dignity and honour? As in the previous video, these discussions point to fundamental issues of justice, and therefore, of governance. As we discussed in Chapter Four, the liberated areas were places for alternative systems of governing, through the local councils and civil society organisations which sprang up when the government pulled out. For the Syrian fighters the immediate goal and focus was to topple the Syrian leader and this was the path to honour and dignity. The political work was for the formal opposition negotiators in Istanbul and elsewhere; the decisions would be at the level of the opposition leadership and the Syrian people. There is a natural demarcation of roles within the revolution, as we might expect, but the fighters are the ones on the front line and it is they who are running the liberated areas of Syria. The formal opposition is notably, and problematically, absent in Syria during this period and beyond. Abdel Qader is pressed further on the possible political distinctions between the Islamist groups operating in Syria:

Muawad: Am I accurate in this quote from something you have said once, which is "the aim is to apply justice and the Islamic sharia". This means that you have something in common with Nusra, is that right?

Abdel Qader: Yes, probably. We want a just state, an Islamic state, which is elected and which represents all the rights and considers the rights of minorities. This is what we aim for. However, we won't force, neither us nor nobody else will force the shape and the structure of the state in the future. The people are the ones who will decide the destiny of this state, and the structure of this new state.

The return to dignity and honour is, it seems, adjacent with an idea of a just state of an Islamic nature. In this case the kind of just system alluded to is one abiding by Islamic principles which need to be respected and brought more centrally into the Syrian polity. In this way Syrian Sunni Muslims in the neglected provinces and now at the battle front lines, can live a dignified life. This imperative for a just state is, of course, a rejection of the Asadist government and state system in its entirety. Dignity appeared in the revolution and was asserted by the fighters because they had felt the injustice of the Syrian state response to the demonstrations and the national uprising. Abdel Qader explained this in the interview in response to a question about whether he had used a rifle before the revolution, and if things all happened by chance when the revolution started:

> I can't say by chance, but I have never held a rifle or used one apart from when I was in the army. Before the revolution I used to work as a trader. I was a food trader. We started demonstrating peacefully for seven months, but when we had had enough and after he [the Syrian president] started killing people randomly, including women and children, we were forced to use weapons. This is why we started using weapons. Before that we didn't.

There is a clear narrative and justification, in Abdel Qader's mind, as to the taking up of arms, not as being inevitable but as a necessity given the actual context of government violence. There is an indication of the sense of injustice felt by the demonstrators and by the communities who bore the brunt of the government's security and military response in order to quell the

dissent. The quest for justice is thus a core value within the Syrian armed revolution. The question this poses is what kind of just polity might the fighters' desire?

As I noted in watching the previous video, pious or practicing Muslims such as Abdel Qader wanted to feel comfortable in their homeland and in the practice of their faith. The place and form of Islam in the everyday and in relation to the political realm is being recast in real time by the fighters — but the revolution, as a receptacle for all kinds of ideas, cannot act to constrain or distinguish or prefer some such ideas over others. The political implications of Abdel Qader's desire for a state based on the principles of Islamic law are in potential conflict with his assertions that a future Syria will be inclusive and respect minorities (or those who do not want Sharia law expanded in a future Syrian state).[33]

Within this, and across these potentially competing logics, we can position the concept of dignity as signalling ways of living in a just state, allied with notions of justice and following the religious sensibility of the Syrian fighters, but how exactly might the Syrian people return to dignity without an urgent consideration of such political issues that the revolution has opened up? I think we should hear Abdel Qader is *deliberately* being somewhat ambiguous on the matter. The vagueness reflects the difficulty of his 'positionality': he is aware that diverse Islamist brigades may be watching him; he is not politically experienced; he does not want to come over, himself, as being a politician. He portrays his role in the revolution as that of a fighter undertaking armed jihad—this is what he is trying to maintain and project.

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[33] Some aspects of Islamic law are already implemented in Syria as is the case with other Muslim majority countries, in particular around family and marriage, for example. There is thus much ambiguity and lots of wiggle room for varying conceptions of a state which recognises Islamic law.

However, Abdel Qader is pushed to the political and, as he conceives of it, he does not want to go there. Muawad's questioning concentrates Abdel Qader's attention on some of the challenges which have emerged in the Islamist-controlled liberated areas of Syria, and in particular the targeted surface-to-surface bombing of civilian areas and suicide bombings, as well as rumours of summary executions and massacres. Abdel Qader concedes that:

> There have been individual mistakes. This is a revolution. Some people misbehave, and someone might kill another person. We don't deny this.

For all Abdel Qader's claims of being just a military man, or a fighter, he reflects some of the wider political dimensions and issues being discussed ahead of the assumed fall of Asad (the deadly default assumption of all revolutionaries at this time). He sought to instil a revolutionary culture of hope. He drove home the idea that there were fundamental problems in Syrian society, as we have seen so far, in that there was a significant breach between the state and its social contract with its people. In his responses Abdel Qader is, rather reluctantly, hinting at a reimagining of Syria in which the role of, and relations between, the people and the state changes and in which the role of Islam is deepened on the social and political levels. Abdel Qader's shift to the political, recast here as revolutionary action outside formal politics, is his response to the above-mentioned breach; it is not an inevitable move, nor does it manifest a compulsion in Islam for armed jihad as an end in itself; at least not in a society which properly accommodates and respects the believers.

