Remembering anarchism in the Arab Spring in digital media: Omar Aziz and the Syrian local councils

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Content

A digital appendix including further data and tables is archived seperately from this printed edition of the dissertation.

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Abbreviations

ACU	Assistance Coordination Unit
AIA	Anarchy in Action (Wiki)
BbS	Bordered by Silence (Blog)
FSA	Free Syrian Army
GIK	Gruppe Internationaler Kommunisten
HD	Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
IDP	Internally Displaced Person(s)
INGO	International NGO
LAC	Local Administration Council
LACU	Local Administration Councils Unit
LCC	Local Coordination Committees
MEW	Marx-Engels-Werke
NC	National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces
NCB	The National Coordination Bureau for the Forces of Democratic Change
NES	Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NPA	Norwegian People's Aid
PKK	Partia Karkaren Kurdistan (engl.: Kurdistan Workers' Party)
RFSAN	Regional Food Security Analysis Network
SFF	Syria Freedom Forever (Blog)
SIG	Syrian Interim Government
SNC	Syrian National Council
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SRCU	The Syrian Revolution Coordinators Union
SRGC	Syrian Revolution General Commission
Tahrir-ICN	Tahrir International Collective Network
TAL	The Anarchist Library

1. Introduction: Remembering anarchism in the Arab Spring in digital media – Omar Aziz and the Syrian local councils

We are no less than the Paris commune workers: they resisted for 70 days and we are still going on for a year and a half. (Omar Aziz 2012; quoted from Al-Shami 2021)

It was too easy to not give a shit about this revolution, because: 'Too difficult to understand' and 'Islamist, not revolutionary', or 'It's a civil war, forget about it'. (X. [Syrian anarchist] 2016, translation A.W.)

Anarchism in the Arab world and its articulations in digital media were the starting point for my dissertation eight years ago. The Arab Spring uprisings have provided a scene in which anarchists in the region made themselves visible transnationally, especially through digital media. An interview with Egyptian anarchists was published here, an anarchist blog in Arabic language emerged there and Facebook groups with references to an anarchist repertoire of theory, practice and history proliferated. I took on to deal with these articulations in digital media in terms of the self-mediation practices of Arab anarchists. However, the more I scrolled through the timelines, the more I was led to the conclusion that an anarchist movement in the Arab world is near to non-existent and many instances of anarchist articulations have been transient. This is not to downplay the significance of those who have held anarchist thought and practice in high esteem - especially against a strong authoritarian leftist tradition in the region (not to mention state repression). Yet, just when I began to feel disheartened by my inability to make enough sense of the topic to fill the pages of a dissertation in a meaningful way, I realized that a council movement in Syria has gone largely unnoticed in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. In addition to well-known council-based self-administration project in North and East Syria led by the Kurdish PKK, another large-scale experiment of local councils had emerged in Syria from 2012 onwards. No circled 'As' were sprayed and no red-black flags were waved, and it was not about spectacular forms of direct action. Rather, experiments in self-government spread throughout Syria in the form of local councils. One eminent figure in the Syrian local council movement was Omar Aziz, an anarchist intellectual in his 60s, enthusiastic about building up democratic self-government that would lead to a form of collective autonomy and that would create new relationships among people based on cooperation and shared learning processes. Next to initiating several local councils right in the early phase of their emergence, he conceptualized them in his "Discussion Papers" (Aziz 2011/12) that circulated clandestinely among revolutionaries. He was less a

leader than an organic intellectual in Gramsci's terms: a "shahid min shuhada""[1] rather than an iconic figure. His anarchism leanings have been fruitfully used by memory workers to 'claim' the Syrian uprising from a distinctly anarchist perspective, but, as this dissertation will explore, his conceptualization of councils holds major potential contributions to the broader field of council theory.

Whereas the local councils and their radical potential have largely evaporated (for now), what is at stake one decade after their emergence is their remembrance: whether the local councils will be remembered as decisive characteristic of the uprising and how they will be remembered has consequences for the overall understanding of the Syrian Revolution, particularly so from a leftist perspective. From the latter, the question is whether the Syrian council movement (and hence more generally the Syrian revolution) will be recognized as part of a tradition of struggles that offer valuable insights and lessons for future possibilities of social transformations. From an anarchist perspective, it is not the first time that the writing of history must be accomplished by anarchists themselves.

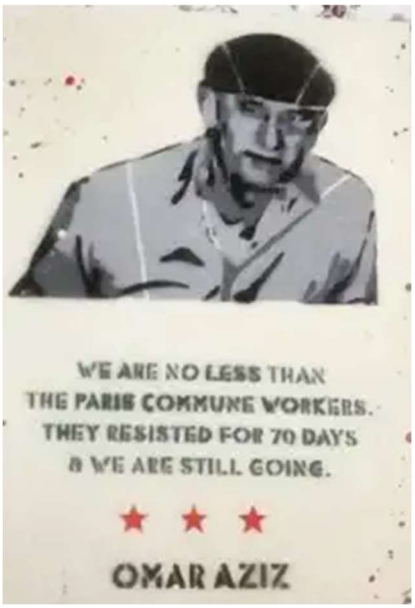
The dissertation engages with the remembrance of the Syrian revolution, focusing on the local councils, from several angles. First, it is important to understand the relevance of memory in the context of the Syrian uprising and the Arab Spring generally. The way in which the Western left has dealt with the Syrian uprising can be summarized as 'adding insult to injury' – to the injury of a breathtaking level of repression and atrocity against Syrians comes the insult of ignorance, erasure and skepticism: "unlike the initial celebrations after toppling the pro-Western Tunisian and Egyptian presidents (2011), the uprisings in Syria were met from the get-go by suspicious apprehension or support of the regime by certain quarters of the left" (Bardawil 2019, 176). Eventually, the narrative of the "civil war" became the dominant lens through which Syria was looked at, thereby invisibilizing agency, achievements and potentials. The emancipatory character of the Syrian revolution that is undeniable for large parts of that revolution and the agency of people are "actively erased when we speak only of civil war. Such an erasure, it should be noted, is not merely (or never only) discursive or symbolic; quite significantly, it helps reproduce these actors' marginalization from the current political process and perhaps also any future settlement" (Attrache 2016). From a leftist perspective, this situation poses a significant obstacle to the formation of a collective *memory* of the emancipatory projects that existed in Syria, even if only for a short period of time, and consequently may inhibit learning processes for leftist theory and practice concerned with revolutionary transformation. Syrian intellectual Yassin Al-Haj Saleh repeatedly articulated a deep frustration over the Western left's failure to apprehend the Syrian uprising: "Rarely have I found a useful piece of information or a genuinely creative idea in their analyses. My impression about this curious situation is that they simply do not see us." ("Syria and the Left" 2015) Hence, this dissertation approaches remembrance also on a meta-level, because it seeks to make a contribution to the struggle against erasure, modestly, from within academia. It does so by proposing neither "nostalgic remembrance" nor "tragic lamentation" (Al-Haj Saleh 2021), but by highlighting agency and achievements while critically assessing the experiences of and perspectives on councils.

The underlying motivation in this undertaking is to better understand processes and possibilities of revolutionary transformation and its obstacles in order to inform future debates and experiences. Looking at the local councils in Syria more thoroughly reveals interesting and complex dynamics that really should be considered by those dealing with council theory: it complicates simplified assumptions, raises questions that were unseen and highlights crucial points that are underestimated. In its exploration of remembrance within the framework of "claiming memory", the dissertation ultimately strives to assess

[1] "One martyr among others" as Sami Al-Kayial has phrased it (interview, February 2019). The word 'martyr' has no religious connotation here, but is frequently used with a secular, 'political' connotation for those who have died for the cause of the revolution.

the extent to which the Syrian local council movement can be understood as a component of a libertarian leftist revolutionary 'tradition'. Omar Aziz provided a symbolic anchor with which we can easily start investigating such possibilities by comparing Syria with the Paris Commune of 1871. Given the fact that the Paris Commune is viewed by many as the "archetype" of council revolutions (Azzellini 2018) and has remained an iconic reference point for anarchists and libertarian communists ever since, such a comparison raises the stakes for apprehending the local council movement in Syria. To be clear, this is not to suggest that the Syrian revolution was an anarchist one, but rather to acknowledge and understand the astonishing momentum that it did have especially against a background in which anarchism has been (and remains) next to irrelevant in Syria.

Figure 1: Stencil of Omar Aziz



Note: Source: Al-Shami (2021).

Investigating the local councils – in their operations on the ground in Syria over the years, in their conceptualization by Aziz, and in their theoretical dimensions– implies a distinct perspective on the meaning of 'democracy': I take it as a basic premise that representative democracy is to be viewed as only one form of democracy, and that it is desirable to replace this 'minimal' democracy by an alternative, deeper or broader type of democracy. Council democracy is such an alternative, which, consequently, "has been a focal point for critics of liberal democracy, parliamentarianism, representation, state communism, and bureaucracy and has repeatedly been interpreted as the democratic kernel of socialism" (Popp-Madsen 2020, 56) or whatever one wants to call an alternative social order. Ever since the Paris Commune in 1871, which some view as the "archetype" of council revolutions (Azzellini 2018), councils have been at the core of anarchist, libertarian communist conceptions of social transformation: both as an organizational tool within a revolutionary transformation and as an organizational anticipation of an alternative, democratic society beyond representative democracy, political parties and the state.

Since memory is always necessarily 'mediated' in one way or another, it is obvious that the construction of memory regarding the local council movement must (also) be understood through reconstructing its mediation. This is especially so because of the scope of this dissertation that wants to understand how such a remembrance has been emerging transnationally among (Western) anarchists that have not had direct access to that experience. This transnational setting raises the question as to how far especially *digital* media have contributed or not to the recognition and appropriation of the Syrian revolution as part of a history of anarchist revolutions. From such a perspective of communication and media studies, digital media are explored in this dissertation as a possible affordance structure that would potentially back (or limit) the creation of a leftist remembrance: Aziz' discussion papers in which he conceptualized the local councils were not published until 2013 after his death, merely on a private Facebook page. This conceptualization of the councils including their radical potential could have easily been forgotten and overridden by the predominant narratives of the Syrian uprising. Immediately after Aziz' death, a small number of bloggers and activist journalists sought to raise awareness of the Syrian uprising, the local councils and Omar Aziz. Since then, memory workers who have assumed different roles and who have engaged in different mnemonic practices have been contributing to such a leftist remembrance by circulating, archiving and claiming memory in digital media.

Against this background, the central question of this dissertation revolves around examining how the Syrian uprising, with a particular emphasis on the local councils, has been commemorated and interpreted from a leftist, specifically anarchist, perspective through digital media. The scope of this dissertation is twofold: on the one hand, it seeks to understand the way in which the local councils in Syria and Omar Aziz have been dealt with from a leftist perspective in and through digital media. This is the 'how' of remembrance: who has taken on this task, in which spaces within digital media and how? What were the temporal dynamics within this first decade, in general, and with regards to the three different practices of archiving, circulating and claiming memory? How have specific technologies enabled or limited the specific practices of actors? Which were the discursive strategies used by memory workers to 'claim' memory? The 'how' of remembrance in digital media is investigated in a procedure rather typical for communication and media studies, which includes the three steps of 1) revising the theory of 'media and memory' (chapter four) 2) explaining the methods for the empirical analysis (chapter five) and 3) interpreting the data (chapter six).The research design is characterized, first, by its multi-platform approach and, second, by its multi-method-approach. A multi-platform approach is necessary, because mnemonic content has been shown to arise not from a single platform (such as Facebook, blogs, Twitter), but from "digital networks of mnemonic content", i.e. from the intersection or interlinking of several platforms (Merrill & Lindgren 2020). Consequently, the multi-platform analysis implies a need for diverse methods (e.g. measuring circulation of content regarding blogs demands different tools from measuring circulation in Twitter). The dissertation makes a rich empirical contribution to the (still emerging) field of memory and digital media in connection with political/social movements, by showing in detail how practices unfold within different platforms and how they can be grasped methodically. It especially highlights the interplay of blogs with other platforms and is able to differentiate the assumption of affordances of digital media according to the respective technologies.

The second objective of this dissertation is to develop a thorough understanding of the local councils themselves. Councils were a core part of the Syrian revolution, but are poorly understood so far - first and foremost because discussions remained confined to their empirical appearance with little to no theoretical depth. The dissertation sets out to understand them better by drawing a line to anarchism and council theory. Delving into the *object* of remembrance in that way is not only an add-on, but will stir questions about the way in which memory workers have been claiming the Syrian council experience and what they have been ignoring. One example is how memory workers have highlighted the explosion of individual and collective *agency* as a result of council activity, whereas crucial *institutional* aspects of councils have hardly been considered (e.g. the reconfiguration of legislative and executive powers). From a leftist perspective interested in alternatives to statist democracy, understanding the Syrian council experience more profoundly matters, because, only if the Syrian council experience is recognized as a *council* experience (that belongs to 'us') rather than a *Syrian* experience (that belongs to 'the Syrians') can leftists actually draw meaningful conclusions for their visions of revolution, transformation and democracy without a state.

In contrast to the 'how', the 'what' of remembrance is analyzed differently. Local councils were essentially rooted in social processes, are 'unspectacular', and are difficult to grip by hindsight. I discuss the real-existing local councils in a way that combines description and interpretation at once by carving out *inductively* the main characteristics of the councils based on a) studies by international NGOs, b) two lengthy interviews that I conducted with Omar Aziz' companion, and c) an analysis of the website of one well-documented local council. This will yield four main aspects of the councils that will be related to the 'theory' of councils – 'theory' in quotation marks because the theoretical literature on councils has remained fragmentary and incoherent. Acknowledging that this inductive procedure is problematic insofar as it refers to theory by hindsight without having accomplished the 'Begriffsarbeit' in advance, I see its

value in highlighting crucial points, raising questions and challenging common assumptions that council revolutions have been confronted with since the 19th century. In combination with the discussion of Omar Aziz' conceptualization of local councils, this will serve to inform the theoretical debates about councils beyond Syria. The exploration of the Syrian councils makes major contributions by making Arabic sources accessible, by adding substance to the connection of the local councils and anarchism, and by reconstructing the councils in light of council theory for the first time.

Against the background of these methodological considerations, the dissertation avoids treating the local councils as a giant background chapter before doing the 'actual' work of the media and communication studies objective. Instead, it deals with the 'how' of remembrance first – theory, method, analysis – and subsequently devotes itself to understanding more thoroughly the object of remembrance.

Chapter two provides the background information on the Syrian uprising in the forerun to the formation of councils and in the early phase of emergence. It will point to key moments in 2011, the year in which the uprising began, and emphasize the fact that revolutionaries had hardly any established oppositional entities to rely on. Instead, they were compelled to find their own expressions of dissent. The evolution from the initial grassroots formations, the Local Coordination Committees (focusing on protest), to the local councils (increasingly focusing on daily life) is sketched before clarifying the origin of the latter. Lastly, an overview of the development of the councils in the subsequent years is given which will situate the local councils among other actors, such as the higher oppositional bodies that attempted to cooperate with or co-opt the councils as governance structures for a 'transitional' period.

Chapter three zooms out of the Syrian context in order to make clarifications that are relevant for understanding what is meant by 'anarchism', how councils are related to it and how anarchism has (re-) emerged recently since the Arab Spring.

Chapter four then dives into the theoretical framework for investigating the remembrance of councils in digital media. It draws on scholarship in the intersection of three fields, dealing with cultural memory, digital media and social movement studies respectively. Highlighting the political dimension of memory, which informs our capacities to both remember the past and imagine the future, the theory chapter makes the point that digital media are a potential game changer for how remembrance can take shape regarding a transnationally dispersed group of 'memory workers' who contribute to the emergence of memory in different roles. The chapter eventually argues to look at remembrance as a constellation of actors, three fields of practices and the available technology.

Chapter five translates the research question articulated at the end of the theory chapter into, first, an overall research design, and, second, into concrete steps that were taken in order to generate and analyze the data. Different methods and tools were used to collect and interpret data, each time according to the respective platform analyzed (Facebook, Twitter, and the Internet more broadly with particular attention to blogs) and according to the respective theoretical dimension of memory work (actors, practices, technology). The chapter also clarifies the literature and empirical material based on which the councils are reconstructed, both with regards to the 'real-existing' local councils and to Aziz' conceptualization.

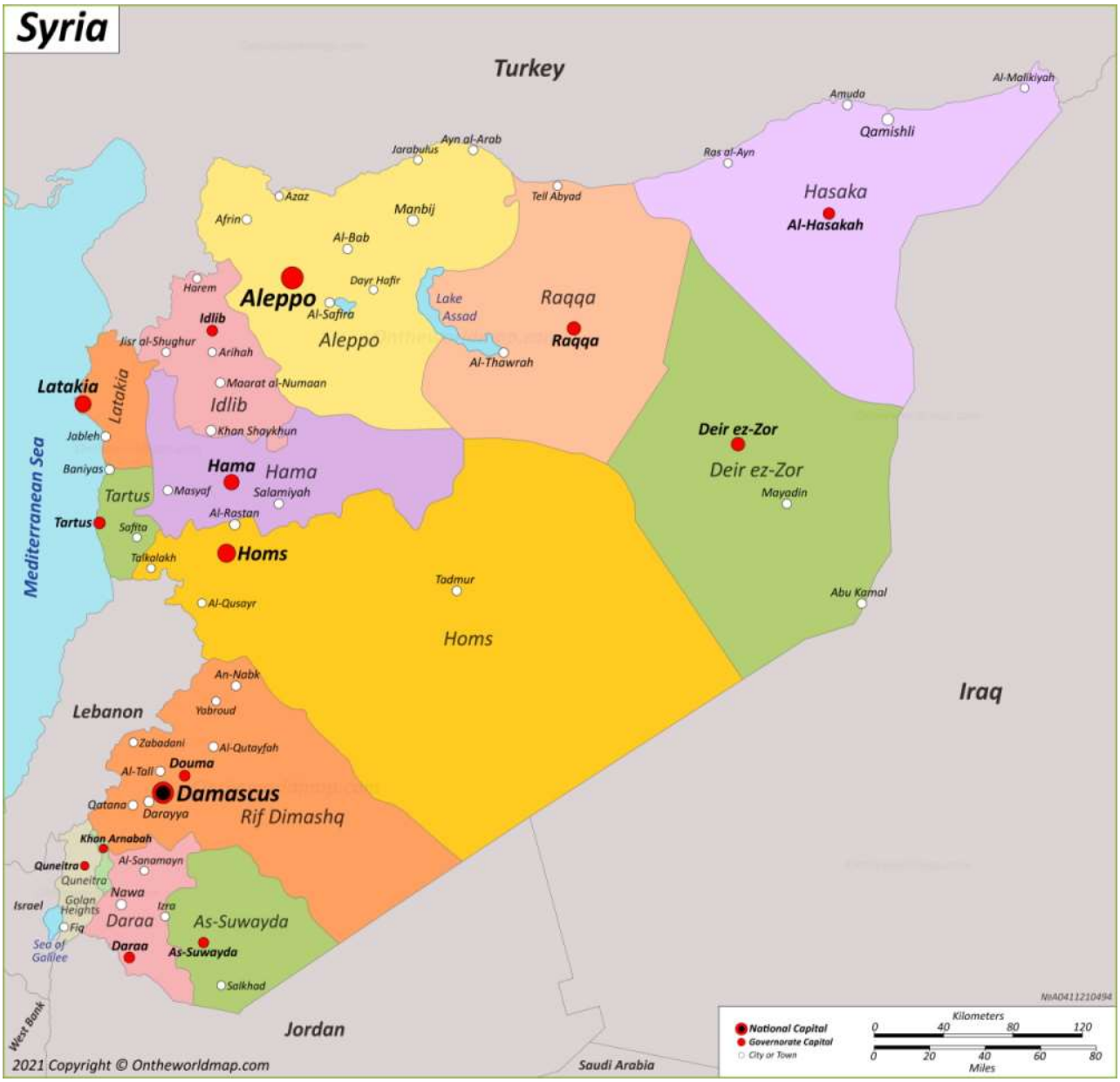
The four research questions, with which the remembrance of councils is investigated, structure **chapter six**. In line with the argument of the theory chapter on memory work in digital media and based on different corpuses of collected data, the specific constellation of that memory work unraveled. Light is shed on the different roles of actors and their mnemonic practices are examined in terms of archiving, circulating and claiming memory. The analysis is concluded by discussing affordances and limitations that specific platforms have displayed in the evolution of remembrance over the last decade.

Chapter seven turns towards investigating the object of remembrance in two steps. It comes up with the descriptive-interpretative analysis of the local councils in Syria in a systematic manner along four

aspects (agency, suspension of the state, prefiguration of a new order, and cooperation/solidarity). The subsequent discussion of obstacles that councils faced goes beyond the acknowledgement of outright repression by the Syrian government by drawing attention to the perils of an 'NGOization' of revolutionary endeavors and traces the dynamics that worked to hedge the local councils into a framework of administrative tools and shrink down their more radical democratic potential.

In order not to blend the experience of the 'real'-existing councils with their 'ideal' conceptualization proposed by Omar Aziz in 2011/2012, the latter is analyzed separately in **chapter eight**. Although in reality, these two aspects are interlinked, the separate interpretation of Aziz papers aims at showing not so much the gap between a lived experience on the one hand and an ideal conceptualization on the other, but rather the potential that one was able to identify in the councils in the given context. Aziz' intellectual background is reconstructed in detail because it deeply informed his – rather unconventional – thinking of what councils were supposed to achieve. On this basis, the subsequent text interpretation sheds light on the motivations that lie behind Aziz' concrete suggestions for what the councils were supposed to do practically. The concluding subchapter relates Aziz' concept to the different paradigms of council theory in an attempt to carve out his contributions to the latter. Chapters seven and eight make novel contributions in several key respects. First, they draw on original sources in Arabic and hence makes knowledge accessible to Non-Arabic speakers; second, the interviews with Sami Al-Kayial, Aziz' companion make a layer of the Syrian council project visible that goes beyond both the previous analysis of the councils and beyond the work of previous translations and interpretations of Aziz' Discussion Papers. Chapter nine concludes by highlighting the most important results and discussing the contributions of this research to the theoretical concepts.

Figure 2: Map of Syria (governorates)



Note: Source: On the World Maps (2021).