In pursuing the thread of dignity and investigating its connections in the revolutionary discourse of the Syrian fighters, we have found an Islamist bent which demands that dignity, as belonging to a community of Syrians and an Islamic *Ummah,* be restored. This restoration rests on a conception of a just and Islamic state. This is nothing short of a declaration and demand for a completely reconfigured Syrian polity and system of governance. Although this is not often rendered explicit, we can garner from these video dialogues that dignity had gained centre ground among the ideas of Islamist and Syrian Sunni fighters because of the Islamic logic within which it was being conceived, and the promise for a more religiously-attuned state and society in a post-Asad future.

V   Video source three: armed resistance through jihad (struggle)[34]

For the third video source (VS3) I analyse footage which circulated after Abdel Qader's martyrdom. The video is entitled: 'The last appearance of the martyr Abdel Qader al-Abdel Qader (Hajji Marea) on the 80 battalion Front (in Aleppo region)'.[35] It was uploaded onto a YouTube channel called '*Thaer[36] al-Shamali'* (the northern revolutionary) and is an amateur recording, likely to have been made by a local media activist or supporter of the brigade. As I mentioned earlier, this footage of one of the last recorded moments of Abdel Qader was shared extensively by Syrian media activists and others on Social Networking Sites (SNS) in the

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[34] I am grateful to Abu Nina for translating this video material which contained much material which is unfamiliar to me, including many quotes from and references to Islamic texts such as the Quran and the Hadith. See my acknowledgements page.

[35] Refer to Appendix One for full bibliographical information about this video source and others for this analysis.

[36] This would be properly transliterated at al-thaʿir but I use the name here as it appears on the YouTube channel.

aftermath of his death.[37] It thus clearly resonated with a broader revolutionary spirit and captures what has been perceived of as being the best among the revolutionary fighters. In this section I draw extensively from this video footage, which lasts less than eight minutes, as it is important raw material which captures Abdel Qader with the rebel fighters he commanded. This gives us some insight into the ideas he adhered to and the language of mobilisation and the revolutionary discourse which developed among the fighters on a front line against the Syrian government.

I start here by setting out some of the visual imagery, and audio from the video, of Abdel Qader rallying troops from the 80th battalion on the front line. The video begins with a close range shot of a group of around 8-10 fighters who have been engaged in conversation before the filming started. All of them are wearing various forms of military clothing and they are seated on the ground surrounding Abdel Qader as he speaks to them. There are a few guns in view. We can hear very clearly loud exchanges of gunfire nearby. The footage constantly reminds us where Abdel Qader is – the sporadic gun fire in the near distance, the rebel fighter who strolls, from off-camera, into the group to join the discussion and is urged by Abdel Qader to return to his lookout. Abdel Qader praises the men, using a number of religious invocations, for undertaking armed jihad. Abdel Qader begins by making a joke that his brothers cannot sleep unless there is the sound of gunfire. These men are on one of the major front lines in what has now become known in Syrian revolutionary historiography as 'The Battle for Aleppo'. Abdel Qader asks:

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[37] As I mentioned in the introduction, I monitored a number of SNS after the announcement of Abdel Qader's death took over my own Facebook newsfeed and thus became a significant moment in the revolution. Re the myriad SNS relating to the revolution see: Harkin, Juliette et al (2012)'Deciphering User-Generated Content in Transitional Societies: A Syria Coverage Case Study', Commissioned Report by the Center for Global Communication Studies, Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania, Washington DC: *Internews Center for Innovation and Learning*, Internews Network.

How can we aid God? I always repeat this question. I aid God by following his instructions. The highest level in Islam is jihad for God, and you are *muraabit* [a person who travels to spread Islam] for God. You're defending the honour of Muslims, our religion, land, our honour. You should know how big your reward is.

He uses this to forcefully remind the fighters that jihad is the most important duty in Islam. Although we do not find in this video an explicit mention of dignity, we find a correlative word is employed, the word for honour (ʿirḍ). This is a core idea in the Islamist revolutionary discourse and among more traditional communities with an attachment to the land and to social bonds. As we saw in Chapter Four, honour can be associated with Arab tribal tradition generally and resonates among pious, conservative, Muslims. This sense of honour was one we also met when we looked at the analysis about the beginning of Syria's revolution in Dar'a, in Chapter Four. We have then seen this idea of honour used in association with dignity, as in the first video (VS1). These (dignity, not humiliation, an escape from slavery, honour, pride, respect and self-respect) form part of a cluster of similar concepts which relate to and are clarified in relation to each other. Here we can find an idea of honour which is associated with protecting communities and land. It is expressed in the idiom of a Syrian commander and pious Muslim who has taken up armed jihad.

Appeals to honour and dignity are used both to mobilise fighters and to make moral and metaphysical claims and arguments about the rightness of armed struggle and about man's duty to God. The appeal to religious duty is one which I have discussed in Chapter Four. If dignity

is endowed to Man by God then it is a duty for Men to fight to retain that God-given dignity and to protect their honour in the temporal world. In the Islamist revolutionary discourse ideas of duty and fighting are intimately linked to, and dependent on, a foundational, theistic world view. Pursuing the concept of dignity and recognising it as a core value in the revolution shows, in this instance, the development of a revolutionary culture and practices which draw strength from Islamic precepts.

Equally, Abdel Qader indicates that what we are seeing here is a particular and local form of revolutionary resistance against an oppressor, which takes on an Islamist hue in the language of jihad. What the men are actually doing is fighting together against a dictator. This raises questions as to whether we might consider armed jihad, in this context, to be a means to a temporal end as well as a metaphysical imperative. This has important implications, too, for thinking about the political aspects of and the ideational context for this collective revolutionary practice which privileges armed struggle. Abdel Qader speaks of us forcibly defending *our* religion, *our* land, *our* honour. He explains that the Prophet Mohammed told his followers that it was not possible to equal armed Jihad and that those who do not go into battle must pray and fast during the day until the *mujtahid* is back from fighting. Abdel Qader draws on a Quranic verse to emphasize his argument:

> O ye who believe! If ye will aid [the cause of] God, He will aid you, and plant your feet firmly.[38]

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[38] *Sura* Muhammed, 7, the Quran.

Abdel Qader relates these religious invocations and scripture to the immediate battle situation that the men are in. He offers the men his reading of religious texts. His stature is one of an accomplished and charismatic orator. Abdel Qader explains to his troops:

> A man said to God's Prophet, "I would like to stay at home, in *Marea* or in *Tell Rifaʿa* (towns in Syria) and I don't want to do jihad but will do other things equal to fighting on the [battle] Front at the airport or the Area 80 Front, or the Front in Aleppo". The Prophet said, "There is no such thing. There is nothing equal to jihad". When pushed, the Prophet said, "Even if you fast you cannot equal jihad".

Abdel Qader is seeking to build the morale of his troops by drawing on the *Quran* and *Hadith* and by crafting a careful language which appeals to an everyday Muslim sensibility. He is mobilizing the troops and doing so with constant appeals to Islamic scripture. He reminds the men again about their reward – as much as 700,000 *hosanna* (hosanna being a record kept of good deeds to be accounted for on judgement day) and more. He reminds the fighters to pray and to strive for *istighfar* (forgiveness from God). Then he moves quickly to the specificities of their own reality, on the battleground:

> if you don't have weapons our morale won't be high. In the past, we used to celebrate when we managed to get an RPG weapon. Brothers, may God bless you, do not rely on your weapons, rely on God.

The men all chime in with: *la allah illa allah* (There is only one God). Then Abdel Qader moves on to talk about the Companions of the Prophet and relates to the men stories of local battles faced by the Muslim community of Medina in early Islam. The Battle of Badr is used by Abdel Qader to illustrate how men can obtain victory "even when they are few in number" (*Quran, Sura al-Umran*, 124). Abdel Qader urges his compatriots to ask for help from God, as the Prophet did in the Battle of Badr, which resulted in a thousand angels coming to fight with him (*Quran, Sura al-Atfal*, 12). Abdel Qader reminds his men how the Medina Muslims exclaimed ya Allah! (Oh, God!); "As we say in demonstrations in Syria: ya Allah we only have you to rely on". He goes on to remind the fighters that they are fighting for a nation (Islamic *Ummah*) and for a whole people (Sunni) and that even though Russia and Iran are supporting President Asad victory is not about numbers and advanced tools. Who supports us? Abdel Qader answers his own question: "nobody but God" and that "the whole nation [Islamic or Arab world] let us down".

Recourse to Islamic battles provides some respite from the concrete, immediate and severe difficulties the fighters are facing. It reminds the fighters of their duties to God which, if we link them with the speech-acts examined elsewhere in this chapter, include the protection of the gifts of dignity, and of freedom, which God has bestowed and enabled for Man. This is reinforced in Abdel Qader's message to keep up with the struggle. He urges the fighters on with: "Let us just rely on God, just like we did when we captured Aleppo with little weapons and men". Abdel Qader finishes by urging the men to pray, to do their duty, to do their guard shifts and to not sleep if there are no guards at night. He warns them to avoid gathering and be prepared for clashes at any time. He urges them to report to operations and keep their military phones with them.

As well as a traditional notion of honour, related to the protection of Muslim land and of dignity, there is, very clearly, the idea of armed jihad, undertaken by these fighters, as a particular kind of resistance which resonates with historic instances of struggles against oppression in the Islamic and Arab world. So we find that Abdel Qader is committed to Islamic precepts and their instrumentalisation in mobilising and sustaining an armed resistance to the state. Abdel Qader and his men want to make a free Syria, for the *ummah*, for the Syrian *watan*, perhaps, and feel that their religion compels them onto this path.

There is a tension. Are the fighters merely aiding God as an end in itself, or do they themselves have agency and a worldly goal? It seems that both these threads exist side by side and it is difficult to unpick them in the weave of a revolution and a war in which resources and men are critical to holding ground. Here the temporal world, the concrete instance of war and fighting on a front line against a dictator, has become increasingly intertwined with the metaphysical notion of fighting to retain dignity in God's name and as a duty to God. The latter has become the best perlocutionary means to the former; but it is clear from Abdel Qader's speech-acts that it would be a mistake to analyse his religiosity here as merely an instrument in service of the struggle. It appears natural, unfeigned, impassioned. This is perhaps why he was regarded as an effective leader.