2. Background: From the Syrian Uprising to the Local Councils

As of 2020, numerous academic analyses of the Syrian uprising exist from various perspectives and academic fields such as social movement studies, sociology, political economy and history (Hinnebusch & Imady 2018). Hinnebusch & Imady remain skeptical about whether it is possible to derive a consistent, causal explanation of the eruptions of the uprising from either recent history or Syria's socioeconomic background. From the 2000s onwards, the Syrian economy underwent a rapid and intense period of liberalization which, in combination with a drought period from 2006-2009, eventually led to rising unemployment and economic hardship - especially for farmers who were forced to migrate to the peripheries of urban centers. Informal housing structures which developed there as a result were targeted later by modernization plans, sometimes leading to repeated displacement and further economic hardship (e.g. Haugbolle 2018; Lawson 2018; Munif 2020, 132ff.). Against this backdrop, Hinnebusch & Imady nevertheless point out that in fact "it is very difficult to establish a cause and effect relationship between the Uprising and the state of Syria's economy in late 2010 (...)" (2018, 334). Interestingly, council communist Anton Pannekoek observed almost precisely a century ago that the occurrence and unfolding of revolutions are heterogeneous and hardly ever predictable or referable to a cause and effect relationship. "They are almost always surprising, exceeding, or disappointing, all expectations. In short, one cannot count on anything really, everything is coincidental and uncertain." (Pannekoek 1912, III; translation A.W.) Looking back at the waves of uprisings in Russia in the period prior to 1906, Luxemburg mocked the idea that uprisings on a mass scale could be foreseen (or even planned): "During the revolution it is extremely difficult for any directing organ of the proletarian movement to foresee and to calculate which occasions and factors can lead to explosions and which cannot." (1906, 38) Rather, her account shows, it was "accidental" and even "trivial" incidents that marked the outbreak of subsequent mass uprisings (p. 15ff.). Indeed, the various Arab Spring uprisings have erupted to the surprise of not only "Western patrons of some regimes, Middle East experts, social scientists, and public intellectuals" (Bardawil 2019, 177), but even to those directly involved in revolutionary activities (as is tangible in Pearlman's interviews with ordinary Syrians, Pearlman 2017). The outbreak ofthe uprising ultimately depended on the unexpected choices and on the determination of people to act *despite* numerous factors - a dynamic that transcends rational considerations and derides calculations of risks (see also Luxemburg 1906, 39). Instead of trying to find a causal relationship between the uprising in Syria and the country's history and economy, this background chapter emphasizes the constellation of the Syrian opposition in order to highlight the novelty of the emerging forms of self-organization. A subsequent overview of the most important events and turning points especially in the first months and year of the uprising (2.2.) sketches the background against which first the Local Coordination Committees evolved (2.3) that prepared the ground for the eventual formation local councils (2.4). This shall help to understand the atmosphere and power constellations in which Omar Aziz wrote his discussion papers on the local councilsin October 2011 and February 2012.

2.1 The landscape of the Syrian opposition before the uprising

Notwithstanding national specificities of the Left in the Arab region, the state of the institutionalized Syrian left mirrored the situation of other Arab countries. Three years after the Arab Spring, Arab intellectual Hisham Bustani voiced a deep frustration about the institutionalized Left, maintaining that

> the mainstream Arab 'Left' is not a Left at all. It is an intellectual void incapable of producing a political discourse consistent with its premises or with the frame of reference that it claims to belong to. What exists in reality are 'leftist' organizations and 'leftist' individuals who are similar in their political composition to the Arab regimes. They avoid thinking, philosophy and reading. They distance themselves from the social platforms that constitute their project. They collaborate with those they oppose (...) and legitimize them. (...) This is no Left. (Bustani 2014, 40)

The words of an unidentified US government official succinctly captures the state of the Syrian opposition just before the uprising, particularly when considering Syria as the context: "For so long, the opposition was in quotes – 'the Syrian opposition'" (Shadid 2011). Left and liberal opposition actors as well as Islamist organizations and dissident intellectuals have been violently suppressed since the Ba'ath party had taken over the rule under Hafez Al-Assad in the 1960s. The Syrian city of Hama has become a symbol for the bloody repression of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamist opposition in general, where the government opted to violently crush a year-long revolt, killing a minimum of 20,000 people. The result was that "(f)rom the 1980s, the Salafis (...) and the Muslim Brotherhood (...) no longer had a noticeable influence on the masses." (Eido 2018, 261f.). The political atmosphere seemed to open when after Hafez' death his son, Bashar Al-Assad, took over in 2000. Mostly left-to-liberal-minded dissident intellectuals then started mobilizing for political and social reforms. Salons (Arabic 'muntadaat') emerged and within few months the discussions lead to the 'Statement of the 99' in September 2000, "the first public manifestation of Syria's rising civil society movement (...). This signaled the start of the era that became known as the Damascus Spring, whose efforts would reverberate in the years to come, despite a campaign of relentless repression (...)." (O'Bagy 2012, 14). Apart from an initial phase in which the gatherings were tolerated, the government soon returned to curbing these new civil society spaces. Despite arrests, in October 2005 a broad spectrum of left, liberal, Kurdish and Islamist groups, including well-known opposition figures, articulated a statement of unity, the notorious Damascus Declaration, which "represented the widest ever opposition bloc formed against the Syrian regime." (Arslanian 2018, 292) Whereas internal fragmentation emerged over time (ibid. 293), the cause for eventual failure of the initiative lies in the repression by the government: although "at no point did these initiatives call for an outright change of regime and rather sought to work with the government to bring about reform *over time*", the latter curbed the engagement by marginalizing, arresting and harassing those involved, which ultimately "crippled the movement" (Al-Om 2018, 161; italics in original). With regards to the decidedly leftist opposition, the government had opted for deliberately "marginalizing and undermining Syria's communist parties through the decades" instead of outright repression (Arslanian 2018, 290). This happened within a framework of pseudo-democratic procedures by which the government succeeded in taming and co-opting the various communist parties (for details on that political spectrum see Arslanian 2018). Although several of the established left opposition groups managed to unite in the form of an organization called "The National Coordination Bureau for the Forces of Democratic Change" (NCB) in June 2011, the "claim for legitimacy among the wings of the protest movement (...) resulted in the utter and immediate

failure of the NCB" (Arslanian 2018, 295), mainly because they remained willing to cooperate with the government even in the light of growing regime violence.[2]

Because the Damascus Spring had never been able "to penetrate mainstream society" due to repression (Al-Om 2018, 161) and the left opposition, in the form of communist parties, was mostly domesticated by the regime, Syrians found themselves without a leading figure or organization to turn to. The initial expectations in the early uprising phase that the "left-leaning intelligentsia would unequivocally support the Uprising" were completely unmet (Arslanian 2018, 290). Quite to the contrary, the NCB seemed to lean towards the regime, thus alienating many of its members (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami 2016, 63). The Muslim Brotherhood, which had suspended oppositional activities in 2009, did not officially resume its opposition to the regime until May 2011, four months into the uprising (Díaz 2018, 208). To sum up: "None of these forces was suited to the task at hand." (Sayigh 2013) Hence, the grassroots uprising that then emerged and spread within weeks in spring 2011 was neither the result of a civil society that had built up capacities over the previous years nor of preparations of an established political organization or party. Rather, the uprising emerged, to an overwhelming extent, spontaneously and in dissociation from established structures. Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami (2016, 57) stress the leaderless and grassroots character of the uprising: "The Syrian revolution wasn't led by a vanguard party and wasn't subject to centralized control. It didn't splinter because it was never a monolith. It originated in the streets among the people from all backgrounds. The plethora of initiatives that emerged organically to sustain the revolutionary movement were all the more astonishing given the absence of civil and political organization before 2011." Syria witnessed a "mobilization from scratch" as Pearlman suggests (2020, 2f.; 10). Instead of thinking of the grassroots organizations as one part of a greater left opposition that had become hegemonic in the uprising (as e.g. Arslanian 2018), I suggest understanding the success of the grassroots organization as rather a fundamental break with the paradigm of 'opposition' in the sense that it also broke with the paradigm of the political form of representative democracy as such. Instead of trying to organize political interests, it practically rearticulated the meaning of 'politics' apart from conventional forms such as parties, parliaments and representational practices. When in June 2011 a prominent dissident from Damascus expressed a "dire need for young new leaders", because they "are our only hope in the future", it seemed unthinkable that an 'opposition' was already emerging that did not rely at all on leaders because it had found structures that rendered personal leadership superfluous (Hussein quoted in Shadid 2011). It was and remains difficult for analysts to understand the contrasting logics of revolutions that seek to take over power through conventional strategies (parties, leaders, centralized planning) versus social revolutions that transform the social and political. In the Arab Spring countries in general and in Syria in particular, protestors "steered 'clear of creating new icons' and leadership figures" (Al-Om 2018, 168).

2.2 Key developments of the uprising

By the time the Syrian uprising began in March 2011, Tunisia had already experienced a rapid series of events that resulted in Ben Ali fleeing into exile (14th January 2011). Similarly, Egypt had witnessed Mubarak stepping down after attempting to suppress protests (11th February 2011). Meanwhile, the

[2] This has to be seen against the background that in summer 2011 a Libyan scenario for Syria emerged on the horizon: At this time, the newly established Libyan National Transitional Council had been founded to represent the Libyan opposition abroad and it leaned towards a support of international military intervention. When, in this context, the Syrian National Council was formed - which was emphatically supported by many of the Syrian grassroots organizations - it appears that the NCB feared a Libya-like "swing in the mood of the protest movement" for international military intervention in Syria, too (Arslanian 2018, 295).

uprising in Libya had been ongoing since February 2011.Interestingly, in analogy with Tunisia's Mohammed Bouazizi, a man had also set himself on fire in Syria as early as January 2011, in the town of Hasakeh. In contrast to Tunisia, this incident occurred with no remarkable consequences (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami 2016, 35). Instead, a different incident in the periphery in March 2011 eventually ignited the uprising on a large scale. When contrasting the Syrian uprising with Egypt and Tunisia we can see that it positioned itself within this greater Arab Spring protest movement and that it drew on similar protest repertoires: "Al-Shaab yurid isqat al-nizam", a central slogan in Tunisia and Egypt, was picked up by Syrians from around April 2011 onwards (vgl. Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami 2016, 36). Secondly, the transgression of gender, sectarian and age lines within peaceful gatherings echoed the spirit of the Tahrir Square occupation. Third, Syrians expressed their solidarity with the Arab Spring uprisings by gathering around the embassies of the respective countries in January and February 2011. Similarly to Egypt and Tunisia, mobilizations in Syria were "decentralized and spontaneous; they were neither led by political parties nor defined by the traditional narratives of socialism, nationalism, or Islamism." (ibid., 35) Furthermore, a popular protest framing was picked up from the Egyptians: their mobilization of a "Day of Anger" (January 25) or "Friday of Anger" (January 28) (Timeline of the Egyptian Revolution, n.d.) was copied in the form of a "Day of Rage" for February 4 in Damascus. On the other hand, the Syrian revolution can be seen as different from the other uprisings in several regards (Javaher-Haghighi et al. 2018, 128). For instance, while the occupation of public squares, such as Tahrir Square in Egypt, has become a defining symbol of protest in countries like Tunisia, Bahrain and Egypt (Galián 2019b, 719), the Syrian uprising took a different course and was compelled to follow a distinct path. During the very first two months of the uprising, attempts to temporarily claim public space, such as the (unsuccessful) Day of Rage on February 4, or a spontaneous demonstration on February 17 in the Damascus Hareeqa neighborhood (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami 2016, 36), were consequently repressed. One example is the coastal town of Baniyas – where people followed the Tahrir-model in an attempt to establish a sort of camp (Baniyas, n.d.). Another attempt took place in the city of Homs: following a funeral with thousands of participants, a large crowd occupied the central Clock Square, mirroring central features of the occupation of Cairo's Tahrir Square (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami 2016, 43). This incident was later remembered by refugees in a Greek camp by reconstructing the famous clock tower – the setting of the clock to the time when they arrived in the camp symbolically captures the refugees' tragedy as revolutionaries. Since the occupation of squares was not a promising model for protest in Syria, people creatively

Figure 3: Photo of the replica of the Clock Tower built by refugees in Greek refugee camp.

Note: The inscription on the bottom of the tower reads: "Time stopped when we came here" Source: Barkil-Oteo/Syria Untold (n.d.).

Figure 4: Photo of a demonstration at Clock Square in Homs on April 18, 2011

Note: Source: Reuters/Handout (2011).

developed strategies shifting protest onto a smaller territorial scale, as Omar Aziz noted: whereas the regime "kept its grip on the main roads", "the uprising was successful in appropriating the streets and alleys and the side streets in the cities and the rural areas", signaling a break in the regime's absolute control over geography (Aziz 2011b, 2). Perhaps this shift from grand public squares to neighborhood space already anticipated the anchoring of local councils and thus of the revolution itself in neighborhoods and people's daily lives.

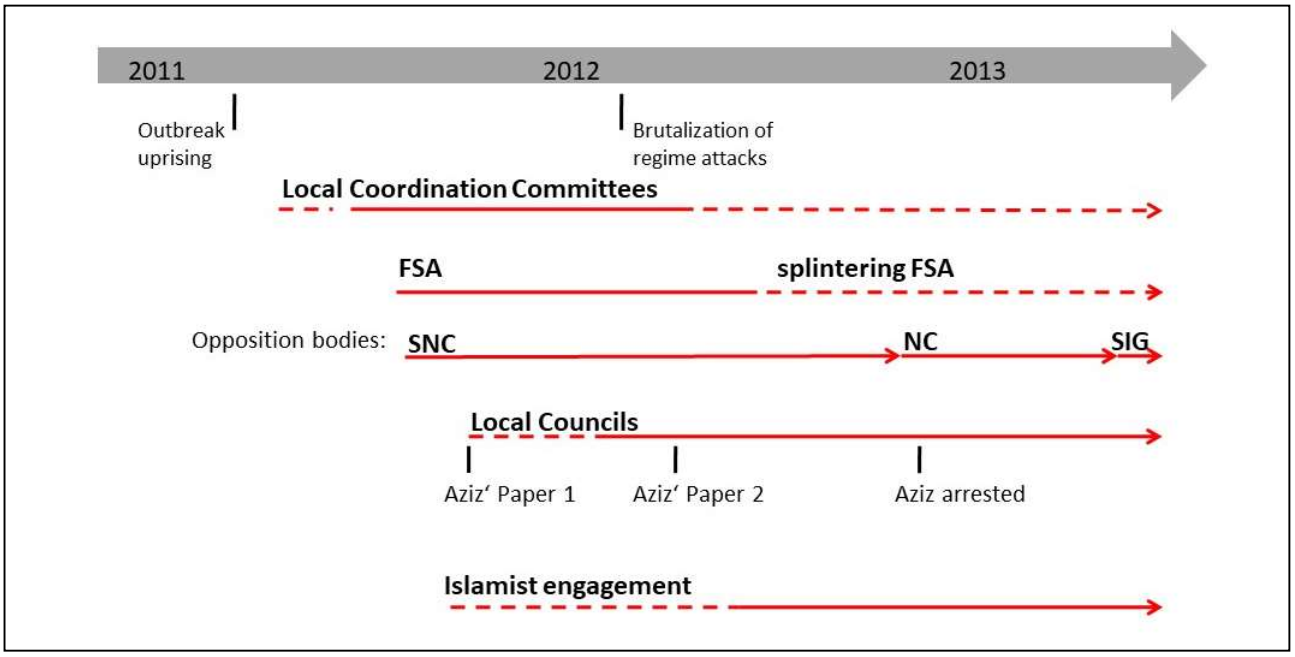
The incident that is widely seen as the catalyst for the uprising, igniting it to a full fire after the first weeks of protest, revolves around the arrest and torture of a few youths for anti-regime graffiti in the southern city of Deraa: "We got a can of spray paint and we wrote 'Freedom. Down with the regime. Your turn, Doctor', referring to President Bashar al-Assad, a trained ophthalmologist." (Your turn doctor 2018) Adding insult to injury, after torturing the children, the head of the police humiliated their protesting parents verbally to the utmost in public (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami2016, 38f.). This incident, combined with the violent government response to subsequent demonstrations in the following days, caused a wave of protest all over Syria in solidarity with Deraa. A few weeks later, the last hopes that the central government would apologize and acknowledge the necessity of reforms were dashed after Bashar Al-Asad's speech on March 30th 2011 in which he blamed the protestors. As a result, an "enormous sense of anti-climax" spread and "was followed by a surge of unprecedentedly open discussion in Syrian homes, workplaces and cafés. Previously apolitical people were suddenly politicised." (ibid., 42) In the following months, the uprising spread throughout the country (Yacoubian 2021). A few measures with which the government had pretended to introduce some reforms in March/April 2011 – e.g. lifting of the Emergency Law, some economic reforms regarding unemployment, announced media reforms – "were immediately rendered meaningless" through so-called counter-terrorism laws and measures (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami 2016, 46). The government's strategy of repressing protest by any means remained consistent throughout the entire uprising, whereas the means of repression clearly brutalized from February 2012 onwards.[3]

Over the course of the spring and summer months of 2011, three larger oppositional structures began to emerge: first, spontaneous, flexible, informal groupings at grassroots level appeared all over Syria, assuming the label 'Local Coordination Committees'. In order to exchange experience and coordinate activities beyond their immediate locality they formed different umbrella organizations. Second, the Syrian National Council was formed as an attempt to institutionalize the opposition and represent it symbolically and diplomatically. Third, the Free Syrian Army, made up of defected officers and soldiers, was formed. Whereas the LCCs will be dealt with in the subsequent subchapter, some cursory information on the FSA as well as the SNC are necessary, because they shaped the power constellation as well as the course of the uprising and hence the context in which the councils evolved. In early summer2011, several military officers defected from Al-Assad's troops to eventually form the Free Syrian Army (FSA). A first mass defection had already happened in June in the north-western Idlib region after a deadly attack on a funeral by government troops in which soldiers who refused to kill protestors were themselves executed by their officers (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami 2016, 83f.). Despite severe punishments against the defectors and their families, "tens of thousands of conscripts and lower-ranking soldiers had deserted". Under the label of the Free Syrian Army, newly forming militias made up of the deserted soldiers spread within Syria and gravitated around different areas. Whereas by November 2011 the FSA appeared to be "strong enough to launch attacks on government intelligence offices in Damascus and Aleppo"

[3] At a later stage, the government ultimately did not abstain from large-scale and indiscriminate bombardments (barrel bombs on densely populated urban areas in Aleppo in July 2012) and from using chemical weapons (in Eastern and Western Ghouta in August 2013) (Yacoubian 2019). Numerous other examples of atrocities committed by the government could be given (e.g. "List of massacres during the Syrian civil war", n.d.).

(Yacoubian 2019), authors insist that the term FSA hardly describes "a centrally recruited and trained organisation (...), it was never centrally armed or funded, at least not sufficiently or continuously" (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami 2016, 85). Against this background, three aspects of the FSA are noteworthy: first, although both defected army members and civilians took up arms from late spring 2011 onwards (as response to the ongoing repression), it was only "by the spring of 2012 [that] the armed struggle had come to dominate" the uprising (ibid., 78). Second, the FSA's relevance to the people must not be reduced to its (dis)ability to gain territory or to win battles against the government's army. Armed protection of protests was the precondition for ongoing physical and symbolic appropriation of the streets, so that the FSA's role was important for ensuring that the revolution remained visible and tangible in people's lives in an empowering way. Wherever protestors managed to spread in the streets or even to occupy and shut down the local security premises, they essentially "smashed the regime's red line" of control over space (Aziz 2011b). Thirdly, contrary to the prevailing narrative of a "civil war" that emerged from the summer of 2012 onwards, it is important to note that "the conflict remained essentially a one-sided regime assault against a civilian population only occasionally defended by poorly armed and uncoordinated militias." (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami 2016, 78) Nevertheless, the destructive, dangerous potential of the uprising's arming was recognized by involved actors. As early as in October 2011, Omar Aziz anticipated that the revolution was at risk of becoming a "hostage of the gun" (Aziz 2011/2012). Already in the fall, not even half a year after the formation of the FSA, concerns began to arise that armed groups might start to detach themselves from the grassroots movement.

Figure 5: Timeline of key events and developments



Note: Source: A.W. based on Yacoubian 2019; Aziz 2011/12; Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami 2016. FSA=Free Syrian Army; SNC=Syrian National Council; NC=National Coalition; SIG=Syrian Interim Government.

Alongside the defections and the formation of the FSA and the latter's punctual successes, the opposition seemed to gain further momentum when in the second half of 2011 oppositional actors in exile aimed at forming a body that would represent the Syrian opposition abroad. Whereas the established oppositional structures inside Syria had become increasingly irrelevant as oppositional voices in the first months of the uprising, the Syrian National Council (SNC), founded in August 2011 in Istanbul, was widely accepted among Syrians (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami 2016, 185). This is the background against which Omar Aziz

wrote the first version of his discussion papers on local councils in October 2011. From autumn onwards, discontent at the grassroots regarding the SNC grew on different grounds, including the rather strong influence of the Muslim brotherhood and the fear for lobbying for international military intervention – in Libya, "faltering of the Qaddafi regime (...) led to a swing in protest mood of the protest movement in support of international military intervention, especially within the external opposition [in Syria, A.W.]." (Arslanian 2018, 295) On diplomatic levels, by the end of February 2012, half a year later, various international actors had recognized the SNC as representative body and intended to support the opposition through the SNC in the form of financial aid. However, based on pressure from world and regional powers, in November 2012, the SNC was replaced by the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, commonly referred to as the National Coalition (NC), which was then widely recognized as the representative body of the Syrian opposition (Yacoubian 2019). The NC was again substituted by the third opposition body, the Syrian Interim Government (SIG), in 2013.Importantly, these bodies confronted the grassroots councils and committees with both the chance for access to financial aid and at the same time with the risk of becoming absorbed into a top-down architecture. The NC/SIG, indeed, established ministerial structures that aimed directly at integrating local councils into their governance architecture assigning to the councils the role of aid deliverers on the one hand and as streamlined municipal administrations on the other. This will be discussed in detail in chapter seven.