The logic of armed jihad is a core belief for these fighters who have inculcated this Islamic idiom in armed revolution. It is intricately linked to the ideas of honour and dignity. The armed struggle is one with which to strive to retain human dignity which has been eroded by the state. The state, and Syria itself, is thus one of the most deeply contested concepts in this revolution and emerges through the thought practices of the fighters across the videos in this

chapter. In this particular dialogue we saw how the state is notably and necessarily absent. The fighters have bypassed the state, which no longer serves or represents them, and their appeal is directly to God and their loyalty is directly to God and, in the struggle for honour and dignity, directly to the Syrian people and the Muslim *ummah.*

The aim of this analysis has been to point to the main ideational currents flowing through the Islamist current in the revolution, as represented by what was regarded by many as the exemplary actions and practices of one of its most revered commanders and most effective battalions. In the next video I examine some of the reactions and analysis following the martyrdom of Abdel Qader. This final video will help us to get closer still to the ideas flowing in this armed struggle and how they have been reproduced and disseminated as well as inculcated among Syrian activists and supporters of the revolution.

VI   Video source four (VS4): ethics and values in the revolution[39]

The fourth video I select for analysis is: 'A special segment on the martyrdom of the commander Abdel Qader', produced and aired on the Syrian revolutionary television channel, Orient News, on the 18 November 2013, one day after Abdel Qader's death was confirmed.[40] The programme lasts nearly fifty minutes and begins with a news bulletin on events in Syria, followed by a video montage with images and footage of Abdel Qader; it then moves on to a discussion involving guests via Skype in Syria and a studio guest with the Orient presenter in

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[39] I am grateful to Muzna for summarising this interview and for discussing the content with me in order to clarify some of the themes. The translations here are sometimes paraphrased or in summary form.
[40] For full bibliographic information about this video source refer to Appendix One.

the studio in Amman, Jordan. The programme segment I focus on is the analysis and commentary by the guests.

The segment is informative for our purposes because it provides us with perspectives from Syrians who were involved in the revolution, knew and admired Abdel Qader and who worked to cover the activities of, or were familiar with the brigade and its military operations. The interviews are particularly noteworthy as the Syrian commentators start to provide a moral picture of Abdel Qader: they focus on what they describe as his ethics (*akhlaq*) and values (*qiyami*). The video is very insightful as it illustrates the ways in which Syrian media activists worked with the fighters and the brigades and so returns us to the discussion in the previous chapter, and earlier in this one, regarding a common Syrian-ness and unity of purpose, albeit articulated and acted on through different forms of resistance.

I begin here with a quote from one of the studio guests, Islam Abu Shakeer, a writer and journalist, who sums up the values, or principles, which Abdel Qader represented and struggled for and which, more importantly, reflected the wider revolutionary spirit and summed up its aims:

> There are two principles here. Freedom and dignity. Freedom to choose the shape of the country and the shape of political life in the county and how politics is done in line

with your desire and wishes and nothing that is forced from the outside. And dignity also, in ensuring there is everything to live a dignified life.[41]

Once more we find dignity appearing with the notion of freedom as an essential component of life; people must be free to organise and to be active citizens in Syria. As we have seen in the previous chapter(s), dignity is frequently close by when demands of freedom are being made by Syrians. Dignity relates not just to being free to determine together the "shape of the country"; freedom (as opposed to 'slavery') is part of the whole of a dignified life. The kind of life aspired to is that of a 'normal' one for the Syrian people. The implication from the commentary in this video is suggestive of a desire for ordinary Syrians to have more agency; for the pious, humble Syrians to be recognised, over prominent figures or personalities and politicians who claim to represent the Syrian people and for everyday religion, and Islam specifically, to be honoured.

The ideas of dignity and freedom serve to frame this television debate; we can compare Abu Shakeer's thinking with that of Abu Fares, another of the guests on the programme. Abu Fares was present in the hospital in Turkey when Abdel Qader died and for this programme he is being interviewed via Skype from Aleppo, Syria. As a prominent media activist[42] Abu Fares accompanied the fighters and reported on events from Aleppo. His work is typical of, and part of, a well-established network of citizen journalists' media centres established in Aleppo and across Syria in the first months of the revolution. Abu Fares is emotional in his eulogising of Abdel Qader when asked about Abdel Qader the human being, he says:

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[41] The audio of the last sentence of this quote from the video interview is not clear so I have paraphrased this, with help from Muzna (see my acknowledgements page).

[42] He is introduced as a *nashaat 'ilaami* by the Orient presenter.

He chose to raise arms when he saw the injustices of the Asad regime against the people. [H]e taught us many lessons. He was like an intellectual school for us and his ideological teaching should be spread around Syria.[43]

These striking words, suggesting a role for Abdel Qader almost parallel to that which we saw Saleh occupying in the previous chapter, came a day after Abdel Qader's death and will have been broadcast via satellite on the Orient channel to audiences in Syria and across the Arab region as well as shared online. The mood is one of high emotion in these conversations about Abdel Qader. As someone who worked closely with the fighters to capture the battles and life in Aleppo for a wider audience, Abu Fares was keen to point out Abdel Qader's exemplary role in the revolution. He was looked up to and was like a *muʿallim* (teacher) for those in the revolution.

Alongside Abu Fares's heartfelt dedication to *al-batl* (the hero), Abu Shakeer reflects, too, on Abdel Qader the man, but is also at pains to emphasise that:

The revolution has introduced to us leaders like Yasser Aboud, Yusef al-Jader[44] and Abdel Qader . . . now they are gone, unfortunately, but that does not mean that their values do not remain. The people who we will discover will follow the same ethical path of Syrian patriotism (wataniya), as exemplified by Abdel Qader.

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[43] These comments are made during a Skype call and the audio is not very clear.
[44] Al-Jader was a tank commander who defected from the Syrian army when he was instructed to fire on demonstrators in a village in Lattakia. His story is related by Yassin-Kassab, R. & al-Shami, L. 2016. op cit., 98-99.

Abu Shakeer goes on in the interview to elaborate and reflect further on Abdel Qader and what he stood for in the revolution. In doing so he remarks how it is people like Abdel Qader who the Syrian government fears the most, more so than the extremists, because he was a real national leader dedicated to al-*mashruʿa al-watani* (the national project). Through his analysis Abu Shakeer presents the revolution as a national project for Syria. We can and to some extent should contrast this with the language used by some activists and by Abdel Qader himself elsewhere in this chapter – in which there is some ambiguity in the switch between using Syrian nation (watan) and the ummah (which could be taken to mean an Arabic nation or an Islamic nation when there is no qualifying adjective with it).

There is also some tension during the discussion, in particular from Abu Shakeer, about not placing undue focus on Abdel Qader as an individual. The guests on the programme constantly moderated the tone of the presenter, who was intent on lionising Abdel Qader as unique or exceptional. Abu Shakeer attended to this issue at other times during the interview:

> As Syria gave birth to Abdel Qader it too gave birth to people like him who are still working. I just want to highlight an important point. If we look at the reaction to his death we can see that everyone is sad for his death, not only as a man, as many did not know him personally; we are mourning the values of what he represented as a leader. This sense of values which other people claim have been diluted [in the revolution]. This is not true. What proves that the spirit of the revolution and the value and path of the revolution is still the right path is the case of this collective sadness about Abdel Qader and people like him who have died. . . Syrians are still Syrians and still believe

in their nation and there are thousands of leaders who could step up and be like Abdel Qader.[45]

These comments reflect an important dimension and an historical tradition of Arab unity and perhaps of socialism in which socialist ideas of a collective, of an Arab people, of a Syrian *watan* or *ummah*, are privileged over those which give undue focus to the individual in society. This dimension is found in both the progressive and the Islamist currents I deal with in this research study. Abu Shakeer is at pains to emphasise the collective nature of the struggle and the potential of the Syrian people to keep on representing the values and beliefs of the revolution. His remarks are in this sense very hopeful, and part of an ongoing shared political project.

Then the presenter brings in another guest who is also a media activist, Abu Hassan. During the interview he relates how Abdel Qader was known by Syrians and by the whole Islamic world or nation, and he remarks, along somewhat similar lines to Abu Shakeer, that there will be many others like him to continue the *ummah islamiyyah* project [of liberation]. This sense of Abdel Qader as part of a shared, living project that is not confined to a short temporal duration is an important aspect of what emerges from these interviews. The guests each refer, through their various contributions during the interview, to the values and ethics that they felt Abdel Qader represented. Abu Hassan describes how Abdel Qader was humble, *of the people,* and ate, prayed, and fought *with the soldiers*. His struggle goes on, without him, with and through them.

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[45] This is paraphrased from the original video interview with the help of Muzna; see my acknowledgments page.

Abu Shakeer suggests that maybe Abdel Qader was disappointed with the formal Syrian opposition, the politicians in Istanbul, because they were not close to the people in Syria (the formal opposition has its base in Turkey). Abu Shakeer remarks that Abdel Qader was a good character and says that he did not have any political agenda; he wanted only to embrace the national cause and his reputation was not tarnished, the implication being that some others' have been.

Abu Hassan mentions how leaders like Abdel Qader are just "normal Syrian citizens" and that Abdel Qader was normal [he was not a vain leader] and this is why he was loved before the revolution for the same qualities. This sense of a 'normal' Syrian is also something which the studio guest Abu Shakeer suggests distinguished Abdel Qader from the extremists:

> Abdel Qader and people like him enjoy a natural kind of religiousness. It is common between all of us. This is the nature of Syrian society: Christians and Muslims are religious, we cannot escape the fact . . . we are religious but it is natural and normal and one [sect] does not cancel the other out [prefer]. They perceive of and honour the rights of others . . . this is the path of Abdel Qader and what he advocated.

Abu Shakeer was here attempting to present a Syrian perspective and to delineate a distinctive Syrian people who are ordinary, and have a natural religious nature. In doing so he was highlighting that Syrians (can and do) honour one another and respect difference across the religious groups in Syria. There is a suggestion of a necessary dynamic of mutuality and of

respect, which, as we found in Chapter Four, importantly works with the concept of dignity and, inter-relationally, connects one with other humans and with the external world. Abu Shakeer uses this explanation to distinguish the Syrian fighters from what he refers to as the more extremist fighters, particularly, he argues, those who are foreign fighters and have an extreme discourse and a pre-formed project of the shape of Syria and how it 'must' look after Asad falls. Abu Shakeer emphasises that Abdel Qader left such decisions to the Syrians and how this chimed with "the values of the Syrian people".

The values and ethics of the Syrian revolution, in its culture and practices, cohere here especially around the core principles of dignity and freedom. In this video discussion about Abdel Qader we have found it stated that Syrians were struggling for a dignity which could be honoured by freedom, in a political system which enabled active citizen participation. The analysis and commentary about Abdel Qader provide the contours of a Syrian popular sovereignty which I discussed in the previous chapter. As well as the attention paid to the normal religious character of many Syrians, there is also mention of the 'national project' and of the liberation of Syria from Asad's rule. There is an attempt by the activists to set Abdel Qader apart from the more extremist Islamists and the banditry which has come to characterise the revolution in some parts of the liberated areas in Syria. The values of Syrians are presented as being that of a nation who yearn for an inclusive Syria which, as Abu Shakeer claimed, ". . . honour the rights of others . . ." Still, even within this exchange of views on Abdel Qader the man, and on his politics and his religious nature, there is a tension and perhaps a contradiction which echoes the balancing act that Abdel Qader tried so precariously to perform when he was alive – to assuage his different publics and the variegated revolutionary actors inside Syria while avoiding fanning any sectarian discourses.