It is against this sketched background of a massive, widespread popular uprising in addition to the formation of the FSA and of the rather centralized SNC/NC on the one hand, and brutal, but not yet overwhelming military repression on the other hand that Omar Aziz wrote the first version of his paper on the local councils in October 2011. As visualized above in Figure 3, by that time, Islamist actors had made their first appearances, but had not yet become a major force on the scene. Although al-Qaeda leaders made efforts for "activating an Islamic insurgency" from August 2011 onwards (Pearlman 2020, 24), they were not yet shaping and influencing the grassroots opposition. It was only in January/February 2012 that Al-Qaeda articulated support for the uprising, and the formation of the Nusra Front was announced with the call for establishing an Islamic State. The Nusra Front later merged into the infamous ISIS in April 2013 (Yacoubian 2019). It was clear from the outset that the Islamists' engagement in Syria would pose a major threat to its progressive character - the abductions of four famous revolutionary personalities in December 2013 stand symbolically for that. Also, in February 2012, the further brutalization from the regime side came down to large-scale assaults on the big industrial city of Homs (February 3), at that time "the epicenter of the uprising" (Yacoubian 2019) and on Hama (February 15). In this context of Islamists entering the scene in addition to the government stepping up the scale of military assaults, Omar Aziz revised his paper (February 2012).

2.3 The Local Coordination Committees as precursor of the local councils: from self-organization to self-government

Although the attempts to take control of public space largely failed, the demonstrations that had taken place were still crucial for the further development of the uprising: the gatherings at demonstrations throughout March 2011 served more experienced political and human rights activists to establish connections and make plans. Although the demonstrations were always repressed within a short time, "the conversation conducted at the protest led to results which the state was unable to suppress. (...). 'And it was from this gathering [March 6 2011; A.W.] that the Local Coordination Committees (LCCs) were born, called 'tansiqiyyat' in Arabic. Everyone was charged with returning to their own area and starting a committee.'" (Assaad al-Achi quoted in Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami 2016, 37; see also Javaher-Haghighi

et al. 2013, 144ff.).Syrian intellectual Yassin Al-Haj Saleh recalls with praise these structures: "the tansiqiyyat (...) were the heart of the revolution and its most creative expression." (Smith 2016a) Western observers have quickly identified the LCCs as a sort of authentic expression of the Syrian grassroots and hence as potential addressees of support and funding (e.g. O'Bagy 2012; Carnegie Middle East Center 2012; Khoury 2013). Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami (2016, 35-76) as well as Pearlman (2020) have pointed out the meaningfulness of activists' experiences and learning within the LCCs in terms of solidarity versus risks, of spontaneity versus predictability, of trust versus mistrust, of creativity versus paralysis and of committed self-organization instead of leadership (see also Al-Om 2018) - themes that resonate strongly in the later conceptualization of the local councils by Aziz. To provide an overview of the LCCs, I will explore their establishment, primary concerns, and their positioning as grassroots structures vis à vis the development of representative superstructures within the opposition.

The term Local Coordination Committees is translated from the Arabic term 'ligan al-tansiq al-mahalliyya', literally meaning: the committees (ligan) of local (mahalliyya) coordination (al-tansiq). As of May 31, 2011, there were merely fifteen officially documented LCCs in Syria[4] (LCC Syria 2011b), but their number grew to the hundreds within the following weeks. It appears that that there were LCCs in the neighborhoods of most Syrian cities and towns (Javaher-Haghighi et al. 2013, 148; Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami 2016, 57; Pearlman 2020,16). An activist from Qamishli in the north of Syria recounts that there were more than eighty LCCs in that one city (Syria Untold 2016, from min. 14:00). LCCs emerged during a demonstration or afterwards. Sometimes people were doing what appeared necessary and only later identified their work as the work of a local coordination committee: "local activists organically came together in committees because the continuation of demonstrations compelled it. What spread was not the innovation of organizing committees as much as the practice of identifying these efforts as tansiqiyyat and the understanding of tansiqiyyat as being linked to each other and to a national revolution" (Pearlman 2020,6). Initially, the LCCs were predominantly occupied with the organization of protests and their mediation afterwards: "they focused on street action, preparing slogans and banners for demonstrations, barricading areas to protect protestors, and documenting events which they uploaded on social media" (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami 2016, 58). The mediation of the protests' achievements (as well as of the regime's atrocities) were important "for the persistence of protest in the face of such violence – people didn't (yet) feel alone" (ibid., 47). Based on this visibility, people inside Syria inspired each other to imitate this kind of informal organization as famous lawyer and activist Razan Zeitouneh (who herself pushed the foundation of the LCCs and later also of the LCC Syria network) explained at that time: "In the beginning, none of the (...) activists (...) knew anything about the committees. With time, (...) the media repeatedly mentioned the committees. Then, these activists spontaneously considered themselves members (...)." (Zeitouneh 2011). The availability of digital media and communication technologies, despite the government's attempt to censor communication, clearly functioned here as an affordance structure that enabled both the work of the committees and their proliferation. Alongside enhancing the visibility of protest, the mediation also aimed to enable future memory: "documentary work publicizing the government's violence and people's resistance was one of the most important activities that the Syrian activists focused on and tried to master from the beginning." It "was a deep concern to those who had realised that they had to write the history of the Syrian revolution themselves in order to keep it from being erased by the narratives of the government." (Dayoub 2018, 228; Hourriya 2016, 19ff.).

The development of the LCCs' work was shaped by a sort of continuous spiral of spontaneous reaction to necessities and by a refinement of mechanisms: "New needs (...) drove relatively spontaneous

[4] In Dara, Homs, Banias, Saaraqeb, Idlib, Hasaka, Qamishli, Deir Ezzor, Syrian Coast, Hama, Raqqa, Suweida', Damascus and Damascus Suburbs - that is, all over the country and not just in one area.

action, which in turn produced both new and increasingly refined organizational structures." (Pearlman 2020, 20). Faced with growing violence from the government, LCCs increasingly took over tasks of immediate medical relief and food distribution as well as providing legal assistance in cooperation with lawyers and human rights groups (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami 2016, 58; Pearlman 2020, 19). By the summer of 2012, the LCCs shifted towards aid work when faced with the deterioration of the humanitarian crisis that resulted from ongoing regime attacks and sieges. As their documentary work progressed, the LCCs increasingly focused on tracking and reporting the number of casualties. During the final months of their website's operation, they made daily announcements regarding the death toll (LCC Syria 2011a). The LCCs are often characterized as being predominantly composed of young people, primarily from the working and middle classes (Carnegie Middle East Center 2012). However, "while many protests were organised online and via mobile phones, those attending were not only the youth of Syria but a multitude of people from various backgrounds." (Al-Om 2018, 164). The city of Salamiya is an instance where women organized in a Women's Coordination Committee to confront the lack of representation in the city's LCC (Salamiya, n.d.). Several accounts are congruent in stating that women's (equal) participation was widespread. The blurring of both gender and sectarian segregation in the LCCs was a tremendous achievement against the background of the notorious Syrian sectarianism.[5] The collaboration among individuals within committees in their respective localities not only gave rise to a new sense of community but also to "solidarities that never existed" through coordination among cities. (Shadid 2011) Indeed, the experience of solidarity appears as the revolutionary experience *par excellence* in the Syrian uprising – in the LCCs as well as in the early local councils. In Pearlman's interviews with activists of the LCCs, the theme of solidarity is evoked again and again (2020, 22). One of the main achievements of the LCCs with which they also laid some groundwork for the functioning of the local councils later, was "the shift in Syrians' interactions from hazy suspicion toward cooperation and mutual respect (...). While these changes might seem romanticized, Syrians' expressions of joy and pride in this novel solidarity and camaraderie are too powerful and frequent to dismiss." (Pearlman 2020, 22)

In a simplifying view, the LCCs can be understood as a precursor to the local councils in a chronological sense and also in a sense of organizational complexity (e.g. Saleh 2018, 143). In this thrust, Pearlman (2020, 18f.) interprets an "evolution from spontaneous protest to tansiqiyat" (i.e. LCCs) and then in a move of more "organizational refinement" from the LCCs to the local councils, the councils reaching "another level" of organizational development. Whereas the LCCs devoted themselves more to the immediate events, the local councils developed an approach to construct an alternative to the government structures: "While the Local Coordination Committees (LCCs) had been formed as organizational structures to prepare, call for, and document demonstrations, the idea was that the local councils would be an alternative to the regime and its institutions." (Daou 2018) However, whereas the LCCs were often transformed into local councils and activists from the LCCs built "the main nuclei of the local councils" (Khoury 2013, 4), it is important to note that not all the LCCs made this transition. Some LCCs consciously opted to keep operating as an LCC, and LCCs and local councils also cooperated (Becker & Stolleis 2016, 2; Daher 2013). Mostly, the LCCs remained focused on the organization of protests and on their mediated documentation of protests and on whatever was related immediately to the protests, such as dealing with repression, aid and relief.[6]

[5] Unfortunately, the division of confessional groups is being again reinforced with the regime intentionally forcing resettlement strategies and population swaps that homogenize sects on neighborhood and even citylevel (see several contributions in Hinnebusch & Imady 2018). During the uprising, spreading rumors and even staging abductions (preferably of women) was a common strategy of the regime to incite mistrust and aggression especially vis à vis Sunni Syrians (see e.g. Banyias n.d.).

[6] Perhaps due to the sometimes fluent passage between LCCs and councils, some confusion has emerged especially in the early literature on the LCCs and the local councils. Some authors have mixed up LCCs and LCs regarding tasks as well as

Interestingly, this two-step evolution from LCCs to local councils bears resemblance to the trajectory of self-organization in the Russian Revolution 1917 and of the German Revolution 1918, if one leaves aside the different spatial anchors of self-organization (factories versus neighborhoods): Anton Pannekoek (1936) observed that such organizing committees "originate and grow up along with the first action of a revolutionary character. With the development of revolution, their importance and their functions increase." The councils were not a ready-made institution, but took shape in the course of intense struggle and of a broadening of tasks: "the tightening of the council (…) fabric progressively led to an overflowing of the initial role of the protests; (…) to a transformation of their meaning. Committees and councils extended their actions to increasingly general economic and political domains, until they took charge of a form of political reorganisation of the territories on which they operated (…) They often formed as true committees of public safety in charge of administering a growing part of day-to-day operations" (Dubigeon 2019, 265). What Dubigeon concludes with regards to Russia and Germany is a plausible reading of the Syrian context, too, namely that this "changing role could be considered as the period of transition from a situation of self-organisation to self-government. The point was no longer only to organize the strike or to defend the struggle, but to progressively take on tasks that were until then performed by preexisting political institutions." (ibid., 266)

2.4 The origin of the local councils

The term local council is the translation from 'majlis mahalliy' or plural 'majalis mahalliyya'. 'Majlis' literally means 'the place where people sit together', and 'mahalliy' means 'local'. Many authors date the emergence of local councils to the year 2012. However, by the time of writing his paper in October 2011, Aziz suggested the formation of local councils and recapitulated in the second paper from February 2012 that local councils have since been formed in many places. Accordingly, Khalaf (2015, 46) dates the formation of the first local council to "as early as 2011" which coincides with Sami Al-Kayial's account of his and Aziz' first attempt to form a local council in Damascus-suburb Zabadani in late 2011 (Zabadani n.d.; Aljundi 2014, 17; Sawah 2014 33). Hajjar et al. (2017, 9) mention twice that the local council in Kafr Takharim in the north-west was founded already in mid-2011 which I could neither verify nor refute. According to Sawah (2014, 33), the neighborhoods/towns of Barzeh, Darayya, and Douma were the following ones. Aljundi reconstructs that when more and more "towns fell out of the regime's hands, activists in other cities followed the example of Al-Zabadani and created local councils. Towns such as Saraqib in the Idlib province, as well as Marea and Al Bab in Aleppo province were among the first to follow." (Aljundi 2014, 17). However that may be, from late 2011 or early 2012 onwards hundreds of local council proliferated all over Syria over the subsequent years.

A handful of authors attribute the origin of local councils to a law passed by the Syrian government in August 2011, the so-called Decree #107 (Government of Syria 2011). Some have interpreted that "most of the local councils were formed according" to that law, but that the decree "has not been implemented" (Faviér 2016,11, 12, FN 16). Others insinuate that the local councils in Syria were formed based on and in reference to that law (Araabi 2017).[7] Whereas it is true that the Syrian government passed the decree in August 2011 "as part of a package of legislative reforms to appease the popular protests" (Araabi 2017), the decree is not mentioned in the vast majority of accounts on the local councils, either because it is not known to those involved, or because its existence is confusing to authors and they prefer

origin and development (e.g. Javaher-Haghighi 2013, 148ff.; Becker & Stolleis 2016 2; Galián2019b, 726; Galián 2020, 146). Oftentimes the LCCs are referred to as 'popular committees', 'tansiqiyyat', or simply as 'committees'.

[7] Saleh refers to this article by Araabi 2017 (2018, 143).

to avoid the issue, or because it is simply irrelevant. Moreover, the narrative that the local councils were - consciously - based on that decree was strongly refuted by my interview partners (Al-Kayial 2020, email conversation with author; A. Jasim, personal communication, April 2019). The Syrian Interim Government via its Ministry of Local Affairs has adopted and amended the law and supplemented it with by-laws. However, even after the adaptation of decree 107 by the Interim Government in 2016 the local councils have not adopted these regulations consistently and had "little awareness of these provisions" (Hajjar et al.2017, 12). Whereas "Decree 107 has since been a key component of ongoing peace negotiations in Geneva and enjoys wide support from the Syrian government, the opposition, and even external actors"(Araabi 2017) this is not because the councils were introduced *de jure* by the government, but conversely, because the local councils have become the major civilian opposition force *de facto*. The ministerial bodies themselves assert that "the [local councils] have emerged and operated in a highly ad hoc and independent fashion" in the absence of "a centralized body to apply unified strategies, guidelines, rules and regulations" (Hajjar et al. 2017,0).[8]

Apart from the discussion around Decree #107 Omar Aziz is widely identified as the "main architect behind the idea of the local councils" (Faviér 2016, 7, fn. 5) or "père des comités locaux" (Ayad 2013; see also Saleh 2018, 144; Sawah 2014,33; Aljundi 2014,17, Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami 2016, 68). His name is especially associated with the formation of the first local council in Al-Zabadani (Sawah 2014, 33). Aljundi incorrectly states that the "concept of local councils as an organizing force first appeared in a paper published on the Internet by Omar Aziz in October 2011" (Aljundi 2014, 17). According to Aziz' friend Sami Al-Kayial, the papers have been circulated only in private communication via email or personally among activists for fear of persecution. Al-Kayial himself published them on his private Facebook page in February 2013 upon the announcement of Aziz' death. Apart from NGO literature, fellow revolutionaries credit Aziz for the concept. For example, Yassin Al-Haj Saleh recounts that "(m)y friend Omar Aziz, the Syrian activist, was the 'father' of the idea of Local Councils. (...) [H]is ideas took off in the revolution." (Smith 2016a). I suggest that it is legitimate to credit Aziz with articulating the concept for the first time and for successfully pushing the formation of the councils, whereas it is equally important to bear in mind that in many places the formation of local councils was both a spontaneous and plausible choice made by revolutionaries on the ground without any knowledge of Aziz and his papers. It seems that the recognition of Aziz as the architect behind the councils is also a result of memory workers' eloquent efforts to make Aziz and the local councils known to a broader public. Furthermore, the suggestion that Aziz initiated the founding of the councils has to be qualified: local councils also emerged spontaneously and independently from Aziz concept. The success of the initial local councils, in which Aziz played a key role as a founding member, likely served as inspiration for people in other areas, even without direct knowledge of the individuals involved in the concept.[9] In the words of another observer: "it seems it was just the right thing to do at a certain point in time" (Ansar Jasim, personal communication, April 2019; also Daher 2018). Al-Kayial raises the "high density of communication among the revolutionary people around the country" as one central factor to the spreading of the councils: "some revolutionaries were concerned only with establishing connections between groups, through media, especially also through Skype. And Omar was one of those who cared for the connectivity. There were mixed networks based on the different roots of the people in the different cities, especially in

[8] The study was conducted by the NGO Swisspeace in cooperation with the Syrian Local Administration Councils Unit that is associated with the Syrian Interim Government.

[9] Contrasting Aljundi's account (mentioned above in this section) that towns in Idlib and Aleppo were among the first to follow Al-Zabadani as a model, Aziz' friend Al-Kayial remembers that when they heard about the founding of councils in Idlib and drove there of curiosity, they learned that the council there was founded without knowledge of the council concept (Al-Kayial, interview, February 2019).

Damascus where one was from Idlib, one from Hama, etc." and who would reconnect with the people from his/her hometown (Al-Kayial, interview, Feb. 2019).With regards to the local councils in which Aziz was personally involved, Al-Kayial emphasizes: "We never founded a local council, Omar never founded a council. He connected with the people as one of them – he was a 'guy from the hood' [ibn al-balad] – and by that he had an influence on them. We discussed the idea with people and helped bring people together. The 'establishment' of a council was then an intuitive and gradual development." (Al-Kayial, interview, Aug. 2020) However, according to Al-Kayial, Aziz was influential, because "he was the first among us all to conceive the councils in this particular way" (interview, Feb. 2019). The first council that Omar Aziz tried to set up was in the Damascus suburb of Zabadani where had worked together as early as winter 2011 with other locally well-known personalities. This first attempt to build a local council was short-lived, because the regime managed to take the town back after a month. Right afterwards, i.e. in early 2012, Aziz and Al-Kayial bundled their efforts in Barzah al-Balad, a northern Damascus suburb.

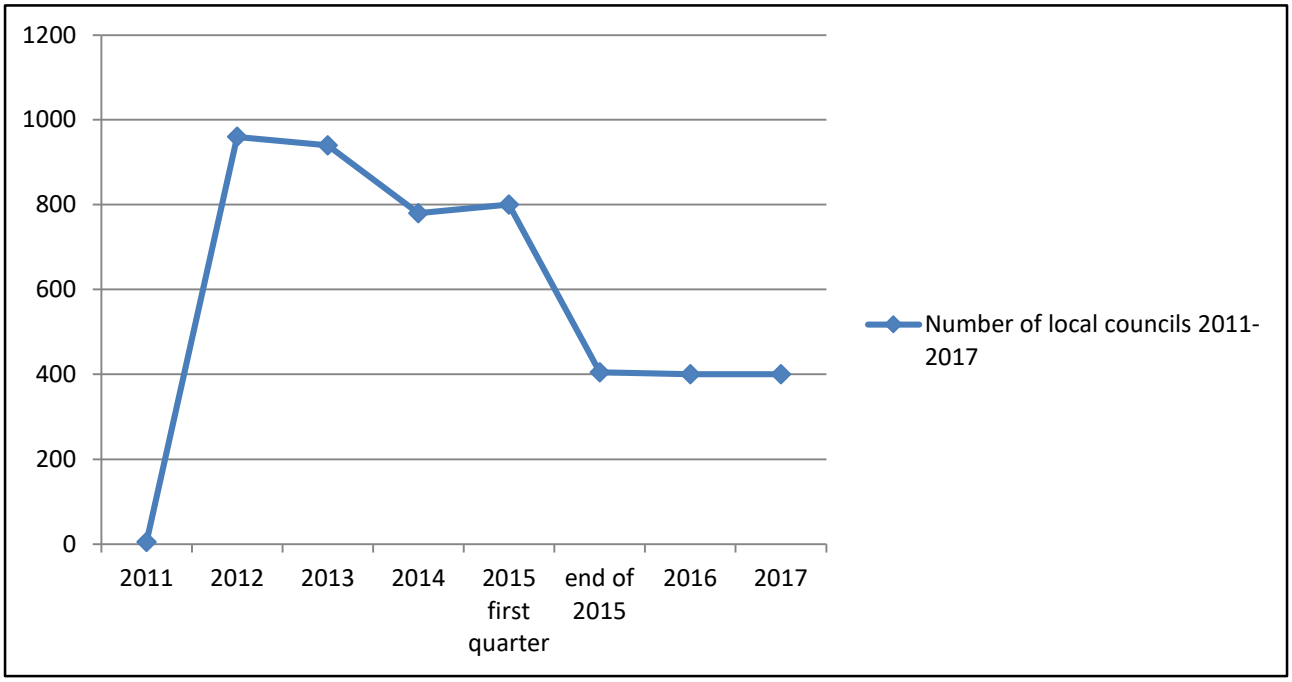
2.5 Local councils from 2011-2016

The local councils tied on seamlessly with several aspects of the LCCs: they were spontaneous, rooted in the neighborhoods, made up of ordinary people of diverse backgrounds. However, the scope of their tasks shifted: the local councils accounted for the fact that people had to assume responsibility for procedures of everyday life beyond protest organization and immediate relief, all the more so when places were liberated from the regime. Medical care was to be provided beyond immediate relief, electricity and the water supply were to be maintained, and sooner or later school education had to be continued, security had to be coordinated with armed groups etc. The councils have been heterogeneous "depending on their security situation, access routes to border areas, length of time since their establishment and existence of other competing structures or spoilers" (Khalaf 2015, 46; Faviér 2016, 12). Despite that heterogeneity they have been "widely embraced by local communities" and have "enjoyed high legitimacy" over years (Khalaf 2015, 46). Their numbers soared rapidly in the early phase of their existence. Within a few months hundreds of local councils spread all over the country and the years of 2012 and 2013 were the heyday of local councils whereas the year of 2013 already marks the subsequent decline in numbers that continued for two years until 2015.

The local councils were founded and operated in both regime held areas and liberated areas (LACU & NPA 2015, 8). In rare instances did the regime respect local councils as governing entities (e.g. in Yabroud, Aljundi 2014, 20). But more often than not, the councils were antagonized and targeted to different extents. Next to the regime, the foreign-backed Islamist militias oftentimes founded alternative 'councils' or similar structures or took over the existing ones by violence and transformed them in their own interest (Fisher &Majasent 2008). Within "two years and a half these very interesting and very novel political grassroots bodies were almost entirely dismantled." (Smith 2016a) Against this background, Daou resumed in 2017 that "(t)he original idea behind the councils became meaningless. Under the hegemony of weapons and conditional funding, the space for council work closed up. Thus, the possibility of building an alternative, democratic authority from below, which could lead the revolution and speak in its name, was diminished." (Daou 2018 [2017]). Whereas calling out the massive violence against the councils is legitimate, I propose a reframing that highlights the council's resilience: in fact, people managed to uphold and rebuild local council structures again and again, under the most difficult circumstances. The local council in Darayya still existed until 2016 despite a massive siege; some local councils, remarkably had been dismantled and reconstituted nine times (Hajjar et al. 2017, 6). In Atarib, youths ran a campaign in 2017 to re-democratize local councils (Haid 2017, 14); in Saraqeb, the local council proudly

succeeded in holding elections against the pressure of Islamist militia Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham (Saleh 2018, 149), and in January 2017 the head of the Sinjar local council "refused to hand over the official stamps of the council to the new council established by HTS" (Haid 2017, 12) – this is to name only a few

Figure 6: Number of local councils per year from 2011-2017



Note: Source: A.W. based on Kannout 2017, 52; HD 2014, 16; LACU & NPA 2015, 8; Faviér 2016, 11; Becker &Stolleis 2016, 2; Hearn &Dallal 2019.

examples. Hence, instead of reading the decline in numbers merely as an unstoppable demise of councils, we can bring our attention rather to the existing resilience.

In 2015, the number of local councils is estimated to have "fallen from around 800 in the first quarter of 2015 to an estimated 395 active LCs in March 2016, most of them in the Aleppo and Idlib governorates."(Becker & Stolleis 2016, 2) Whereas the vanishing of 400 councils, according to this estimate, is massive, it is nevertheless remarkable that there still were 800 of them in 2015 - that is, after at least 4 years of intense antagony (Faviér 2016, 7). At that time the biggest proportion of existing local councils were the ones in cities (57 %, municipal plus city), a good quarter was in smaller towns (28 %), and the remaining 15 % are indicated as provincial, i.e. regional councils (LACU & NPA 2015, 8).Two or three years after the first councils were formed, i.e. in 2015, one third of the councils were positioned in liberated territory in a rather stable position, whereas one third of them was in liberated territory, but exposed to bombardment, and 13 % lied in areas of more or less stable regime control (ibid.).

Even by July 2016, local councils were considered "a key factor for stability during the current crisis and in a future transitional phase" (Omran 2016, 2). A study, analyzing a sample of 105 local councils, stresses that the councils both fulfilled "a service role built upon the legitimacy they receive from the populace" and "great potential for political effectiveness" (p.2). Indeed they were functioning well enough to be seen as "the stepping-stone through a transitional period" (Faviér 2016, 7).However, numbers declined painfully due to the loss of opposition-held territories to both the regime (Eastern Aleppo in November 2016) and Islamists - note that ISIS had begun to seize territory in Syria from 2013 onwards and was at its maximum strength in the beginning of 2015 (Fisher & Majasent 2018; Islamic State 2018). Yet, "(i)n late 2017 there were some 400 LCs overseen by twelve provincial councils, with the majority in Aleppo and Idlib provinces, about 140 in Aleppo and 144 in Idlib" (Hearn & Dallal 2019). Although

ISIS had been pushed back substantially by 2018 (Islamic State 2018), other Islamist armed groups continued to take over territory and councils, such as Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham in the Idlib region. After expanding military control over territory since the beginning of 2017, the group either forced councils to work in their interest (e.g. in Atarib, ca city between Idlib and Aleppo) or replaced councils by their own civilian administrative structures. However, communities in the Idlib region have persistently tried to push back the group's control within the councils and/or by pressuring the overtaken councils from outside. In 2018 it seemed "possible that new formations of civic organization and mobilization may take place among residents (both 'original' and IDPs)" (Saleh 2018, 143f.). Both rebels and civilians, had been evacuated under the terms of the Aleppo Deal from Aleppo to Idlib in December 2016. As anticipated, the regime strategically relocated opposition-minded actors and rebels to Idlib, leading to an escalation of the conflict in the region in 2019. This resulted in what was described as "the biggest single displacement of Syria's nine-year war" (Syria war 2020).

Whereas Saleh in 2018 realistically asserts that "(c)learly, Syria's opposition controlled local councils face daunting prospects with respect to their viability, effectiveness, and independence", she raises the point that councils have been reconstituted by their members even after their displacement. Al-Om suggests that this even happened after displacement outside Syria where councils "continue their work in their newly established places of residence." (Al-Om 2018, 168) Saleh notes that, "(b)y late 2017, only 20 per cent of such councils had re-constituted themselves as residents were displaced northward to Idlib (...)." (Saleh 2018, 149) - she writes "only", but the mere fact that councils were reconstituted after displacement is quite a remarkable sign of the "civic resilience" that Saleh points to (see also Faviér 2016, 10; Omran2017).

In conclusion, due to the absence of an established opposition that the Syrian uprising could rely on or choose to align with, self-organization emerged organically at the grassroots level, starting from scratch. The first expression of that was the Local Coordination Committees that dealt more immediately with protest organization. Local councils subsequently built on the LCCs but shifted the mode and scope of tasks from self-organization towards self-government around organizing everyday-life. Whereas Omar Aziz has been widely referred to as architect, it was emphasized to me that the formation of the councils was driven by the belief that they were the appropriate course of action. Although they were confronted with violence by the regime and Islamist militias, they proved to be remarkably resilient in many instances. This has been recognized widely, also by the exile opposition and Western states who made efforts to integrate local councils into a transitional governance framework under the umbrella of interim governments. By contrast, the local councils in Syria have received limited recognition as an attempt towards a holistic revolutionary transformation beyond the state (Carpi & Glioti 2018) and apart from "institutionalist and proceduralist" perspectives (Saleh 2018; Khalaf 2015). Hisham Bustani in his poignant denunciation of the Arab Left unfortunately overlooks the local councils as a revolutionary model that precisely breaks with the reified structures of the old left that he rightly condemns (Bustani 2014). Even authors who embrace open-mindedness towards exploring prefigurative politics and alternative imaginaries beyond the nation-state have struggled to find what they seek within the context of the Syrian local councils. Basok (2014), for instance, in her article on "[t]he Arab Spring, Occupy, and Radical Imaginaries in the 21st Century," falls short of finding the specific elements she is searching for. The local councils are a perfect example and object of study in this respect.

3. Anarchism in the Arab world

The intention of this chapter is to avoid misunderstandings in the further discussion of anarchism and in terms of who and what is meant when we speak of anarchism in the region. This appears all the more advisable since Omar Aziz has been framed as an anarchist and since anarchists/radical leftists have started recognizing his conceptualization of the councils as a distinctly leftist, anarchist contribution to the Syrian revolution. The chapter proposes a definition of anarchism along four principles in order to situate 'councils' as one theoretical and practical expression within an anarchist, libertarian tradition. These principles inform the further analysis, especially with regards to claiming memory (RQ3). The subsequent overview of contemporary anarchism in the region for selected countries will help to appreciate the momentum that anarchism had in the Syrian uprising against the background of a small and heterogeneous landscape of anarchism in the Arab world.

3.1 Defining anarchism

Anarchism emerged in the nineteenth century as both a distinct philosophy and revolutionary movement, influenced by early socialists such as Charles Fourier and Robert Owen. The fourth general congress of the First International in Basel in 1869 – a central institution of the workers' movement in central Europe – marked a caesura at which a decisively anarchist self-understanding emerged that clearly rejected the nascent modern state both philosophically and strategically (Christie 2009, 1). This emerging movement informed and shaped struggles and practices which aimed to destroy, subvert or overcome actually-existing capitalism, the state, and representative democracy in order to reconstruct society as a free association of human beings. Anarchism has evolved into various different currents over time, including anarcho-syndicalism, anarchist communism, mutualism and insurrectionary anarchism. These currents endorse and employ different strategies for the transformation of society, including labor struggles (e.g. strikes, workplace organizing, campaigns and/or direct action tactics etc.), but also everyday life practices such as communal living, food sovereignty projects, squatting, social movements and/or confrontational tactics, in diverse organizational forms from tightly-knit affinity groups to unions (Loick2017). Introductory works on anarchism often present a neat classification of currents or core traditions, linking them to particular personalities (see Loick 2017, contents; Palgrave Handbook 2019, contents). From classical introductions to anarchism (e.g. Guérin 1967) to more recent works (Palgrave Handbook 2019, Milstein 2010), authors strive to construct a mix of classification ('core traditions'), a selection of the eminent personalities, an overview of the historical context, and some philosophy ('core problems', 'ethics', 'utopia', 'aspirations'). Loick is right to stress the difficulty in establishing canonical texts and the absence of any single philosopher to attain hegemonic status within the anarchist literature. Moreover, anarchism did not come into existence through theoretical debates, but developed as a practical movement, or rather multiple movements, within the context of early socialist movements in Europe. It was deeply rooted in working class communities across the continent, with traditional strongholds in Spain, Italy and France, but it was also at the core of important revolutions outside Europe, notably in Russia, and – as Hirsch & van der Walt tirelessly emphasize (2010) – in the colonial and post-colonial World.

Undoubtedly, anarchism has been intimately tied to the workers movement from the beginning. Calling Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm to witness, van der Walt & Schmidt (2009, 33) claim an anarchist-syndicalist hegemony within the overall workers movement especially between the mid-1890s and the mid-1920s as opposed to the fringe position of Social Democracy (2009, 158, 164ff. 158). Social Democracy primarily focused on organizing the workers as *voters* in order to get a greater share of power through increasing representation in the parliamentary system, whereas anarchists have aimed at self-organization of workers in order to transform society based on the workplace as eminent sites of human and social activity. While van der Walt's & Schmidt's have been sharply criticized for their exclusionary definition of anarchism (e.g. Kuhn 2011), the great merit of their work lies in its well-reasoned move to exit a defensive position of anarchism vis à vis Marxism and Social Democracy and to lay claim on the history of workers' movements and revolutions as part of anarchist history. In a consequential second step, this enables anarchists to recognize councils as an integral part of anarchism's repertoire and experience, acknowledging their significance as a core concept within the workers' movement. While favoring an inclusive definition of anarchism that to some extent preserves ambiguities (Kuhn 2011), I align myself with those who stress that the term should be reserved for the philosophy and the political or social movement that emerged "as a distinctive praxis" throughout the nineteenth century (Milstein 2010, 17). This implies, at least, a rejection of an anthropological approach that views anarchism as "one of the oldest political philosophies in the world" which denotes "how humans organized their affairs" in absence of centralized authorities and states (Ross 2019, ix) In that definition, all movements or struggles throughout history are identified as anarchist that articulated (later-to-be) anarchist principles, such as horizontal organization (Veneuse 2009; sometimes Graeber 2009; Bamyeh 2012). However, if we consider every articulation of direct action practices throughout history or today as anarchist, anarchism becomes a very bloated term. Anarchist principles of organization or practices, such as direct action or flattening of hierarchies may shape a struggle or movement and it is certainly insightful to identify "anarchist properties"within "civic culture" (Bamyeh 2012, 35, regarding the Arab Spring). In his seminal article, Mohamed Bamyeh rightly points to the "Anarchist Method, Liberal Intention, Authoritarian Lesson" (2013) of the uprisings in Egypt – anarchist principles were a shaping factor in 2011 (similarly Galiàn 2019b, 716). While it is interesting to identify typically anarchist practices and tactics in recent movements and uprisings, such as the Arab Spring, I argue that it would be a distortion to immediately categorize them as strictly anarchist. Accordingly, I do not at all aim at framing the Syrian uprising and the local council movement as anarchist. Rather I intend to explore the connection between anarchism and the Syrian uprising and I build on three bridgeheads: Omar Aziz' intervention into the local council movement as an anarchist intellectual; the well-received evocation of the Paris Commune; and the central role of councils in the Syrian uprising.

3.2 Four principles: agency, anti-authoritarianism, prefiguration, association

For this dissertation, I am proposing four principles of the philosophy of anarchism, instead of departing from classifications and core traditions. The "motives and discourses" that Loick enumerates[10] and the "core problems" that the Palgrave Handbook mentions can be condensed, I suggest, into four principles that serve as the common foundation among various currents within anarchism.

First, the principle of **agency** as a basis for a redefinition of the 'political', which includes direct action, self-organization and the negation of representative democracy. Anarchist politics are often not granted the status of being 'real' politics due to a very narrow understanding of 'the political.' The

[10] To the exception of ecology which is of no interest here.

commonly acknowledged form of democratic politics refers to representative, parliamentary procedures and exhausts itself in parties, elections, and state institutions. The mode at the basis of this model of democracy is a "politics of demand" in which actors such as social movements protest within the given structures and articulate demands towards institutions, the parties, and the government (Day 2004, 733). However, within the politics of demand only the *content* of structures is alterable, whereas the form of given structures and categories are not at issue (ibid., 233). Conversely, it is impossible and not foreseen in the given social structures to alter the structures as such. We are theoretically free to desire it, but not to demand it and even less to put this desire into practice: "The 'bourgeois' democracy is not based on constitutional ideals, shared values, religious convictions or ethical guidelines. Rather, any position can be articulated as personal opinion which is as free as it is inconsequential - as long as the 'contractual' foundation of private property is not touched upon." (Adamczak 2017, 75; translation A.W.) Politics, then, is conceptualized in representative democracies as a competition between parties that organize particularistic interests and compete for hegemony by structuring the pool of demands. This is a precise mirror of the capitalist social order that is based on an all-encompassing competition (Kurz 1999 37; von Redecker 2020, 55), leading to a form of "structural hatred" (Habermann 2016, 17ff.). Anarchism aims at challenging such seemingly unalterable structures in favor of conscious self-organization grounded in collective decision-making (Gordon 2007, 30). Anarchism, thus, follows a different mode of politics, namely a "politics of the act" based on "actions oriented neither to achieving state power nor to ameliorating its effects" (Day 2004, 717, 723; Gordon 2007, 29f.). Day's clarification serves as a reminder against oversimplifying interpretations. Engaging in a politics of the act does not mean simply 'doing as you please', just as direct action does not mean simply 'blowing things up"' (Day 2004, 734): 'Direct action' is to be understood as an imperative of agency, both individual and collective, and as a direct counterpart to the passivization of people as voters and the transplantation of agency into a sphere of civil society. Councils have been a classical translation of that principle into practice.

Consistent with its emphasis on individual agency, anarchism rejects hierarchies and structures of domination. Anarchism's **anti-authoritarianism** takes shape in the rejection of the state as well as the rejection of capital as bases for a social synthesis. This is what fundamentally distances anarchism from social democracy and Leninism/Trotskyism, political strains which all rely on hierarchies internally (as parties or as vanguards) and feed into the greater hierarchy of a state-centered democracy (based on parties and competition of interests) (Davis 2019, 49; van der Walt & Schmidt 2009, 66). In line with its rejection of authority and hierarchy, anarchism sees egalitarianism as an antithesis to these principles. Therefore, anarchism recognizes that agency cannot be limited to mere individual agency, but must encompass collective agency as well. The principle of egalitarianism – a social order in which all are truly equal not only via equal rights but via equal means – has to be translated into a radical inclusiveness in practice. Egalitarianism is not to be misunderstood as an antithesis to (individual) freedom – a term so central in anarchism, but at the same time unspecific. Milstein (2010, 107) rightly points out that "(f)reedom is never a done deal, nor is it a fixed notion." Less of a core principle of anarchism, freedom should instead be considered as a result based on the actual realization of egalitarianism, agency, and an ethics of practice (van der Walt & Schmidt 2009, 47). Dismantling authoritarianism has not been reduced to the reconstruction of social institutions, but notably, it has also been conceived as a matter of culture, mentality and spirit by anarchists of different stripes (Mühsam, 1973 [1933], 82; van der Walt & Schmidt 2009, 133; Wolf 2013, 244). Aiming for a profound change in mentality poses the question: how is it possible to challenge humans' authoritarian socialization through the state, the patriarchal family, schools and companies? These are institutions and structures in which people learn from early on to integrate themselves into hierarchies. How can the ideological mindset that is attendant on these hierarchies and to the division of humans into categories such as religious sects, social classes, national identities etc. be

dismantled? How can we foster an alternative spirit without resorting to manipulative tactics that contradict the anti-authoritarian goals, thus avoiding propagandistic mentality engineering? The analysis of the local councils in Syria will provide intriguing empirical substance for discussing these questions.

The third principle revolves around a specific ethics of anarchist 'politics' and maintains that **means and ends** are inseparable. This has become a prominent figure of thought, especially since anarchists' criticism of how the Bolsheviks usurped the Russian Revolution of 1917: "This perversion of the ethical values soon crystallized into the all-dominating slogan of the Communist Party: THE END JUSTIFIES ALL MEANS. (...) There is no greater fallacy than the belief that aims and purposes are one thing, while methods and tactics are another. (...) No revolution can ever succeed as a factor of liberation unless the MEANS used to further it be identical in spirit and tendency with the PURPOSES to be achieved." (Goldman 1923; capitals in original) This methodology for social change was re-articulated in more modern terms as 'prefigurative politics', a concept to assert that meaningful change must not be postponed to a time after a political revolution but has to anticipate ('prefigure') the desired society within the current struggle (Sitrin 2019, 672). Anarchism's strength in struggles has always been – especially in contrast to Leninist and Social Democratic politics – to draw attention to revolutionary dynamics in which means and ends diverge, based on the assumption "that the character of a transformation will have strong effect on its outcome" (Day 2004, p.138). Thus, "considerations of efficiency or unity" and of discipline - so prominent in Bolshevism - have no priority per se (Gordon 2007, 41), rather the process of transformation itself is already recognized as part of the revolution. Thus, prefigurative politics stresses the processual character of revolutionary change and of revolution as a *learning* process (Milstein 2010, 107). The desired change is not postponed to some utopian time after the revolution; rather, it is supposed to start right here and right now, *ici et maintenant*. This principle has been elaborated especially by Situationists in France in the context of the 1968 revolts (Davis 2019, 51). The longing to witness, participate in, and ultimately experience revolutionary transformations during one's lifetime is a driving force behind anarchism's enduring and seemingly unquenchable "utopian élan" (Anderson 2010, xv).

The fourth principle consists in **free associations** as both the basis for and the horizon of social change. Whereas the aspect of 'free' or 'voluntary' is sufficiently justified by the second principle that rejects coercion, the emphasis here is on *association*. Since anarchism seeks a way to reconstruct a social order, the question arises as to how the relation of the individual and society is negotiated. Based on the second principle of anti-authoritarianism, anarchism necessarily rejects the answer to that question that is given in a capitalist social order. Capitalism, as a form of social order, relies not only on the forceful separation of people from their means of production. Throughout its history, it has been characterized by waves of violent dispossession and destruction of means of subsistence both in the colonial world and in the capitalist center (see Marx' classic account of the so-called primitive accumulation MEW 23, 741ff.). Notably, however, it also relies on the separation of humans based on the liberal notion of the isolated, atomized, seemingly autonomous individual (Stapelfeldt 2014, 327ff.). Thus, the task of a revolutionary transformation is to find an alternative way in which humans are linked, in other words, in which they are socialized ('vergesellschaftet'), in order to construct a *concrete* totality, based on concrete material and affective wealth, instead of an *abstract* richness of amassed value embodied in money (Kurz 1987, p 4ff.). Whereas Leninism and Bolshevism replaced capital as social synthesis by a capitalist state which eventually reduced the degree of bonds between individuals to nearly zero under Stalin's regime (Adamczak 2017, 230), the anarchist answer revolves around the intensification of horizontal associations on different levels of society and around binding, interlinking and associating humans. Hence, anarchism, both classic and modern, stresses that free associations are the basis on which "new forms of community" (Day 2004, 740) can be further cultivated and individuality can unfold. On this view, freedom is envisioned as a result of the reconfiguration of the individual and the collective, in which agency is reclaimed

and in which the political and the social is reconstructed along a cooperative and inclusive line (Davis 2019, 49).

The history of anarchist struggles shows that these four principles can become embodied in the most different organizational forms: small affinity groups can as much claim to realize and strive towards these principles as can syndicalist trade unions, platforms and so-called organizations of tendency,[11] as well as production cooperatives. Councils have been considered as an eminent institutional expression of anarchist goals, at least since the Paris Commune of 1871. This organizational form has been prominent throughout major revolutions in Europe and beyond in the era of the workers' movement: soviets in the Russian Revolution, for example, the council republics in the German Revolution of 1918, or of revolutionary Spain in the 1930s. From the 1960s onwards, however, councils gradually diminished in prominence within anarchism, as the movement shifted its focus towards more subversive micro-political approaches (Newman 2011, 345). Oddly, although the Zapatista revolution in Mexico from the 1990s onwards and the project of democratic autonomy in North-East Syria (Rojava) since 2014 – both well recognized among anarchists – have both actualized the idea of councils, the anarchist discussion of councils lags behind. Councils have seemingly become the theoretical prerogative of the (Marxist) Council Communists. This dissertation makes a contribution to revisiting councils under anarchist terms.

3.3 Contemporary anarchism in the Arab world: an overview

This subchapter will give an overview of anarchism in the Arab World focusing on its contemporary expressions. Galiàn has argued that the experiences of anarchists both in the Arab Spring and in the 19th and 20th centuries "have not yet been inserted in what Uri Gordon describes as '[…] the full-blown revival of anarchism, as a global social movement and coherent set of political discourses, on a scale and to levels of unity and diversity unseen since 1930s'." (Galiàn 2019b, 716) The dissertation seeks to make a contribution to this undertaking. I will confine my overview to Lebanon, Tunisia and Egypt, because they serve well to illustrate how diverse the anarchist landscape in the Arab region is.[12] Apart from literature, I derive my knowledge from the visibility of anarchists in digital media as well as on my encounters and informal interviews that I conducted during three field trips between 2014 and 2016. Since this chapter has a cursory character, I will proceed without explaining any further the methodology that underlies my observations and findings.

Figure 7: Photo of anarchist graffiti in Tunis

Note: "A's Back" (circle-A)Source: A.W., Tunis Sept. 2014.

In quantitative terms, anarchism has practically been a non-issue within the Arab Left for decades, if not a century (Kalicha & Kuhn 2010). At best, Arab Leftists may find resonance in the Paris Commune or the Spanish Civil War (Kalicha & Kuhn 2010, 195). But certainly Baathism has made a great

[11] Within anarchism van der Walt & Schmidt differentiate between numerous organizational approaches: organizations of tendency, platformism, syndicalism, organizational dualism/dual unionism (2009, 211ff.).

[12] Information on Jordanian anarchists is rather eclectic so far (Kalicha & Kuhn 2010; Galiàn 2020). Morocco is worth investigating more, also in terms of transnational connections with the French L'Alternative Libertaire that appears to play a role in the diffusion of anarchism. Eclectic information on both Morocco and Algeria concerning contemporary anarchism is found in Galiàn 2020.

contribution to continuing the overall Leninist/Stalinist cleansing policies of libertarian opposition (Bustani 2014, 35). The Arab Spring has flushed up anarchism as a possible reference point especially and has made visible a desire for re-inventing the political, of reconstructing the social, of renegotiating individuality and community on radically different grounds to what either authoritarian regimes or representative democracies could possibly offer to people. This desire became manifest in the emergence of groups and individuals during the Arab Spring who consequently rejected leadership, who resisted the call for merely replacing one government with another, who, in very different forms, experimented with direct action.