With some of the Aleppo media activists the idea of the Islamic *ummah* still holds sway as we find in their eulogising of Abdel Qader. This is possibly because the ideas underpinning the revolution are held in common. There is a unity of purpose among the fighters, the media activists, and the 'progressive' intellectuals (whom we met in the previous chapter), about revolutionary ends. There is also though, as we have started to unpick in this chapter, internal disagreement about the best means and about the encroachment of the Islamists across the revolutionary landscape.

This tension is perhaps indicated in a more prescient voice from a member of the Orient audience who writes a message on the official Facebook page, which is read out by the presenter during the programme, about Abdel Qader's death: "After the death of Abdel Qader a part of Syrian dignity went with him". The Battle of Aleppo was to be lost to both the Syrian government and to the nihilistic forces of ISIS. Thus, the Syrian fighters had not managed, either through Abdel Qader's brigade or in the ever-increasing new military formations, to return the Syrian people to dignity and to free them.

VII   Conclusion

As I had indicated in the introduction, the 'raw material' for an analysis of this brigade was relatively scarce compared to the rich publication of the thought-practices of the first exemplar study and progressive trend in the revolution. However, and for both of the exemplar cases, I had wanted to give space to and try to allow the ideas in the utterances and speech-acts to

breathe and speak for themselves, to some extent. Hence why I choose to try to go deeply into just two revolutionary currents and not to gather multiple sources which might also reflect similar ideational patterns in the revolution.

There is, of course, the attendant concern not to over-analyse and to revert to a textual analysis of a particular dialogue or article. I have tried to synthesise and to embed the ideas we found in these two exemplars within the wider political context: not just that of revolution but also to reflect the Syrian and local cultural and logical constraints and issues where this is possible. It is thus important to reiterate that I have *not* set out here to analysis words in a text or to conduct a discourse analysis (though this has its uses and there is some overlap with my method). Rather I have been analysing and interpreting a wider context and web of meaning: that is the ideas, patterns, and the broader ideational implications for the thought-practices as situated by these revolutionary agents.

These two differing currents in Syria's revolution gave me a valuable point of access for my investigation and interpretation of the idea of *karama*. Using the idea of karama as an entry point seems to have provided a vision of these two trends which exhibit strikingly similar thoughts and ideas. There is the common project of Syria, the assertion of and demand for a dignified Syrian life, and the attendant ideational features of such a life, including that of a being free and living in a just State and adhering to principle of equality for all. This is the ideal sense of the revolutionary dignity when we trace the idea and pick out its relational concepts and see what it resides in close adjacency with.

However, as Connolly already alerted us to, such concepts of dignity are bound to contain an internal complexity and to take on differing hues depending on differing contexts and interactions in the social world. Although we have been able to follow the threads of dignity and see the ways in which it has been decontested, there are layers of political implications which would require further inquiry. So, for example, we have seen in many examples now that the idea of freedom helps to clarify what dignity is for the Syrian revolutionaries. We were alerted to the ways in which the humiliations and injustices of Asadism had breached basic civil norms and torn at the very social fabric of Syrian society. But what kind of freedom might be envisaged and how might a just society be ordered? The contestation is at this level: the way that Islamic precepts and religious sensibilities are dealt with; the kinds of social and familial freedoms that the progressive liberals will guard and retain, and the manner of authority and nature of the polity vis-a-vis these social constraints and priorities.

However, the aim of these two final chapters has been to start to pick out and pursue the thread of dignity and to see where it takes us. In my examination of dignity explored through Syria's armed and Islamist fighters there was situated an explicit commitment and justification for armed jihad: a resistance against tyranny and the desire for a happy life lived in dignity. This dignified life was one in which, for these pious Muslims at least, they were free and respected rather than vilified within a modernist state project. But this seemingly religious and traditional sense of dignity and honour also contains clear political implications for these fighters and for Syria; despite Abdel Qader's protestations to the contrary. There is, perhaps, nothing more political than taking up arms to effect a change in society.

But the problem starting to assert itself here, in an investigation of the dignity of the fighters, is that the distinctions made between the religious and the political have become blurred. Partly this is because there is, of course, a political dimension in religion practiced in a secularising society, but importantly because the appeal to Allah permeates the discourse of the fighters— in the speech-acts of Abdel Qader, in the revolutionary culture among the fighters and in the ways in which religious belief comes to the fore and becomes the only thing the men feel they can rely on. In the shifting sands of war the social and political context of dignity is constantly on the move—the more violence and extreme the conditions the further the assertion of dignity and the fight for it moves into a metaphysical realm. It is only here, perhaps, that the fighters can safeguard the brotherly, Syrian, dignity which they first took up arms to fight for.

Conclusion

In my conclusion I aim to draw out the main themes from my findings and to briefly speculate on the wider implications of and future possibilities for my research. This thesis set out to address my main research question: what were the uses and meanings of the concept of dignity in Syria's revolution?