The naming and self-identification of various groups within the Arab region are influenced to a significant extent by colonial history and the dominant non-Arabic languages in those respective countries. Whereas in the Maghreb countries we mostly encounter the French 'libertaire', 'anarchiste,' or 'anti-autoritaire', the Egyptian way of calling themselves anarchists is mostly through the noun 'anarkiyyoun', as well as through the adjective 'taharrouri', i.e., 'libertarian', or 'la-sultawi', i.e., 'anti-authoritarian'. The choice of name also depends on where a person would position herself within the anarchist spectrum: those oriented towards workers' struggles and in favor of syndicalist (workers' unions') strategies for social transformation would rather refer to 'ishtirakiyya taharrouriyya', i.e., libertarian socialism, whereas autonomous groups who are more inclined toward strategies of social and cultural transformation of society and of their lives would mostly refer to 'la-sultawi'. 'Fawdawiyyoun', however, would be the Arabic equivalent of 'slobs' or 'vandals', typically a pejorative term imposed by others that refers to the misconception of anarchism as chaos, violence and absence of order.[13] My overview thus includes anti-authoritarian, libertarian and autonomous radical left actors as long as they – metaphorically speaking – spray a circle around the letter A and do so with intention.

3.3.1 Lebanon

The most 'dynamic' place with regards to contemporary anarchism in the Arab world has long been Lebanon. Every now and then anarchist groups have been forming and vanishing, anarchist and (queer-)feminist graffiti and radical street art pops up at every corner. Throughout the 2000s, more than three groups were active, each one with a very different orientation and activism. One, Al-Badil Al-Taharrouri, was a small group consisting of mostly elder intellectuals from around Beirut who were primarily concerned with discussing anarchist history and theory and were connected to the French organization L'Alternative Libertaire - which is mirrored in their similar group names. One of them, Georges Saad, a university professor of Law whom I had the opportunity to meet in Beirut in 2015, also translated Daniel Guérin's introductory work Anarchism: From theory to practice. The latter is still the only hard copy book on anarchism in Arabic which is comparatively easy to acquire in bookshops. Whereas this translation and the circulation of around 4,000 copies of the book are a great achievement, I find it hard to verify the claim that the group had "a notorious influence on the evolution of libertarian radical thought in Lebanon and other parts of the Mediterranean." (Galiàn 2020, 139). Following a decline of activity in the late 2000s, the legacy of Al-Badil Al-Taharrouri is primarily represented by a short Wikipedia entry ("Al Badil Al Taharouri" 2021), a relatively inactive blog launched in 2008 and a radio interview (radio canut 2009). As their connection with the French L'Alternative Libertaire already suggests, they associated themselves with libertarian communism, rejecting party organization and advocating for a

[13] Unfortunately, the US-based group CrimethInc. has opted to use the word 'fawdawiyya' in the translation of their pamphlet "To change everything" from 2016 (CrimethInc. 2016). Fortunately, they have re-worked the translation and replaced the term by 'anarkiyya' (CrimethInc. n.d.).

transformation of society based on direct democracy, federalism and a cooperative, self-organized mode of production (Al Badil Al Taharouri 2021). The other group, a Red and Anarchist Skinhead (RASH) group, was based in the north of Lebanon and mainly engaged in social street work (Commission Journal 2007). During the war between Israel and Lebanon in 2006, group members went to the south of Lebanon, the area most affected by the war, in order to help deliver medical aid and to support affected people in different ways (Kalicha & Kuhn 2010, 188). Ironically, they were caught by the Lebanese Hizbollah militia who held them accountable for a declaration that the other group, Al-Badil Al-Taharouri, had published shortly before. There, Al-Badil had declared their support for the government at that time and against Hizbollah. "This communiqué was perceived by all as the position of Lebanese anarchists" which put the RASH-activists in great danger as "the people there [in the south] knew about our political convictions" (Kalicha & Kuhn 2010, 189). Having rifles pointed at their foreheads, the activists of the RASH-group only narrowly escaped serious consequences by convincing Hizbollah that there was no relation between these two anarchist groups (ibid.). Two members of the RASH group died during their activities in the war (Commission Journal 2007), others left the country.

Another group was present from around 2007 onwards and became active especially from 2011-2014: Radical Beirut. According to their own very short description they are "an initiative aiming to give an online and offline push to the radical activism scene in Lebanon and the Mediterranean area." (Radical Beirut, n.d.). They established a blog which they used for around 4 years, a Twitter account (which hasn't been used since 2015), and a Facebook account that had been in use until spring 2020. The latter was the center of their online activity and especially served them for posting photos of radical graffiti and mural arts in Beirut. However, I would caution against the claim that their activism was limited to digital media (Galiàn 2020, 139). One of them explained to me: "(...) we were mostly active in 2011-2014 , then we got together briefly again during the Lebanese uprising in October 2019; the former members are all still active in different ways, but we put our effort now with كافح (Kafeh) which is kind of the umbrella anarchist group for different anarchists nowadays in Lebanon." (private Facebook conversation 2020).

Figure 8: Snippet from Radical Beirut's Facebook page

Figure 9: Snippet from Radical Beirut's blog

Note: Source: Radical Beirut, n.d., blog; Radical Beirut, n.d.

The activists from Radical Beirut have received some attention beyond Lebanon for their "Letter to North American Anarchists". In early 2013, the US-based CrimetInc. collective attempted to get in contact with Egyptians who had formed a 'black bloc' during protests against the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt which gained notoriety in national and international press (LeVine 2013) and in social media (Moynihan 2013). Personal profiles and group pages that referred to black blocs proliferated on Facebook, generating significant hype about this phenomenon that gained considerable attention from anarchist circles in the West. CrimethInc. then posted an open letter in both English and Arabic on their blog (CrimethInc. 2013), which was subsequently circulated digitally and linked or reposted on other European anarchist blogs, e.g., on the German speaking linksunten (Magazinredaktion 2013) and on the transnational libcom.org (ASyndicalist 2013). The letter, a mix of articulation of solidarity with leftist revolutionaries in Egypt and of a request to get in contact to discuss anarchist strategies (CrimethInc.

2013), probably never reached the Egyptian addressee.[14] Instead it provoked "A Letter to North American Anarchists" from Radical Beirut who engaged in a meta-discussion about the relationship between anarchists from the post-colonial periphery and the West, best summed up by the following quote:

> We appreciate the feedback and the exchange, and we think it's desired and needed, but we feel that there are a lot of subtle expectations that we should become another version of you. And we don't want to. Being on the other end of the equation, the one that has been getting drone missiles, uranium depleted shells, and imperialism for decades, we can honestly tell you that whatever you tried, it didn't work well for us, and it seems it didn't work for you as well (Radical Beirut 2013).

In the course of flaming protests in Lebanon against the government in the years around 2020, another group emerged: Kafeh, which translates to 'Struggle!'. This group has received quite some attention by anarchists in Europe and North America who have posted, reposted, and archived an announcement by Kafeh about the protests (Organize! 2019; enough14 2020; The Anarchist Library 2019; Galiàn 2020, 142).

Figure 10: Snippet from Kafeh's Facebook page

Note: Figure 10: fist on black flag with Arabic font reading "Kafeh!". Source: Kafeh 2021, n.d.

Figure 11: Photo of anarchist graffiti in Beirut

Note: "The Union of Anarchists in Lebanon"; Circle-A in center. Source: A.W., Beirut (quarter of Hamra) February 2017.

In Beirut, a group called Autonomia opened an Infoshop in Hamra (downtown Beirut) and created a mailing list for networking. What initially seemed "promising" (Commission Journal 2007), eventually revealed itself to have a limited lifespan. Autonomia no longer exists, and their website has faded from the collective memory of the internet. Groups and their names come and go, but the experiences made by the people involved leave traces and may at times re-emerge. The description by a Lebanese anarchist that "libertarians are present in many networked struggles regarding education, social work, ecology, feminism, mobilizations against homophobia (...)" is mirrored in the periodic re-appearance of anarchist

[14] This has to do with the fact that the Black Bloc was most likely formed by the ultra communities around two of the most prominent Cairo soccer clubs, Al-Ahly and Zamalek, which are both experienced in radical tactics to confront police forces. As will be explained below, soccer ultras are primarily concerned with soccer and probably do not follow the news or debates within the anarchist community.

and radical groups. Likewise, when I visited Beirut in February 2017 I found several graffiti reading "The Union of Anarchists", while none of the anarchist or leftist people that I spoke to were aware of that group.

3.3.2 Tunisia

In the context and in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, Tunisia stood out as a country where anarchists were particularly active. I had the opportunity to meet a few of them, in late 2014, and again in 2015, at a time when the general atmosphere seemed to be one of post-revolutionary resignation. However, Yousri, who was one of the core members of Harakat Asyan (Disobedience Movement), generously shared his memories of the time between 2011-2013 in several conversations.[15] His accounts richly add to and sometimes contrast the narrative that has been proposed by researchers (Galiàn 2019b; Octave & Msabhi 2016). Until the revolution, Yousri had been studying at university, which represented for him "a magical space". "I found myself in a politicized milieu, so different from the rest of society", he explained. "It was really here that it all began for me." When the uprising erupted in late 2010, he was part of a large clique of friends who realized that "we had to get organized not only as friends, but really as a group." Although a few anarchists came from very politically engaged families, including one whose father was a co-founder of the communist party, they did not immediately adopt a specific organizational mode. Instead, there was a phase of orientation, spontaneity, and a willingness to go with the flow. At that early stage, being young and immersed in that experience of youthfulness was the common denominator for this growing group which attracted young people from the most diverse political tendencies: "There was no filter, except maybe that we were all young, which we were proud of." For a short while, they considered becoming organized as a group called Harakat Shabab Tunis al-Hurr (Movement of young and free Tunisians). "We functioned as a magnetic core that attracted young people who had the spirit and will to continue this revolution. We really had that potential, being present in the streets, staying out late in bars, hanging out in cafés." This is reflective of the trajectory of many other radical groups: "In that first year everything was intuitive. And later we realized that other groups had the same trajectory, we all did the same: A bunch of friends, a growing core that attracted more and more young people (...). It was like a large fabric of groups that we were part of."

In late 2011, a turning point arrived: seeing that free speech and a certain culture of militancy had been established, they became increasingly interested in going beyond spontaneous practices and in reflecting also on an intellectual level about revolutionary organizing. In that search, they turned to more experienced and elder libertarian communists that they were in touch with loosely or through family ties and they began a common trajectory that would last for roughly two years, tensions notwithstanding. "They were older and much more experienced than us, they were well-read, they knew how to write texts, they were Marxists or leaning towards syndicalism, they had been working politically over years or decades in secrecy and they were not inclined to destroy traditional political structures such as parties. And – which would become a problem later – they were working and had their financial security." Thus, the two milieus were the complete opposite in many regards: "We were all young, unemployed students with no income, who had suspended their studies to continue the revolution, we increasingly leaned towards anarchism, we wanted to experiment, to sustain our group in an autonomous way." In the beginning, that process seemed to lead to building a party, but the youngster faction blocked that process. Although some people dropped out as a result, the connection between the two factions remained relatively stable

[15] All quotes draw on several private conversations, personal and on Skype, that I transcribed during the interview. Yousri gave his explicit consent to using them.

and they eventually formed a new group in spring 2012: Harakat Asyan. According to Yousri, the group's name reflects their anti-authoritarian trajectory. By the time they founded the group, they had established for themselves a "minimum basis of anarchist thought and theory." It is very noteworthy that despite the sharp contrast of the two milieus, the new group managed to tolerate these differences in Asyan until the end. Whereas the youngsters were less inclined to organize farmers and workers, for instance in cooperatives, strikes or unions, they nevertheless supported those projects, such as the collectivization and establishment of a farming cooperative in a village. "It was confrontational, and at the same time it was also an intellectual and sometimes practical convergence. We fertilized each other, we argued, we convinced each other and we had enough common ground to develop together for a while." A documentary film "Le peuple veut la chûte du système" (Tarlacrea 2013), which accompanied some of Asyan's activists, gives a very good impression of the convergences and crossings of these currents if one is aware of them, even within families.

Figure 12: Photo of Harakat Asyan at a demonstration in Tunis (2012)

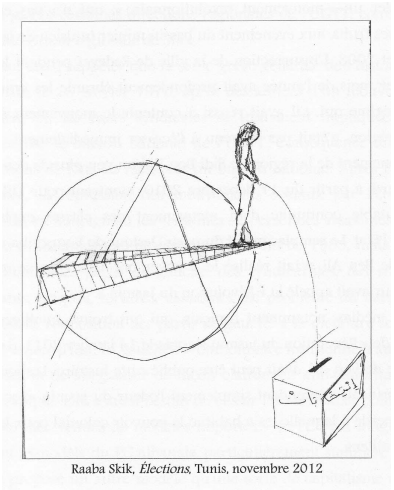
Note: Red-black banner reading "Break capitalism's rule", and in the background "All states are the servants of capitalists. Smash authority". Source: CREA Toulouse (2013, July 3).

Asyan's declaration of principles, the initiation of the Facebook page and the publication of a monthly four-page journal all stem from that new phase after the group's birth and reflect their élan. In all their appearances, whether mediated or in the streets, they displayed an explicit stance against both the state and capitalism and wholly rejected the channeling of the revolution into parliamentary elections. One of their declared principles was to "break with all forms of hierarchical and bureaucratic organization; (to) affirm the principle of free dialogue and collective decision-making in all realms by going beyond democratic centralism and the passivity of the electoral spectacles." (Asyan 2012, declaration). The *la'* – the Arabic pendant to the circled A – was central in their Facebook iconography, and it was concretely linked to elections and representation, such as in the Facebook profile picture reading "la ra'is li"/"there is no president for me", reminiscent of the famous anarchist slogan 'no gods not masters'. Whereas the French Nuit Debout protests claimed that "our dreams don't fit into your ballot boxes" ('nos rêves ne rentrent pas dans vos urnes'), Asyan was quite explicit about what they would contribute to the ballot boxes.

Figure 13: Figure from Harakat Asyan's Facebook page

Note: Arabic "La ra'iis liy" (engl. 'there is no president for me'). Source: Harakat Asyan, n.d.

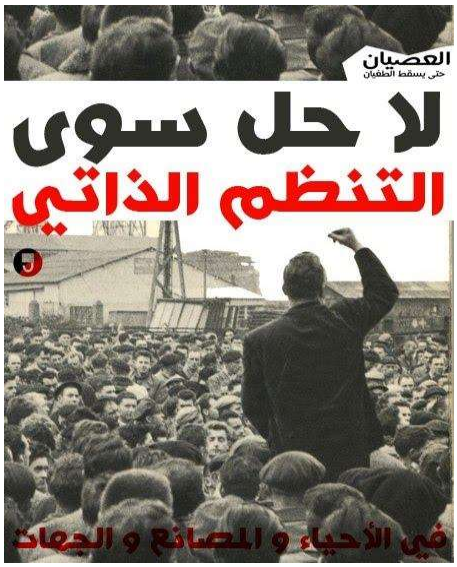
Figure 14: Drawing from Harakat Asyan's printed zine



Note: A person urinating into a ballot box; circled-A in background; Arabic "intikhabaat" (engl. 'elections') written on the ballot box. Source: Scan from Harakat Asyan (2012).

Asyan's declaration of principles from spring 2012 (distributed digitally but also as part of a four-pages A4 journal in both French and Arabic language) mirrors the heterogeneity of the group, manifesting its syndicalist, labor-oriented and more experimental approach. The declaration states prominently in the beginning that the "Mouvement Désobéissance is libertarian and anti-authoritarian. It struggles against capitalism and its authoritarian apparatus. It aims at the self-organization of the masses, and at a generalized self-organization of life and of the produced wealth." By contrast, it concludes by stating: "Asyan's activists are free individuals, relying on themselves in their initiatives, and they consider themselves as

Figure 15: Figure from Harakat Asyan's Facebook profile



Note: Figure 15: top right corner: "Obedience until the regime falls". Center and bottom: "There is no alternative to self-organization – in the neighborhoods, the factories and regions". Source: Harakat Asyan, n.d.

Figure 16: Figure from Harakat Asyan's Facebook profile

Note: Figure 16: In background: "There is no alternative to self-organization"; in the foreground: "Harakt Asyan/revolutionary action committee"; left: image of two kids drawing a Circle-A. Source: Harakat Asyan, n.d.

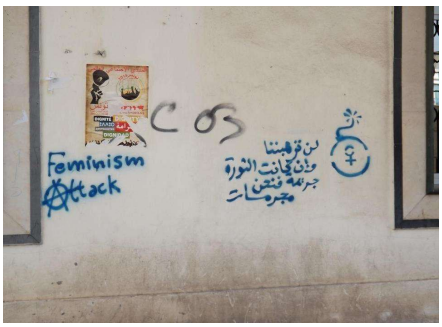
creators of novel, collective experiences." (Asyan 2012, translations A.W.). This "multitude of tendencies" in Asyan (Octave & Msabhi 206, 137) was well mirrored in the different iconography that they drew on for their Facebook profile photos, juxtaposing iconography of mass-organization to radical graffiti iconography that appeared youthful, artsy and witty.

In the course of 2012/2013 the more syndicalist faction of Asyan pursued activities to support workers' self-organization. This is the current documented by Octave & Msabhi, who I believe were themselves part of or at least close to Asyan. In their account of syndicalist activities in Tunisia, Octave & Msabhi (2016) integrate Harakat Asyan into a landscape of a broader movement of syndicalist organizing structures and struggles all over Tunisia. Based on several interviews with trade union activists and on their own research and experience, the authors claim that since 2008, but spurred by the uprising in 2011, anarchist-leaning syndicates, collectives and groups were emerging all over Tunisia (p. 22). However, they acknowledge that self-government (French 'autogestion') of production and agriculture was scarcely present (p. 94). This narrative is congruent with the one of the aforementioned documentary films which portrays the revolution as starting in 2008 with the workers' uprising in Gafsa (hence the subtitle "An V de la revolution" by Tarlacrea 2013). Meanwhile the 'youth-faction' of Asyan engaged in completely different practices through 2012 and 2013. For Yousri and his peers "Asyan was a group for action, for theoretical reflection, and for experimenting with new forms of practices" They used to gather

on a weekly basis to engage in discussions, study texts, and plan actions. Initially, these meetings took place in cafes or people's homes. However, as the group grew in size, these venues became increasingly inconvenient. "We realized that in order to continue with our work, we needed our own space. So we rented a small apartment as a venue. It was tiny and we furnished it entirely ourselves." The venue, situated in a busy, popular quarter of Tunis, became the gravitational center for an increasingly young, urban, leftist milieu. They offered workshops on serigraphy, established communal kitchen events, and organized rap concerts. Whereas this venue represents a heyday phase of Asyan's activism, it also marked the beginning of the end, according to Yousri. Since they were, despite their efforts, not able to sustain the place, they relied on donations from elder comrades to pay the rent – a situation that was dissatisfying to both sides. Against the backdrop of an economic crisis and a lack of income for the youngsters, a conflict surfaced again that had earlier led to tensions with another subgroup of Asyan: the matter of accepting financial support from the French group of the Fédération Anarchiste Internationale. "It was a difficult decision, because many were very attached to the venue. But we strongly perceived it as a matter of principle. We were convinced that accepting money from outside – and we were offered a large sum – would necessarily introduce hierarchies and create opportunism that would have killed the project in the long run." It was precisely this faction of Asyan that tried to revive anarchist organizing in 2015 under the name of Le Commun Libertaire (Al-Mushtarak Al-Taharrouri) and with the support of the French Fédération Anarchiste. In 2015 they published a "Call for a first Mediterranean anarchist meeting" in cooperation with the French Fédération anarchiste (Tahrir ICN 2015, Jan 18). The meeting, which I attended, was an opportunity to network among anarchists: supporters from L'Alternative Libertaire were present, a Kurdish anarchist, members of the Spanish syndicalist union CNT, several anarchists from Belarus, from Denmark, Germany and other European countries. Above all, the meeting was intended to give the newly formed or reformed Tunisian group momentum to build a local structure, such as – ironically – a venue.

Whereas the venue was closed in late 2013, Asyan – as a whole group – gave another important incentive for anti-authoritarian organization in Tunis: the creation of a common platform organization that would link anti-authoritarian groups all over Tunis to each other. Under the name Hay'at al-Amal al-Thawri - Harakat Asyan, the group associated itself with groups in the city of Sfax and roughly six other towns where people had formed anarchist-leaning groups. Trying to estimate the relevance and influence of Asyan, Yousri believes that "Asyan in Tunis, the capital, was a bit like an avant-garde in the sense that we really inspired young people in different places." When I first met him in 2014, Yousri appeared resigned, but today he holds a slightly more optimistic view of the experience of Asyan and the broader revolutionary movement. "Of course, we knew very well that what we desired was probably not going to happen – a libertarian society, workers' self-administration etc. However, we wanted to change things here and now. And we wanted to exert the maximum influence we could: With our friends, other groups, we wanted to tie a network, a real, tangible fabric for our quotidian lives. (…) We left our traces in Tunisia. A lot of the spirit is still there."

Figure 17: Photograph of graffiti in Tunis by Feminism Attack



Note: Text on the right: "You will not intimidate us. If the revolution is a crime, we are criminals". Source: The Free (2013).

Harakat Asyan also attracted young women. A school student, Aika, recounted to me how she had been leaning towards communism before being in contact with Harakat Asyan. Aika and others came into conflict with the core of Asyan activists, especially on the question of whether they should accept

offers by L'Alternative Libertaire to support Asyan financially and to find common ground or projects. As a result, together with a dozen other young women, Aika founded a group that they named Feminism Attack which met on a weekly basis in and around Tunis, discussing their situation, and preparing small actions such as spraying feminist graffiti. Police repression affected them in the form of a house search and short detentions (Nath & Chris 2013).