I achieved this by situating an investigation of *karama* within its diachronic—historical—and ideational context. I analysed the idea of dignity as it emerged in two differing revolutionary currents and I showed how dignity was decontested in relation to other priorities and virtues in the thought-practices of Syria's revolutionary agents. The potency of the idea of *karama* weaved a wider web and structure of meaning which was clarified in relation to resistance and the struggle for freedom and equality. Dignity's release from its ideational margins was a harbinger of the imminent and urgent resistance forming to protest the state's long indifference as to the "absences, erasures, demands and lacunae" building up in the Syrian polity and society.[1] Dignity signified the history that could have been and was articulated, and then activated, as a virtue held dear by the Syrian people in Syria's 2011 revolution.

Syrian revolutionaries were both interrupting historical convention, assumed inherent in the 'burden of history', and also refashioning ideas from it. This attempt in the "making and remaking of the past, the making and remaking of the future"[2] inaugurated the deep political

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[1] Cited in Norton (2010), op cit. Drawing on Spivak, G. (1988) 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in C. Nelson & Grossberg, L. eds. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Champaign IL: University of Illinois Press.
[2] Norton (2010) op cit., 340.

excavations Syrians have undertaken in their revolution. They pursued an alternative history-in-the-making which was necessarily non-linear—the messy, non-sequential processes within which conceptual change (and in this context, political change) takes place and which, in ideal form, would free them from the clutches of authoritarian power.[3] The imagined future would usher in a new ethos and *civic* republican logic (in any number of possible secular and/or Islamist variants) in which the Syrian people are centre and sovereign and thus reject, as illegitimate, the state in its current repressive structure and functions. The speedy entrance of *karama,* from Syria's ideological margins, constituted a form of revolutionary rupture and praxis, evident from the first demonstrations and actions of Syrians in 2011.

To explore the function of dignity, in the revolutionary interregnum, in service of this imagined future, I reviewed the most influential contributions in the literatures which dealt with theories of revolution and with ideas, and ideology, in revolutions. I found that there had been some productive developments in the study of revolution, which gave voice to people in revolutions and sought to factor them into their analyses. However, I concluded that there remained an influential underlying epistemological commitment to the definition-causation-outcomes nexus on revolutions that have occurred in history. The Syrian revolution provided new opportunities for researchers to investigate modern revolutions. Importantly, once again, people and their ideas were on the move and within this moment dignity gathered pace.

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[3] See Zoubi, O. (2016) 'The legend of the flood: beginning and end of the revolution', published online: alhumhuriyeh.net, May 12.

How might researchers engage with and analyse these significant political and ideational moves, with Syrians at the centre and claiming their 'dignity revolution'? In Chapter Two I pursued productive avenues for a research methodology within a sub-field of interpretive political theory concerned with the critical study of political ideologies and contested concepts. I showed how this sub-field gives serious attention to 'ideas in the wild', in the beliefs, utterances and speech-acts of people in the everyday and beyond the realm of or in contention with state-centric, narrowly-conceived 'formal' politics. Due importance is placed on meaning as, to a significant degree, contingent; and, on a particular concept's historic and political situatedness. So rather than seek to pin down a unitary definition of dignity I instead clarified the idea in its usages and functions; and, relationally with other organising ideas. In short I did not seek to offer a fixed or unitary definition of dignity but 'thought' dignity through an interpretive analysis and as constituting a complex structure of meaning-in-use.

This research thus opens out to possible future avenues of exploration, not least in tracing some of the complex and interweaving threads of dignity in use, of its related ideas and how they play out in differing contexts. This could productively include analysis of the social (class, tribe) and the gendered implications for dignity.

Research findings

In this thesis I have shown and argued that the idea of *karama* was central in and to the revolutionary ethos in Syria. Having analysed the western tradition of dignity I found that its foundational and highly individual conceptions of dignity are, in some important ways, starkly different to the colonial and revolutionary context we examined. In the colonies dignity was articulated in a radically 'Fanonian' way which rejected colonial rule. The felt

alienation by the colonised peoples, and the response of a **dignity in resistance**, is transported to and recast in a different frame in Syria in 2011: tyranny at home, rather than from foreign lands.

My investigation into dignity was conducted in a 'live' revolution (and ensuing conflict). In my exemplar studies I showed how dignity appeared in the revolution as a fundamental '**belief challenge'** to the Syrian state and to tyranny (as in history). The concept emerged from an ideational periphery from where it had been long neglected and pushed to the margins—an historical promise in the colonial struggle deemed as won.

In the Syrian revolution dignity signified that the ideas struggled for and desired by the people remained to be achieved. There was a vast **ideational lacuna** between the idea(l)s held by the Syrian people and the state which humiliated them. The gulf between the ideational claims of the Syrian state Ba'thism—for unity, freedom, socialism—and parallel unfulfilled liberatory and collective desires of the people created space for new political imaginaries to emerge when the Arab revolutions started to bear fruit.

The appearance of dignity, in the beginnings of the revolution, sheds light on a new emerging Syrian revolutionary subject: that of a **dignified Syrian people**. In particular the dignity revolution asserts its own logic of resistance and the virtue of resisting resides, in the Syrian villages, towns, and cities, with the people active and participating in it. The idea of dignity exemplifies a deep sense of estrangement felt by a majority of Syrians who were treated as outsiders by the state and authorities. Dignity represented the urge for change and for an end to tyranny. Within this frame, the force of and trajectory of dignity is clarified.