3.3.3 Egypt

In Egypt, in the context of the Arab Spring a group under the name of Al-Harakah Al-Ishtirakiyya Al-Taharruriyya (in English Libertarian Socialist Movement, LSM) was founded, "the first self-declared anarchist movement in Egypt" according to Galiàn (2019a, 277). The uprising in 2011 pushed elder anarchist intellectuals born in the 1950s to join efforts with younger anarchists in order to highlight anarchist principles and perspectives in the uprising. "Tahrir Square served as a meeting point for self-declared anarchists that were spread around Egypt but did not know each other. It also was a political opportunity

Figure 18: Snippet from Libertarian Socialist Movement's Facebook page

Note: Figure 18: Snippet from LSM's Facebook profile: Circle-A in the foreground with group's name in Arabic. Historical photo of anarchist soldiers in the Spanish Civil War (1930s). Source: Libertarian Socialist Movement (n.d. a).

Figure 19: Snippet from Libertarian Socialist Movement's Facebook page

Note: Figure 19: Portrait of Mikhail Bakunin with quote: When the people are being beaten with a stick, they are not much happier if it is called the People's Stick. Source: Libertarian Socialist Movement (n.d. a).

for the construction of a collective identity that, until that day, just existed as an individual identity." (Abud 2011, quoted from Galiàn 2019a, 278) The group had a rather short-lived but still accessible blog and a very active Facebook page which the group used in order to make anarchist texts available and in which they oftentimes referred to anarchist history, e.g. by using anarchist iconography as profile pictures (Figures 18 and 19).

The group, mainly based in Alexandria, experienced a split just one year after the beginning of the uprising due to "differences among its members" with regards to their practical orientation, specifically the organization of workers' struggles versus a platformist approach (Galiàn 2015, 362). The group, or rather the group's individual members, were quite prolific in editing, translating and diffusing writings on anarchism, which seemed to be their main focus of activity. From 2011 onwards, they published a few books on anarchism in an attempt to make anarchist thought more accessible locally. These contained overviews of anarchist history and thought as well as translations of classical texts, and were published and diffused by at least four different authors (Galiàn 2015, 363f.). The primary reference points of the

group were anarchist classics such as Bakunin, and historical struggles that revolve around syndicalism, the working-class movement and larger revolutionary movements, such as the Paris Commune, the Ukrainian Makhnovtchina and the Spanish Civil War. Consequently, they positioned themselves as "an-archo-communists who believe in class struggle as the way to overthrow Capitalism and the authority of the oppressive State. It adopts the aspirations and demands of the working-class, the industrial workers, the small farmers, the peasants, the office workers, and of all of those who only have the power of their labor power to sell and who have no control over the means of production." (Libertarian Socialist Movement, n.d. c, translation A.W.). Both the group's website (Libertarian Socialist Movement n.d. b) and the blog Anarchism in Arabic (n.d.), which was also based on the group and is a rich collection of texts on anarchism in Arabic, were active for three years. After this short dynamic phase of one or two years, it seems that the above-mentioned post-revolutionary resignation has, at least for now, resulted in another phase of latency or near non-existence of anarchism in Egypt as well.[16]

3.3.4 Syria

Previously, when asking about anarchism in Syria, the response was often limited to mentioning the blog "Al-Hewar Al-Mutamaddun" (Stephens 2013), which was believed to have gained significant readership among Arab leftists (Galiàn 2019a, 277, 280 footnote). Galiàn (2019b, 725) quotes the blog host Mazen Km al-Maz: "I started translating the works of Bakunin (who directly impacted me with his crazy devotion to freedom and revolution) and other known 'anarchists'. The theory of State Capitalism was very important to me and for some of my friends who were heading in the same direction. We used it to describe the Al-Assad regime and to promote a direct oppositional politics in the 2000s." The uprising, and the trajectory it was forced to take, changed everything regarding anarchism in Syria. First, individuals turned their back on communist parties and turned towards anarchism. This was the case with Mohammed Abu Hajar, a rapper from Tartous, who only made it out of Syria in the last second before his arrest, and his friends (Yassin-Kassab's & Al-Shami's 2016, 63). Second, anarchists from outside Syria returned, as was the case for both Omar Aziz and for Mazen Km Al-Maz: "(...) it was the 'Arab Spring' that gave anarchism a true push. (...) I saw how the movement was growing up in Egypt and in some parts of Syria as well. I left my job as a family doctor in the Gulf and I went to Egypt and after that to 'liberated Syria' in 2012." (Al-Maz quoted in Galiàn 2019b, 725) Third, anarchists became involved in the revolution, as is the case for around a dozen anarchists in Aleppo (Hourriya 2016). They dedicated themselves especially to producing a newspaper or zine, called Tamarod, but they also wrote and performed songs: "There was a lot of cooperation between different newspapers, many papers exchanged copies across different regions and distributed them as much as possible. (...) Strong ties were created between journals and it was a bit as though a newspaper syndicate had been created." (Hourriya 2016, 109 ff., 114) Since they were active especially in the first year of the revolution (and left Syria in early 2013), their activity was much focused on a type of media work that was characteristic for revolutionary activity in those days in general: documenting abuses as well as protests by editing, uploading and diffusing videos on Youtube. But above all, after one year of revolutionary activity, people started organizing in a way that was different to other Arab Spring countries: they formed councils. The emerging local council movement in Syria and Aziz' conceptualization of the councils adds yet another layer to the emergence of anarchism in the Arab

[16] Soccer ultras in Arab countries have played a role in circulating and appropriating anarchist repertoires (black bloc tactics, confrontation with police and state, rudimentary criticism of capitalist commodification of soccer, spreading Circle-A graffiti and other anarchist codes). Their contribution to the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia has been recognized by several authors (Heck, 2015; Jerzak, 2013; El Guindy, 2013; Gibril 2015). I have discussed elsewhere (Woller 2018) in how far they are to be considered as 'anarchist' or not.

region. What makes the Syrian case really stand out is the fact that nowhere else did the Arab Spring uprisings take the shape of something more than just a political revolution – doing away with one government and replacing it with another one, a more democratic one at best. In Syria, people self-organized on a mass-basis, first in the form of local coordination committees and then in local councils, functioning much along the lines of agency, anti-authoritarianism, prefigurative politics and free associations.

This cursory overview of anarchism in Arab countries highlights the significant heterogeneity in the understanding and manifestations of 'anarchism' both shortly before and after the Arab Spring, even within the same country. It also makes clear that anarchism has been/is only marginally existent in the region, but that the Arab Spring was a window of opportunity for anarchists to cultivate anarchist ideas and experiment with alternative forms of political organization.

4. Theory: Digital Media and Remembrance

Anarchism has always been forced to rely on itself for cultivating a memory of its struggles. Anarchist currents have been "effectively repressed out of existence in the first half of the last century by Fascism, Bolshevism and the American Red Scare" pretty much all around the globe (Gordon 2007, 30). Anarchists were amongst the first ones to be delivered into concentration camps and murdered in fascist Germany, as for instance Erich Mühsam. Specifically, the end of councils has so far without exception been effected by the utmost repression "either in the name of democracy or socialism" (Demirović 2009, 204). In parallel to the material threat to anarchists' lives, anarchism's history has always been confronted with dynamics of 'erasure': First, mainstream history's efforts to distort, depreciate and omit anarchists' struggles. Second, Marxist-Leninist historiography's exclusive claim to revolutions and debates that were in fact substantially shaped by anarchists – this has been coined 'marxist historical amnesia' ("marxistische Geschichtsvergessenheit", Kellermann 2011). This amnesia extends to renown leftist scholars who have contributed to downsizing or ignoring anarchists' roles in struggles to an extent that is embarrassing (Kellermann 2011, e.g. 153ff.; 156). What distinguishes the remembrance of past anarchist struggles from the Syrian uprising is the existence of digital media. Against the sketched background digital media are a potential game changer for the creation of memory. They bear the promise to empower leftist groups to '"write our history ourselves: movements get to leave traces of their passion for future generations because forgotten struggles are lost struggles"' (Merrill & Lindgren, 664, quoting the – by today censored – German indymedia spin-off 'linksunten'). Digital media are one factor for how anarchists will remember – even *if* they will remember – Syria, Omar Aziz, the local councils. The theoretical field that will inform the exploration of this remembrance is the one of digital memory work which lies at the intersection of digital media studies, memory studies and social movement studies.

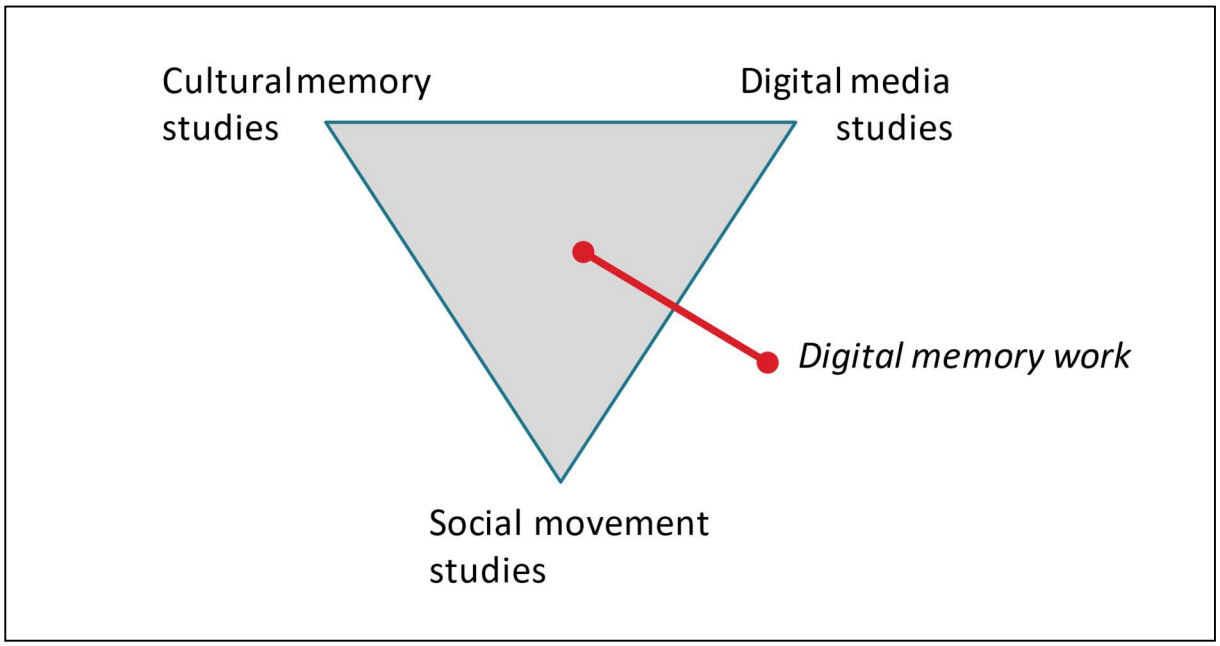
4.1 Memory work – digital media memory work

My study subscribes to the research agenda that Merrill et al. (2020) have recently articulated as mediated remembrance in social movements. The field that the editors and authors in that volume circumscribe is the one of digital media memory work, a field which lies at the intersection of three distinct disciplines: cultural memory studies, digital media studies and social movement studies, as shown in Figure 20. The connections among these three disciplines build interfaces, so that three of these interfaces or links emerge, each interface harboring its respective epistemological interests and approaches.

Memory work as an academic concept evolved in the field of cultural memory studies, a field which unfolded with increasing sway since the 1980s for different reasons (Hoskins 2018a, 4ff., 14). This field departs from the very ground assumption that memory is always socially constructed, i.e. it does neither exist objectively nor automatically, but it emerges out of social processes which are then conceived in different ways by different scholars. In contrast, memory work as a

phenomenon per se is seen to be "age-old" since it denotes practices of humans that deal with "the transfer and reconstruction of knowledge and experience of the past into the present and future." (Smit 2020, 86) In a broad understanding, to begin with, "memory work serves as an umbrella term that conveys an ongoing and critical engagement with the past in the present." (Merrill et al. 2020, 14) The fundamental notion that memory is always **socially** constructed clearly implies the engagement of human beings as actors, i.e. as "actively involved in the processes of symbolic transformation and elaboration of meanings of the past." (Jelin 2003, quoted from Merrill et al. 2020, 14). In memory, individuals are not separated, but linked to others: "memory is constructed in the individual during communication with other members of a given social constellation. It lives and sustains itself in communication processes." (Pentzold 2009, 258) In a more specific pronunciation of that social aspect "every collective memory" is seen to require "the support of a group delimited in space and time"' (Halbwachs 1950, 84, quoted in Pentzold 2009, 258). The notion of a socially

Figure 20: Three theoretical intersections in the study of digital memory work



Note: Source A.W. based on Merrill et al. 2020.

constructed memory furthermore implies the **processual** and non-determined character of memory, so that the term "(m)emory work (…) immediately indicates the past as something 'under construction'" (Smit 2020, 90). "Memory, here, is a *process*, because it is never fixed, static, or finished" (Smit 2020, 87), "memory is always new" and "constantly remade" (Hoskins 2018a, 9), and especially against the background of digital media, "memory becomes permanently transitional" (Kaun 2016, 5397). As soon as actors are involved, the question arises whether or not – or to what degree – memory work is conscious and **aimed at a purpose** or rather unintentional and coincidental. Here, it is important to be aware of the different possible scales and objects of analysis: Analyzing how the memory of a certain event emerges in a society at large may beg for a much broader lens of memory construction and will have to consider non-purposive memory work that happens by coincidence and only later will turn out to have fed into memory construction. This question of how *societies* remember is the paradigmatic question for those scholars who are particularly interested in *collective* memory – a tradition that draws especially on Maurice Halbwachs' foundational work 'La Mémoire Collective' (written 1930s; published 1950; translated 1980; see Hoskins 2018a, 7). That lens of non-purposive memory work with digital media will as well be useful when the

object of analysis is the construction of "personal narratives of self": autobiographical and family memories. Here "everyday memorabilia (photos, videos, texts, etc.)" serve as objects of study from which memory construction can be understood (Kaun & Stiernstedt 2012, 337). In contrast to that, my focus is rather on memory activism in an explicitly politicized context. Moreover, the focus is on a certain, rather marginal(ized) group, transnationally dispersed, but loosely connected: Asking how anarchists construct a memory of the Syrian revolution necessitates a lens that is able to grasp precisely the purposive, intentional practices of memory work. Thus, being aware of the critique (Smit 2020, 88), I comfortably align with those who choose to conceive memory work as a "conscious and purposeful" engagement with the past (Kuhn 2010, 303), as an "active practice of remembering that takes an inquiring attitude towards the past" (ibid.), a practice in which the past is "interrogated, mined, for its meanings and its possibilities." (Kuhn 2010, 3).

Clearly, memory work has an irreducible **political dimension**. This has been emphasized especially by those scholars who investigate the intersection of memory and social movements. As Smit's quote and his reference to others shows, this view has been widely acknowledged: Memory is one activity among many others of humans that "generates and transforms the social world" (Jelin 2003, quoted from Merrill et al. 2020, 14) or at least has the potential to do so. "This makes memory work inherently political. Which and whose versions of the past are carried into the future is the result of a continuous power struggle." (Smit 2020, 86) This is true as much for greater political and social transformations as it is for biographical memories: Whose histories are remembered is a matter of individuals' or groups' positions within greater power architectures (gender, class, race etc.). However, although any memory has a political dimension, that political dimension is of course more immediate and more salient with regards to marginalized groups, social movements etc. Here, memory work manifests an immediately political character, because such groups also consciously strive to make themselves heard and construct a common representation of the past. That this "is not the automatic outcome" of the political practices themselves – such as protests, revolutionary struggles etc. – "but the result of a specific 'memory work'" is acknowledged by scholars dealing with social movements (Zamponi 2020, 144).

In that specific context of contestation, of oppositional groups, of marginalized groups, digital media stir intriguing thoughts: the "access to and criticism of official versions of history through reference to unofficial versions; the recovery of repressed memories of communities, nations and individuals whose histories have been ignored, hidden or destroyed" – all these are moments and contexts where digital media can make a difference based on the affordance structure that is very different from traditional mass media and former tools of mnemonic communication processes (Garde-Hansen 2011, 83). It is this particular research agenda of a politicized memory work that has recently been picked up and pushed forward by Merrill et al. (2020, 14). This research of digital media memory work particularly investigates counter-memories understood as those "relating to marginalized groups and events which challenge dominant, officially endorsed memories" (ibid.). A cultural turn within social movement studies has drawn increasing attention to the question "how (…) activists make sense of themselves and their environment" (Zamponi 2020, 143). It appeared increasingly plausible to those scholars to acknowledge that memory work has an important function for movements: it helps them sustain their continuity (Merrill & Lindgren 2020, 658) and it is a tool of making-sense of oneself. Two directions of counter-memory work by social movements have been identified by scholars in the field, as Bisht (2020, 177) revises: "The outward-oriented memory work seeks to effect changes in public and popular memory in line with the movement's aims; the inward-oriented memory work seeks to ensure that movement participants continue to have a shared sense of the history of the movement essential for the maintenance of collective

identity and unity over time (…)." As has been emphasized, my dissertation investigates the inward-oriented memory work. This has been raised earlier by Cammaerts in his coinage of the concept of self-mediation practices: "Processes of self-mediation tend to be more inward looking, providing justification for certain actions and celebrating resistance." (2012, 22). In Cammaerts' framework remembrance is one aspect of self-mediation practices that is made up by recording and "archiving the past, and through that transmit practices, tactics and ideas across space and time." (2015, 92).

A saved, reconstructed memory of the past, especially a highly contested or a marginalized one, is crucial for preserving a utopian élan in order not to drown in the sometimes overwhelming discourse of the 'impossibility of alternatives' or the 'end of history'. This is the utopian weight that lies in memory work which achieves several linkages between past – present – future. What is at stake when dealing with memory is not only a certain representation of the past, but also "the enhancement of our capacity to imagine the future." (Pogačar 2018, 41) Thus, past, present and future are linked: "On the one hand, the past manifests itself in the present through memory work (…). On the other, memory work designates the transference of the present and past into the future." (Smit 2020, 90) The idea that memory work "not only preserves the past but can slow down the vanishing of the political present" (Rothberg 2006, 184) works not only in the context of genocides that Rothberg discusses, but becomes acute in the context of revolutions and their aftermath such as in Syria: If we think of revolutions as not simply terminated at a certain point in time, but as ongoing or at least as somehow persisting by the fact that people have internalized their revolutionary experiences and learning processes, the active remembrance of revolution and the saving of that memory from oblivion may enhance people's present and future agency.

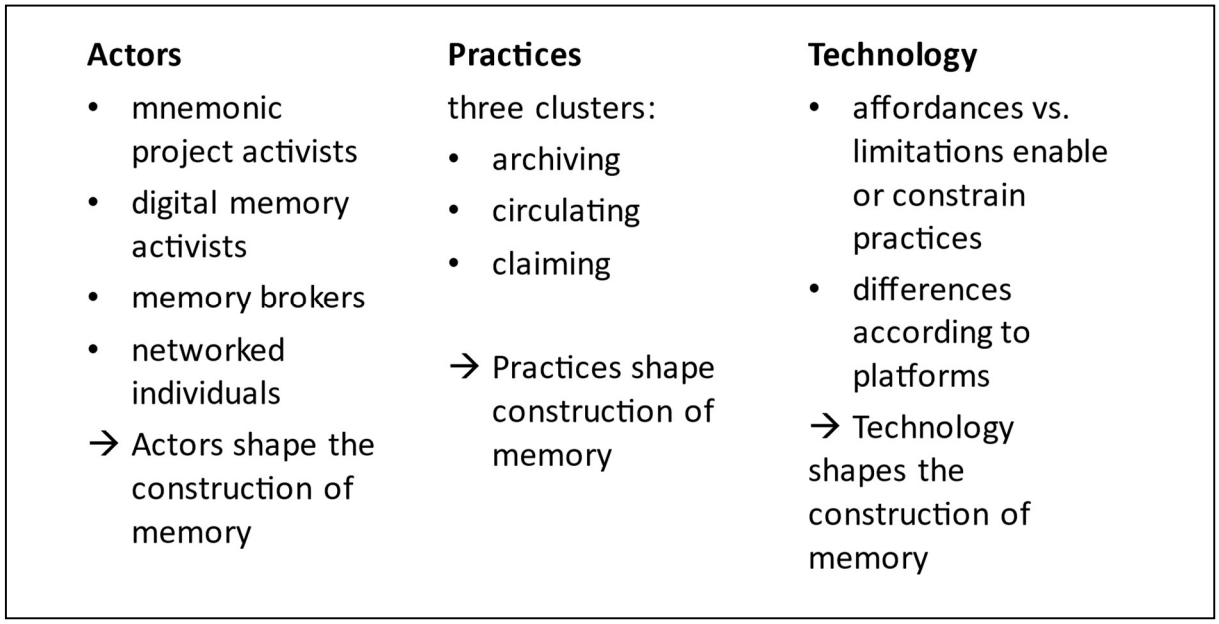
Memory work is not only inherently **social** and consequently **processual** and bound to actors, it is also irreducibly **political** and, lastly, it is also necessarily **mediated** (Lohmeier & Pentzold 2014, 777) There is a quite pronounced consensus to speak of *mediated* memory rather than of media and memory, as articulated for instance by van Dick: "Memory is not mediated by media, but media and memory transform each other" (van Dijck 2007, 21). In that view, media are not entering the process of memory construction at some stage, but are rather conceived as shaping that construction from the beginning: "To even speak of a relationship between media *and* memory already presumes media as some kind of external shaper, carrier, or manager of memory." (Hoskins 2018a, 6). It should be noted, however, that some authors are reluctant to wholly identify memory work with *mediated* memory work, differentiating between "memory-related practices at large" as opposed to such kinds of memory work that are associated to "networks of media" (Lohmeier & Pentzold 2014, 779; also Smit 2020, 88). Hoskins is an ardent proponent of the view that an absolute turning point for memory was marked by the rise of digital media which even begs for "a new ontology for memory studies (…) that is cognizant of media (…) as fundamentally altering what it [memory] is and what is possible to remember and to forget." (2018a, 7) The qualitative change that *digital* media brought about, according to Hoskins, has profoundly changed the conditions of remembering: in the pre-digital era the past was "contained (…), literally walled by the memory institutions of the day" (ibid., 6) In contrast, the arrival of digital media produced a "connective turn" due to "the sudden abundance, pervasiveness, and immediacy of digital media, communication networks and archives" (ibid., 1). Whereas authors such as Hoskins tend to strongly emphasize that the mediated character of memory is ineluctable and quite overwhelming (e.g. Hoskins 2018a, 27f.), others maintain in a more mitigated manner that "digital technologies (…) do not necessarily alter memory products" (Kaun & Stiernstedt 2012, 340; also Merrill & Lindgren 2020, 660; Keightley & Schlesinger 2014, 746).

4.2. Three analytical dimensions

Merrill et al. immediately jump from defining memory work to specifying three practices. However, I suggest that 'practices' is only one category of analysis next to actors and technology which all are at the same analytical level. I suggest that we can best approach this digital memory work as emerging out of a certain *constellation* of actors, their practices and technology which enables or hinders practices. Why does it make sense to assume this constellation? Indeed, it is noteworthy that numerous authors evoke the constellation-like character, but usually do not develop or apply a systematic approach to their material. They mostly stress the interplay of two to three categories from among practices, actors, technology, processes, material, events and (social) contexts. For instance, the relation between "the characteristics of *certain events* and social *actors*" are investigated as explanatory setting for the outcome of commemoration and appropriation (Zamponi 2020, 144; all following italics A.W.). Sometimes, the relation between *actors and the material* are conceived as decisive interplay: "Representations of the past produced and reproduced in the public sphere are the result of 'memory work'" (Zamponi 2020, 148) conducted by 'mnemonic *agents*' (Peri, 1999) that pursue strategic goals and projects and are *constrained by path dependencies* and by the limited malleability of the historical *material* (Zamponi 2020, 148). Similarly, Merrill et al. (2020, 12) plead for understanding *actors* as embedded in *contexts*. Lohmeier & Pentzold (2014, 1) add to this complex of *actors* plus *context/environment* the factors of *objects*: "these time- and space-bound efforts interweave with arrangements of people and their social relations, cultural discourses, objects and media *environments*." And then, there is a recurring reference to the nexus of *practices and technology*: "Memory work is a discursive process – comprising practices, cultural forms, and technologies" (Smit et al. 2018, 3120; Smit 2020, 86). And, lastly, Zamponi (2020, 146) highlights the connection of *actors* and *practices* and *diffusion*. Practices are specifically highlighted as analytical dimension (as especially by Merrill et al. 2020), and some indeed argue for privileging them as analytical category over others "taking *practices* as the *prime mode* of arranging memories as well as a starting point for explaining how they come into being and are made to function (…)" (Lohmeier & Pentzold 779).

Against the background of apparently very different options to relate analytical categories in specific constellations or arrangements, the following choice is made: The necessity to contextualize the object of a study is so unquestionable that I would like to put everything that figures as 'context' outside the bracket. What remains then, I suggest, is a constellation of actors plus technology plus practices. This triad has earlier been evoked by boyd (2010) in a different context, namely in her conceptualization of networked publics: "*Networked publics* are publics that are restructured by networked technologies. As such, they are simultaneously (1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice." (boyd 2010, 39; italics in original). If we take for granted that memory is grounded in social, more or less mediated, and communicative processes, boyd's perspective on networked publics is quite fitting for the analysis of memory. However, I will bypass a further discussion of 'public', because first, I believe it will not substantially enhance the subsequent empirical analysis and, second, it would overload the theoretical framework. Instead, I will draw from boyd's discussion her insights in the specific affordances of media platforms' technology which she sees as creating an architecture of affordances.

Figure 21: Digital media memory work as constellation of actors, practices, technology



Note: Source: A.W. based on Merrill et al. 2020; boyd 2010; Zamponi 2020; Smit 2020 etc.

In the following I will go through each of the three categories starting with *actors*, continuing with their *practices* and lastly shedding light on the *technologies* which enable or limit these practices.

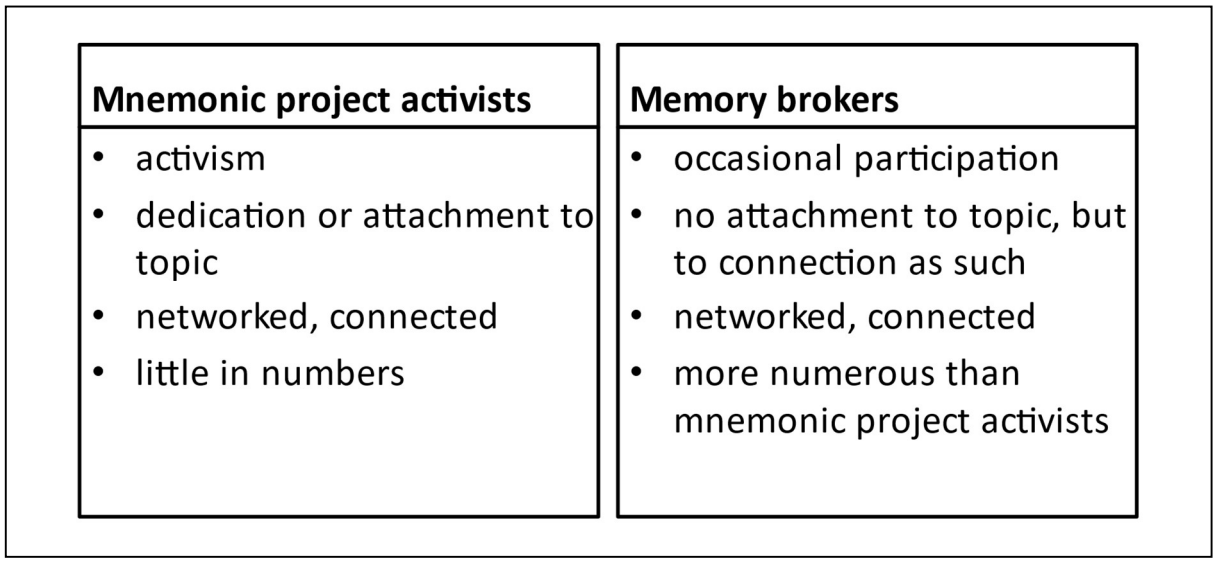
4.2.1 Actors

Scholars have pointed out that the more inclusive, participatory character of digital and social media as compared to traditional media potentially enhances individual agency (Zamponi 2020, 145). Apart from the field of digital media memory studies, this is reflected in other fields, too, such as the sociology of organizations (Majchrzak 2013, 48). A pronounced focus on actors in any analysis of mediated memory work, is all the more advisable as we have defined memory work as purposive and intentional. Smit (2020, 94) highlights the investment of individuals, saying that memory work "results from personal investments of individuals who express themselves and share their contributions." (likewise Bisht 2020, 176) If they do not commit themselves to remembering, it is not happening. Just take the Tunisian anarchist group Asyan as an example (chapter 3): It would have been easy for them to archive their monthly journal in the internet, thus making it accessible, searchable and visible so that this material could be seen, shared, appropriated by other anarchists, but they haven't.

Different terms have been circulating to deal with actors of memory work: memory workers, mnemonic agents, digital memory activists, digital memory brokers. In his study of the commemoration of the massive protests against the 2001 G8-summit in Genoa Zamponi came up with a typology of different roles. He proposes to distinguish between, on the first level, "digital memory activists" and "digitally networked individuals", thus differentiating between "mnemonic activism" as opposed to a more "occasional participation in online commemorations" (2020, 155f.). As Zamponi's Twitter analysis shows, the networked individuals are the overwhelming majority of actors in the specific case, whereas the committed activists – those who tweet with a certain quantitative intensity – are a small minority (only 35 account holders out of the total 2682 involved accounts

posted 10 or more tweets). It is that small minority, the more dedicated and committed digital memory activists which he then investigates further, concluding that there are two types of those activists: the "mnemonic project activists" and the "digital memory brokers" (ibid., 157). The brokers are committed not only to a specific mnemonic project, but more generally to online commemoration at large (ibid., 156f.). In contrast, the mnemonic project activists posted mainly "regarding the specific memory in which they are interested" without diversifying their interest – i.e. the majority of their posts related to only one particular topic and they did not engage in the other events that started to be commemorated next to the initial Genoa memories. Figure 22 sums up the characteristics that Zamponi attributes to the two main categories of digital memory activists. It is important to note that, although individual actors are central, they are not isolated individuals, but connected in different possible ways (Smit 2020, 87). Research focusing in particular on the role of social media in mnemonic processes has pointed out how "they generate new participatory patterns that can be more inclusive than the participation provided by traditional media" and how they "increase the role of agency" (Zamponi 2020, 145).

Figure 22: Actors: Two types of digital memory activists



Note: Source: A.W., based on Zamponi 2020.

4.2.2 Practices

Bart Cammaerts pioneered with his proposition to understand the media practices of social movements as self-mediation practices of a collective self (2015; also 2012). His conceptualization of self-mediation practices serves as a typology to understand what social movement actors do with media and why: Activists' use of digital media is split up into a set of three practices (disclosure, examination, remembrance) which, taken together, nourish the emergence of a collective self. Self-mediation practices (can) make sense for collectives, because in their dealings with media they can make themselves and their aims visible, examine and reflect what they are doing and why, and remember their struggles (2012, 22; 2015, 90ff.). Studies on digital memory work practices by social movement actors precisely zoom into that latter field of remembrance. Based on their revision of the emerging body of work in the field Merrill et al. have proposed a systematic of "three clusters of practices which characterise the digital memory work of social movements." (Merrill et al. 2020,

16) The three clusters are curating, circulating, claiming, which I adopt for my study, although I prefer the term 'archiving' or 'storing' instead of curating as proposed in a different triad by Kaun & Stiernstedt (2012).

Archiving describes how "social movements utilise digital media in order to document, archive and curate cultural memories" (Merrill et al. 2020, 20). Pentzold (2009, 264), draws attention to the discursive processes behind archiving in Wikipedia thus highlighting that archiving may be more than just once storing a piece of content, because one can review the development of an article over time and grasp debates from the talk page on which controversial views are discussed. **Circulating** is a practice in which digital media are used to "provide social movements with new scopes of mnemonic diffusion" (Merrill et al. 2020, 19). Circulation refers to those moments in which actors make content travel or travel again, be it their own blog posts, articles, tweets, videos etc. or the material produced by others which is re-tweeted, linked, shared, liked, etc. **Claiming** refers to those practices through which "social movements have used digital media to lay claim to, resurrect and appropriate particular pasts and cultural memories in different ways" (Merrill et al. 2020, 17f.). Claiming counters explicit policies and also subtle dynamics of erasure, i.e. the "mnemonic marginalization" of a community through an "institutionalised neglect or denial" of their existence (Merrill et al. 2020, 18). Claiming is perhaps the most complex of the practices to be analyzed, because it necessitates a process of joint sense-making. One has not only to identify and actively relate to an issue, but also to negotiate its meaning with others.

Practices can both overlap and interrelate. For example archiving and circulating: The uploading of videos on Facebook can serve "a dual purpose – sharing now and keeping for later – this practice is simultaneously communicative and archival." (Smit 2020, 101) Another relation can emerge between claiming and archiving whereas an absence of claiming might render archiving meaningless: "Cyberspace has become a place where any form of documentation is possible (…). Yet unless these archived documents are presented in a form of a narrative, protected and actively transmitted, they cannot become repositories and carriers of collective memory and are doomed to remain mere fragments of data." (Özhan-Kocak 2017, 63).

Besides the classification of practices as archiving, circulating and claiming, remembrance is oftentimes discussed in terms of **commemoration**. On the one hand commemoration also appears to be treated as a specific practice of memory work, but on the other hand it appears to cut through archiving, circulating and claiming. Merrill et al. have missed to clarify if commemoration is to be seen a special type or even a synonym for remembrance in general, or if it can fit into the above explained cluster. Smit maintains that the difference is a matter of chronology, putting commemoration on the same analytical level with archiving (Smit 2020, 90). Merrill & Lindgren (2020) rather treat commemoration as an overall setting for memory work and analyze it in terms of temporality (remediation, waves, cycles). Commemoration appears to function around anchors: dates and personalities, and sometimes also physical sites. Merrill & Lindgren investigated how antifascists in Berlin have been commemorating Silvio Meier, a leftist who was beaten to death and stabbed by Nazis in the 1990s. They found that remembrance has become ritualized over the years and digital media have been increasingly used by those activists who dedicate themselves to organizing Meier's commemoration – in the authors' terms, "Meier's activist remembrance has been remediated to numerous new digital platforms of memory" (Merrill & Lindgren 2020, 669). Apart from personalities who are to be remembered, anniversaries can serve as anchor, especially state-sanctioned anniversaries or/and round number anniversaries (ibid., 667), because these dates are like an opportunity window to produce attention and thus incite a renewed cycle of circulation (also Bisht 2020, 185). Lastly, commemoration is said to have a performative dimension which comes to play

in commemorative acts (Lohmeier & Pentzold 2012, 778), such as in moments of "mourning together" (Smit 2020, 97). These insights on commemoration can serve to pose question to the material throughout analysis of how Aziz and the local councils are remembered in digital media: Against the background that the outbreak of the Syrian revolution now reaches a decade back in time, are there temporal dynamics? And given that Aziz is acknowledged as a central figure, are there specific dates – his birthday, his imprisonment, his death – that serve as anchors for commemoration, for renewed circulation of content, and, eventually for further claiming and negotiation of Syria as part of an anarchist history?

The emphasis of numerous authors on the offline-online connection in commemoration may challenge the research design of my study. Indeed, Keightley & Schlesinger's (2014, 746f.) point that digital media have not produced a "wholesale transformation of remembering" is precisely based on their insistence on the "persistence of older media technologies" and based on the reasoning that any mnemonic media practice is only one, albeit an "essential part of what might be described as an 'ecology of memory'." (likewise Merril et al. 2020, 12f.). Moreover, what happens in digital media in terms of memory practices has to be acknowledged as a result of "the fact that digital memory work does not take place in a void, but instead, is situated in a pre-existing context of long-established offline practices." (Zamponi 2020, 158). The question that arises in the context of my dissertation is: How do practices of memory work unfold in a setting which is especially characterized by a placeless condition: Activists can hardly go to Adra prison where Aziz died in detention and perform commemoration there; moreover, local councils were essentially based on processes and relationality between people and much less on territory and materiality. Thus, what appears as a weakness in research design – the narrow focus on what is happening in digital media and the ignorance of the offline side – may also be seen, as I hope, as an opportunity: to study how a transnational, dispersed, non-locally grounded community constructs a memory of something whose physical materiality is rather thin.

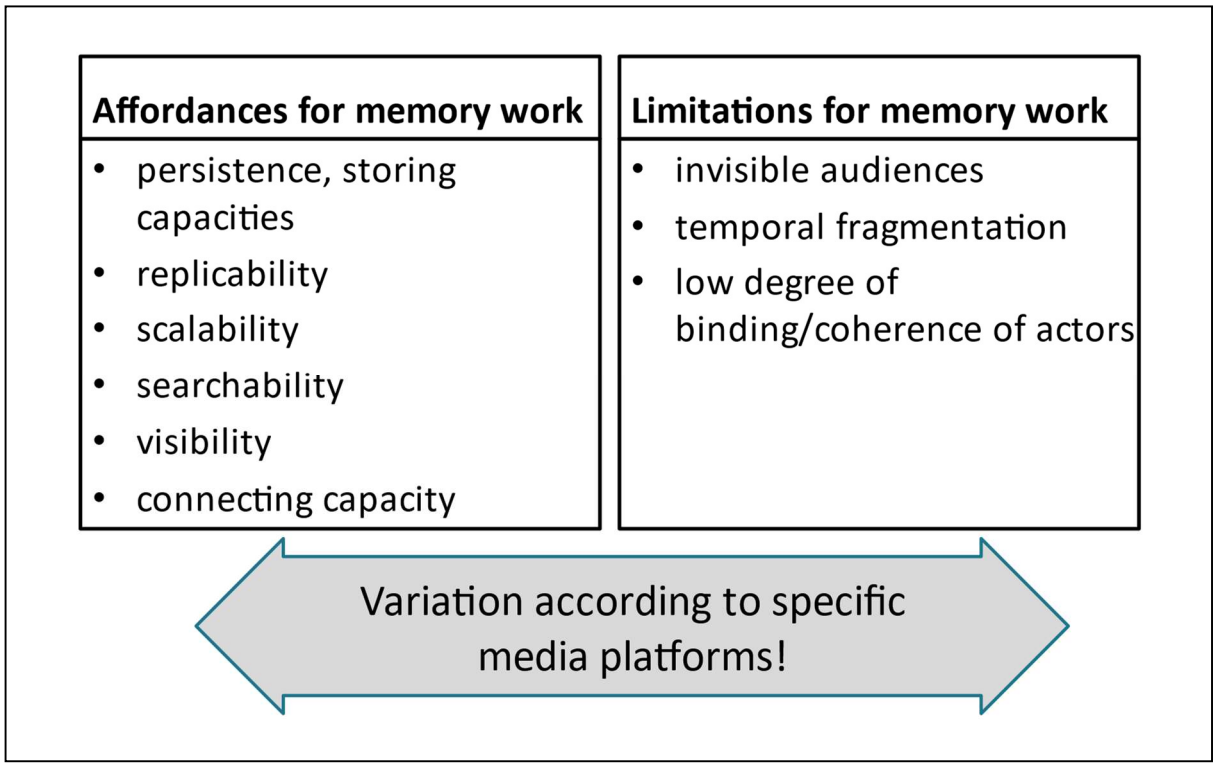
4.2.3 Technology

Certainly, actors are crucial. Before memory is canonized, it is pushed by actors as in the circulation of culture generally. At the same time media affect memory work and so do digital media. The question then is: How precisely does technology shape memory, how does it enable remembrance, and how does it hinder it? Some authors emphasize the role of technology to an extent as to put it on eye level with actors. Hoskins (2018b, 90) maintains that "memory's constituting agency is both technological and human." Going further than that, Smit (2020, 88) views digital media and social media platforms as so central in memory construction that he portrays them as actors themselves: "memory is not solely a human practice". For the purpose of my study however, I tend to favor a more nuanced understanding that views "digital memory production" as being *anchored* in material contexts and technology rather than being performed by it (see also Merrill et al. 2020, 2).

In order to answer the question how precisely digital media affect memory work, the understanding of media as affordance structure has proven useful. Digital media can generally be seen as an affordance structure which enables a broad range of practices. With more specific regard to memory, "the potential of the internet in promoting alternative representations of the past" has been widely acknowledged (Zamponi 2020, 145). Social media in particular are seen to "provide a favourable context for mnemonic projects" (Zamponi 2020, 163; Kaun & Stiernstedt 2012, 354; Smit 2020). To treat digital media as affordance structure for memory is so overwhelmingly plausible that we might be lead to take it for granted. However, it is fruitful to delve a bit deeper into

affordances for three reasons: First, the overwhelming plausibility may lead researchers to treat the concept superficially. Second, affordances can be differentiated according to different media platforms. And third, perhaps because affordances are so clear and numerous, it may be all the more interesting to look at limitations. Figure 23 provides an overview of affordances and limitations that digital media technologies have been described to offer and which I will explain in the following two subchapters.

Figure 23: Technology: affordances and limitations for memory work



Note: Source: A.W. based on Cammaerts 2015; Merrill et al. 2020; boyd 2010.

4.2.3.1 Affordances

From the original coinage of the term 'affordances' by Gibson in 1979 (Majchrzak et al. 2013, 47), the definition of affordances has been adapted by different academic fields, not to the least by media studies. For instance, media scholar Bart Cammaerts has relied on the concept in his studies of protest and social movements. He fleshed out a set of "three interrelated opportunity structures" (2012, 5) that potentially facilitate self-mediation practices which for him emerge from "the interplay between affordances and constraints inherent to social media" (2015, 87). Investigating a slightly different field, namely media technology enactment in knowledge sharing processes, Majchrzak et al. (2013, 39) thoroughly review the affordance concept which helps to clarify the above mentioned matter of the level or hierarchy of categories, especially technology versus actors. The authors "define technology affordance as *the mutuality of actor intentions and technology capabilities that provide the potential for a particular action*" (italics in original). Whereas they do see a "symbiotic relationship between the action to be taken in the context and the capability of the technology", they qualify that affordance is precisely not innate to technology, but "a potentiality" that is absolutely tied to actions (regarding blogs: Hopkins 2015, 3f.). This clarification of the technology-actor-interface can be added by a clarification of the practice-technology-interface which also has

two sides: Whereas technology does not dictate practices, it does "configure" and shape it (boyd 2010, 1; Hopkins 2015, 4).

Majchrzak et al. (2013, 47) sharply insist that the "explanatory power of an affordance lens can only be actualized if two conditions are met." One is that "the domain of action needs to be limited to a specific set of activities." Obviously, investigating the affordances of Facebook will have quite different results if we analyzed how a political group used the tool for mobilization as opposed to how Facebook is used for the remembrance by a political community. This condition is already met, because the object of interest of this study is clear: the focus is on how digital media afford remembrance. The other condition they define is that the "technology in question needs to be clearly identified and specified." (ibid., 47) Indeed, Kaun & Stiernstedt (2012, 340) problematize that "media technologies are often understood as to have inherent potentialities for alternative forms of expression or as affording its users with possibilities for self-expression and identity formation". With more specific regards to commemoration, Zamponi (2020, 145) observes that scholars widely acknowledge the affordances of digital media: "(s)ocial media are understood as platforms that widen the options of storytelling and commemoration, while at the same time significantly shaping the forms of such commemorations".

If the two proposed conditions by Majchrzak et al. are true, it is necessary to derive the understanding of affordances for memory largely in a deductive manner, based on earlier studies. The list proposed by boyd (2010), which includes persistence, replicability, scalability and searchability, will serve as a basis and will be enriched and reorganized based on considerations drawn from those authors who work more closely on memory and based on the context of my specific study. Since "affordances are intertwined and codependent" as boyd (2010, 7) stresses, I will also raise the way in which I expect them to interplay.

First, persistence. Persistence refers to the fact that content in digital media usually remains available for a long time – for instance, blog posts do not vanish once new content is posted, at least not automatically and only if a person deliberately chooses to delete something. I use the term persistence, suggested by boyd 2010, as the underlying technological affordance that is actualized in the practices of archiving and storing. Digital media platforms are configurated technologically in a way that prefers preservation over deletion and thus guarantees persistence of content. "The archival capacities that digital media provide social movements and activists are amongst the most acknowledged by those scholars interested in the nexus between social movements, cultural memory and digital media" (Merrill et al. 2020, 16). Archiving is not only about putting content on a digital shelf and lock it, rather the functions that archiving can accomplish beyond preserving memory include providing proof, legitimating arguments, verifying and credentializing accounts (Kaun 2016, 5396).