The path towards this Syrian dignity requires a complete recasting of society and a recognition of the **equal dignity** of all of Syria's citizens. In particular, the revolution reflected the grievances of the *Shawi*, marginalised and humiliated by the authorities. One conception of the Syrian people is based on the revolutionary idea that that the Islamic and Muslim Ummah should be respected and that pious and religious Muslims in Syria should feel free. Somewhat similarly, Syrian revolutionaries wrote about and spoke of the urge to be free from slavery under Bashar al-Asad and to feel and be free. A dignified Syrian life, then, is one lived in freedom.

Closely tied to the desire for a free and equal society was the idea of and importance of Syrian **unity** in the ways it was articulated and felt in common by Syrians participating in the revolution. These ideas were at the very core of the the Arab Baʿth movement in its formative years. With good reason. As we saw, in the unequal society and policies under Asad rule divisions undermined the beliefs which Syrians adhered to: not least of all the very idea of 'Syria' and being Syrian. Unity seems impossible for now under polarising conditions of war, but will remain and be reconfigured in the future. The writings of Syrian intellectuals has shown its potential but the divisive frontline have increasingly absented it too.

Today as Syria, with its war economy, and deeply polarised and traumatised publics, lurches further towards even more extreme and chauvinistic forms of secularism[4] and goes as far as inviting fascistic tendencies into its ideological parlour, the importance of greater attention to the complexities of and the range of ideas which go to make up our ideological world

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[4] For an example of which see the Syrian-directed and government supported film: *intithar al khareef* (Waiting for the Fall) directed by Rehab Ayoub (2014).

takes on new and increasing urgency. This means, drawing from Freeden, considering the whole spectrum of ideas in their ideological patterns—the appraisive ones we hope and strive for as well as the ones which we doubt or which repulse us. Crucial to this endeavour is to recover the black box of ideological pretenders and to really attempt to open it and to 'see' its contents; what is actually happening so that the lessons we draw and the things we learn are based on actual real ideas in use and not on the artistry of embedded and assumed patterns of discourse, official or otherwise.

The two exemplar studies I showcased are both concerned with pursuing ideas and practices in unity of cause for the revolution. As already mentioned, their ideas cohered in significant ways: the revolution for dignity and to gain a dignified life obtained through a just system made up of the Syrian *ummah* or *watan*. An imaginary in which all Syrians enjoy freedoms and are treated equally and with respect. But, *both* currents had the potential to move towards the extremes and to prioritise ideas which polarised or estranged the other.

Further avenues of inquiry

Future directions and research on Syria must necessarily overcome the snap reaction to dismiss politics and the political realm based on the failure of or rather the decimation of the ideals of the Arab Baʿth project in Syria. It is commonplace to dismiss the defunct ideology of the Syrian Baʿth party in power under Asad. It is axiomatic. But, as he remains in 'power' we must ask more questions about Asad's ruling ideology, organised and closely gathering particular configurations of 'modernism', 'secularism', and 'security' underpinned by and enacted with adjacent mechanisms such as violence, fear, and coerced consent. As we have seen in the analysis of intellectuals like Saleh, there is no place for the actual 'practice' of the 'mosaic' in this Asadism. The exclusionary nature of the ideology is clarified in relation

to the necessity to privilege and to practice the violent control of a people. Thus what is in place in these remnants of Syria is a forced and long lost legitimacy.

The ideological furniture of Baʿthism, worn and long misused, together with its established 'logical' placement of resistance, is radically and irrevocably unseated. The uprising immediately, and necessarily, tears at the very ideological fabric of Asadism and begins to sever the ideational threads of the established order. The implication of this for the ruling elite became immediately clear: as dangerous to the desired status quo and a threat to the foundations of Asad's 'modernist' and 'secular' rule. The revolution was impatient to sweep out the old, perhaps repairing and recycling that which was desirable but never functioned properly; such as ideas of unity and of being Syrian. Aside from the obvious, and anomalous, encroachment of ISIS in Syria's failed state conditions: what kind of Asadism will we see in the future, with or without Bashar at the helm?

Equally, a morphological analysis of ideologies would be a useful tool for analysis of the forming or consolidating ideas in the conflict, for example the Syrian Kurdish project in the north of Syria, the tribes and brigades in the south of Syria, and the formal oppositions formed in the revolution, in exile and in Syria. The so-called loyalist areas controlled by the government and army are not immune to this tide of change. A new culture of demonstrating when wrongs are done has already taken hold. What kinds of beliefs have taken hold in these areas and might we still find common purpose in a possible socially and geographically cohesive future. In other words, what has happened to the concept of 'Syria' and to what extent might it hold and transform? The detailed and complex micro-politics of these localised developments have been outside the scope of this study but my research approach

provides productive ways in which to seek to get closer to ideas in times of flux, rather than wait for expected outcomes so as to pick at the historical artefacts.

Finally, this study only begins the process of learning more about Syrian political thought and disseminating ideas and practices from the texts and utterances of Syrian (informal) political agents. My necessarily partial and provisional exploration of the Syrian revolution through the lens of the idea of dignity has enabled us to actually see the important revolutionary processes and actions—instances which, I have argued in this thesis, would be absented in much conventional study of revolutions. Syria's 2011 revolution must have its place among the modern revolutions, despite the devastating curtailment of it and the all-out war which ensued.

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Appendix

Arabic Source Material: Ideational Exemplars

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Chapter Five: *al-jumhuriya* website

Article One

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