In the context of social movements and their possibilities to write history from below including their own history, "commentators have emphasized the democratizing potential of the digital archives" in so far as they "allow activists to preserve digital artifacts representing the development of movements with low costs and without large physical storage rooms." (Kaun 2016, 5395f.) Wikipedia's potential to save and make visible marginalized accounts of history by providing "alternative patterns of knowledge production through online cooperation" (Pentzold 2009, 257) is obvious. On the other hand, the platform is plagued by a geographical bias overrepresenting Western countries and the English language (Garde-Hansen 2011, 82). Perhaps a level below this classical type of archive that Wikipedia has become, blogs have tentatively been recognized to function in an archival manner. From his interest in news-related blogs, Graves argues that "(b)roadcast and even print news can be fairly ephemeral; reports that don't achieve a critical mass

of attention may fade quickly from sight." – which seems quite ironical, in fact, but Graves plausibly argues and shows that "(n)ews-related blogs (and Web sites generally) constitute a sort of global bulletin board on which to affix jarring or incongruent facts so they can be easily recovered, safe from the amnesiac grind of the news cycle." (Graves 2007, 341). Indeed, whereas it is impossible to retrieve Sami Al-Kayial's articles on Aziz and the councils that he had written for a Syrian-exiled print newspaper, an article posted and quasi-archived on a blog is only one google away. Besides, blogs allow for gathering and "juxtaposing" input on a much wider scale than print media could allow for. Graves discusses juxtaposition as one of three specific affordances of news-related blogs (2007, 341f.), but juxtaposition could well be useful for a memory under construction: different sorts of textual references from different genres can be collected and temporally or permanently stored – and since content can be easily removed it can also be integrated into that growing memory corpus in the first place without high costs – as opposed to published books which have to embrace a contribution for ever.

Archiving is a central matter to my investigation, because archiving is a threshold for remembrance: if a text is archived this means that the text itself or the story that it treats has been deemed worthy of remembrance. I want to find out if remembrance of Syria/Aziz in the anarchist community is accomplished or not by looking at how knowledge about Syria/Aziz is archived, in what form, where, by whom, and to what degree of authority.

Second, replicability and scalability. In her discussion of replicability, boyd (2010, 8) is primarily concerned with the possibility that technology offers in order to copy and transform content. I will however treat replicability as the underlying affordance that enables the circulation of texts, quotes, pieces – sharing instead of storing (Merrill et al. 2020, 16) Scalability is intimately conditioned by replicability, it quite simply describes the fact that replicated content is not only diffused on the basis of a simple reproduction, but in a scaled way. This affordance is most relevant for the movements-memory-nexus, because "digital media provide social movements with new scopes of mnemonic diffusion." (Merrill et al. 2020, 19). Moreover, the affordance of digital media to replicate content easily and make it travel is so central, because, as Astrid Erll catchingly put it, "*all* cultural memory *must* 'travel', be kept in motion, in order to 'stay alive'." (Erll 2011, 12; italics in original) Likewise, Kaun reasons that "(d)igital media (…) might reconfigure the regimes of memory toward an economy of circulation, moving away from questions of preservation." (Kaun 2016 5397). Thus, on the one hand digital media may amplify circulation of memory, but on the other hand the necessity of circulation may render memory also vulnerable to a certain extent. The question that arises is: Is the constant renewal of circulation a precondition for preservation? Can a more permanent resting moment be achieved that bans the imperative of circulation? Whereas Erll maintains that this is only possible as an illusion of scholars who are interested in "select(ing) for their research, as they tend to, manageable sections of reality" (Erll 2011, 14), I suggest rather it is interesting to look at the interplay between fixity (as in archiving) and fluidity (as in circulating) as two poles that are both necessary.

Third, searchability, and related to that, visibility. It is quite easy to see the connection between replicability and scalability, just explained, and the affordance of visibility: "Scalability in networked publics is about the possibility of tremendous visibility, not the guarantee of it." (boyd 2010, 8) Thus, visibility is not an automatic outcome, it has to be produced. It is both a precondition for remembrance – what is invisible cannot be remembered – and it is an affordance of digital media, because the latter make content potentially visible. And it does so especially through the affordance of searchability, i.e. by the fact that content can easily be searched and found in digital media by the help of search engines. In the context of transnational communities, the assumption

that visibility "breeds identification and makes it possible" is very central (Brighenti 2007, 333). Related to the remembrance of Syria this means that the visibility of content, its accessibility and its eventual searchability, is a precondition for practices in which anarchists start relating to the topic, adopt it, interpret, appropriate it – claim it. Thus, I connect visibility as an affordance to the practice of claiming. The implication of visibility for remembrance is quite obvious and so are its relations to the other affordances: If content is invisible, how is it supposed to be archived or circulated? Furthermore, visibility can be linked with the practice of sharing and claiming in a sort of two-step-flow: if platforms make visible how many people viewed or liked or shared content – which is rather the case for Twitter and Facebook, but not for Blogs or Wikipedia – then that content might be deemed more worthy to be again circulated and then also archived. Smit (2020, 101) calls this a 'rhetorical effect' of numbers and metrics arguing that "the more likes and shares a post has, the more rhetorical weight it gains as an important document". Thus visibility enables and reinforces circulation and – as a logical and even chronological consequence – claiming.

Fourth, connectivity. Digital media starkly contrast traditional mass media in their potentially connective character - which is the fourth affordance. Hierarchies are flat and gatekeepers relatively absent to the result that digital media both enable a greater agency of individuals and at the same time allow for a much higher degree of connectivity. Social networking sites have very early been conceived as enabling individuals to "articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (…) view and traverse their list of connections and those by others within the system" (boyd 2010, 4). But this holds true for groups or collectives as well who can connect with others by a simple click when 'liking' another group on Facebook, thus integrating that group and its postings into their own horizon. More examples immediately jump into one's eye besides liking, such as *following* someone on Twitter or *subscribing* to a blog. Quite obviously, this connective affordance is more precisely also a translocal, a transnational one. In social movement studies it has become a commonplace to acknowledge that "digital media made it easier for activists to reach beyond their local contexts" (Merrill et al. 2020, 11). Whereas social movement studies highlight media's affordances with regards to coordination and mobilization, from the perspective of memory studies social media have been seen to "work especially well as platforms for joint memories, since they provide the infrastructure for doing so." (Kaun & Stiernstedt 2012, 339). This connectivity as technological affordance of specific platforms has enabled joint memory construction as several already cited studies have shown, especially with regards to Facebook (Smit 2020; Kaun & Stiernstedt 2012). Under conditions of transnational connectivity, digital media allow for a kind of "cosmopolitan remembrance" (Bisht 2020, 182). Pentzold has highlighted this with regards to Wikipedia which for him is a "global memory place where locally disconnected participants can express and debate divergent points of view and that this leads to the formation and ratification of shared knowledge that constitutes collective memory." (2009, 263). He points to the discursive processes that happen so to say backstage in Wikipedia when authors and editors discuss and negotiate the entries and their amendments (ibid., 264) – which is an important aspect for the discursive character of claiming. It is also possible to think of connectivity as a condition for other affordances: If it is not already accomplished, then replicability may become meaningless – if I am not connected I can hardly circulate material effectively. Posting something on a blog or Facebook, circulating something on Twitter can only effectively reach its aims if an audience is already there, as vague and anonymous as it may be. Otherwise, it may become a situation of "sharing without sharing" (Hoskins 2018a, 2; although Hoskins uses this term in a different regard, namely to the superficial character of a lot of connective practices).

4.2.3.2 Limitations

Given the plausibility of the concept of affordances it is all the more interesting to ask nevertheless how digital media may not only *help* in those groups' memory work, but also *hinder* it, or at least how they do not smoothly roll out the red carpet for memory activism but place sticking points and potholes as well. Cammaerts (2015, 87) has pointed to the "interplay between affordances and constraints" that underlies self-mediation practices of (probably not only) radical social movements. Merrill et al. (2020, 12) have reaffirmed that point. For example, digital media may offer social movements a number of advantages, but it can also invite reliance on commercial entities and lead to a loss of control and exposure to external forces of surveillance, censorship, and retribution. Indeed, when it comes to visibility on digital media research tends to stress surveillance and weigh it against the potentialities for connectivity (see Forschungsjournal Soziale Bewegungen 2015). Anticipating the later analysis, which will show that security concerns are negligible in the studied case, I will now rather focus on three sets of potential limitations that I derive partially from boyd (2010) and from others as indicated further below: invisible audiences, temporal fragmentation and lack of binding connectivity.

First, invisible audiences. The setting of remembrance in this study is shaped by a transnational and rather anonymous condition. The potential audience of memory workers' posts, texts etc. is physically invisible, although writers, bloggers etc. may also happen to know their audience in some cases. Invisibility of audience may be mitigated in certain platforms such as Twitter and Facebook where there is at least a list of followers or a set of associated profiles respectively. The sort of connections that these platforms technologically afford may then also enable feedback, reactions and discursive engagement, but lack of co-presence and invisibility of audiences prevail in digital media (boyd 2010, 7). This may pose a severe limitation on the practice of claiming, which necessitates some degree of discursive interaction, since claiming is a process that requires joint sense-making. This assertion can be, I suggest, introduced from the field of knowledge sharing and digital media where the authors argue that knowledge cooperation – which is not all too far from remembrance – relies on "joint sense-making, negotiation of differences and bridging of worldviews, something that is assumed to be best done face to face and under conditions of shared history, pre-existing ties, joint engagement, negotiations across different perspectives, and careful surfacing of assumptions (…). These requirements are seldom present in social media environments (…)." (Majchrzak et al. 2013, 49).

Second, temporal fragmentation. Invisible audiences also have an implication for another limitation, namely temporal fragmentation (boyd 2010, 7). If memory workers archive or circulate content that they deem worthy of remembrance, that memory work is perhaps seen only years later, so that the momentum for an engagement with remembrance by the later recipient is lost due to a felt lack of newness. This can only be remedied if memory workers uphold circulation of content and continuously rework it. This is remindful of Erll's rule that memory has to travel to stay alive (Erll 2011, 12). Unless memory workers simultaneously engage in "connective memory" practices that have been researched in Facebook (Kaun & Stiernstedt 2012, 349), remembrance on Facebook (in in analogy on Twitter) has been shown to be quite vulnerable to temporal fragmentation due to its technical logic: "it is hardly the case that people go too far backwards in the history of [their object of memory] in the timeline (especially considering that older posts are hidden), but rather engage in current posts and discussions." (ibid.) Merrill & Lindgren's analysis of both Facebook and Twitter points in a similar direction, focusing on temporality in commemoration: Both platforms have been used rather as a mobilization tool for offline events and less for remembrance

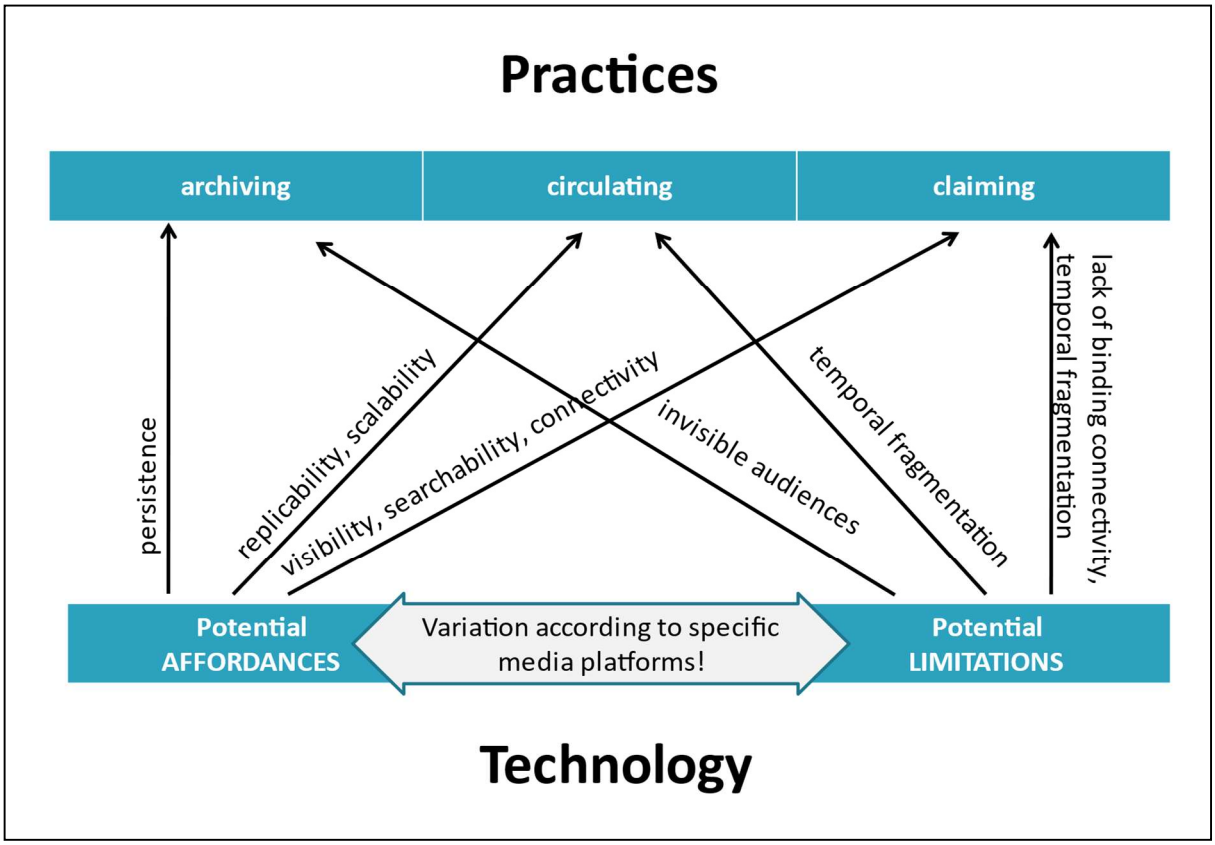
as such: "Due to the platform's temporal affordances, it was thus mostly used by activists as a means to instantaneously communicate local developments during the demonstration in real time as they unfolded. In short, it was used by activists to coordinate more than in any other self-mediation capacity" (Merrill & Lindgren 2020, 669). Hence, the impacts of temporality has to be considered both regarding different practices and different platforms.

Third, lack of binding connectivity/social coherence. Digital media are characterized by a "lack of spatial, social, and temporal boundaries" (boyd 2010, 7), so that their easy accessibility is accompanied by volatility and fluidity of participation. Perhaps digital media's affordance for a higher degree of connectivity thanks to an architecture of flattened hierarchies is one side of the coin, and the lack of a binding character of digital media spaces the other. The connection of actors in social media is non-hierarchical to the consequence that "the central entity to guide the conversation is replaced by highly networked individuals often occupying self-generated roles." Research thus has to "take into account the lack of deep ties and the emergent nature of interactions." (Majchrzak et al. 2013, 49). This highlights the impact of actors and their commitment for creating and sustaining spaces within digital media in which memory workers can engage with the content in a somewhat consistent way.

The power architecture of archiving memory and history-writing now encompasses private corporations that control servers, as much as it encompasses open source and/or non-private actors. Wikipedia is a good example for the fact that archives are no longer necessarily "a bureaucratic, state-sponsored, dominant mechanism of the modern liberal state to handle the past." (Kaun 2016, 5396) However, in contrast to Wikipedia, other small scale and less known archives bear the threat of being too little visible. Possibly, a no-name archive has very well stored memory about Syria and Aziz, but perhaps the persistence of that content is rather meaningless if a) no one will find it unless you really know what you are searching for and b) it has little authority, because it is not perceived as a reliable reference point, thus limiting people's inclination to circulate that content. This point is discussed by Kaun: "The modern state-sponsored archive emerges out of a slowly evolving discourse of archival rules and codes, whereas community archives are more loosely organized to allow for openness of the organization, inflowing materials, and fluctuating volunteers who might not have completely internalized the order of things." (Kaun 2016, 5401). On the other hand, Bisht has investigated how the joint creation of a website by activists has not only allowed for information sharing transnationally, but how "it helped stabilise the solidarity networks, which had been hard to sustain in the past" in order to maintain memory as part of activism (Bisht 2020, 182). The more structures are lacking or the less binding they are, the more heavily weighs the agency of invested individuals to shape for instance an archive.

Figure 24 visualizes the different sets of affordances and limitations of technology and how they are linked to the three different practices of digital media memory work. It has been argued that affordances and limitations are not fixed and static, they may vary according to the specific mnemonic project within one platform, and affordances may be crossed and outweighed by limitations. Again, whether the potentialities of affordances and limitations play out is to a high degree structured, but not dictated by technology, since the actualization of affordances depends on actors' engagement. So far, research in the nexus of social movements, memory and digital media has produced insights mainly on Facebook and Twitter whereas the web sphere and particularly blogs are understudies.

Figure 24: Interrelations of technology and practices



Note: Source A.W.

4.3 Research questions

Four research questions are guiding the analysis of how anarchists have engaged in constructing a memory of the Syrian revolution with regards to the local councils and Omar Aziz. RQ 1 *What does the constellation of remembrance look like?* aims at gaining an overview of the specific constellation by identifying the evolution of the mnemonic field over the last decade as a result of actors with different roles and within specific platforms. The overview focuses on actors (who) and technology (where) and will superficially touch upon practices. The latter are investigated in more detail in RQ 2 in close relation to actors by focusing on the how: *How is memory constructed and precisely what have memory workers done?* How has memory circulated, and how has it done so differently across platforms? How has archiving taken place? The different practices and how they varied over time are linked to the different roles of actors and their level of commitment. In order to do justice to the fact that memory involves processes of sense-making, the practice of claiming is analyzed separately in RQ 3 asking *How have memory workers appropriated the local councils from an anarchist perspective?* It looks at the argumentative strategies used by memory workers to lay claim on and appropriate that struggle into their particular memory of struggles. Lastly, RQ 4 *In how far have media served as an affordance structure for anarchists to remember anarchism in Syria and what are the limitations?* aims at finding out more about the interconnections between practices and technology by discussing the findings of the previous research questions in light of affordances and constraints.

5. Method

This chapter has two main parts according to the two aspects of this dissertation – the how and the what of remembrance. It first explains in detail how the four research questions derived from the theoretical discussion of media and memory are translated into methods and what steps were taken in order to operationalize the research questions in concrete research steps. Second, it explains the way in which the object of remembrance, the local councils in Syria, are reconstructed. Lastly, ethical aspects of the research will be discussed.

5.1 Anarchist remembrance of Aziz and the councils in digital media

5.1.1 Research design: from research questions to methods

Carving out the eventual research questions, finding adequate methods and choosing concrete research steps resulted from a process of gradual refinement. This process was often circular – refining one aspect meant adjusting the other one – and it relied on a reciprocal handling of the theory of media and memory and of the empirical material. This is rather typical for qualitative research and ideally a sign of quality for qualitative research (Przyborsky & Wohlrab-Sahr 2019, 118). In many aspects, the overview of a preliminary corpus was necessary in order to define the research methods and the adequate foci. Moreover, technical possibilities shaped the way in which specific aspects were researches. For instance, only the corpus revealed the salience of blogs and as a consequence the backlink analysis was identified as appropriate tool to explore circulation of content related to blogs and to select the texts for the analysis of claiming.

RQ 1 aims at getting a grip on the mnemonic field across platforms in order to identify the overall structure of that field – the 'constellation' of technology (platforms), actors and practices in line with the theory chapter: *What does the constellation of remembrance look like?* The process of answering that question involves the creation of three corpuses by selecting data from different spheres. This is supposed to reflect both the scale/magnitude of the mnemonic field (how much is there?) as well as its main characteristics (where are the mnemonic hotspots and what does the constellation of actors look like?). This will create an overview based on which the following research questions can delve more deeply into the mentioned constellation by investigating closely the actors and their practices. Thus, RQ 2 *How is memory constructed?* What did memory workers do? zooms into the corpus by focusing on the practices. According to the theory chapter, the process of answering that question implies an analysis of archiving and circulating. This will especially shed light on the temporality of remembrance (e.g. waves and peaks) and is supposed to show how certain practices find their adequate space or place in the respective platforms (e.g. where does archiving take place as opposed to circulation?). The third dimension of practices, namely claiming, is excluded from RQ 2, because it is treated with closer attention in the context of RQ 3 *In how far does remembrance of Aziz/councils apprehend/treat the meaning of councils?* Based on the description of the corpus (RQ 1) and on its first analysis in terms of circulation and archiving (RQ 2) key actors and

central content will have crystallized. Based on a backlink analysis the most important texts will be selected and analyzed in order to understand how remembrance of Aziz and the councils is appropriated and negotiated. As argued in the theory chapter, this process of claiming is essentially a process of sense-making. The latter is reconstructed by the help of a qualitative content analysis. The two research threads interlace in this third research question and then depart again for RQ 4 *In how far have media served as an affordance structure for anarchists to remember anarchism in Syria and what are the limitations?* This research question serves to wrap up the constellation that has been unfolded in RQ 1-3, by highlighting the relationship between practices and technology. The insights that have been yielded on the practices will be referred to the specific platforms in which remembrance has occurred. Table 1 lists the four research questions and sums up the methodological approach to answering them. The respective steps including the analytical tools will be explained in the next subchapter.

Table 1: Methods according to research questions

Research question	Method
1. What does the constellation of remembrance look like?	Selecting and describing the corpus Based on keyword searches across platforms Analyzing the corpus, part I: Actors: Identify roles and degrees of engagement; backlink analysis
2. How is memory constructed? What did memory workers do?	Analyzing the corpus, part II Archiving: identify sites, temporal dynamics and actors' roles Circulating: analyze circulation in web, Facebook, Twitter, based on appropriate criteria for each platform/sphere (backlinks; likes/shares; retweets/likes)
3. How have memory workers appropriated the local councils from an anarchist perspective?	Analyzing the corpus, part III Claiming: Select most important texts based on backlink analysis and identify only the main lines of argument.
4. In how far have media served as an affordance structure for anarchists to remember anarchism in Syria and what are the limitations?	Analyzing the corpus, part IV: Affordances and limitations: overall discussion of findings based on analysis of Q1,2,3 and with focus on single platforms

Some scholars legitimately highlight the importance of offline aspects and moreover the neglect of the interweaving of offline-online-practices in memory work (Bisht with regards to social movements' mobilization capacities for memory work, 2020, 178). Whereas I do consider printed books in the corpus for the above given reasons, offline interactions, such as discussion events, remain unseen here. I imagine that the more dedicated memory workers act within their offline communities as experts who are asked to participate in discussion meetings or give interviews. I briefly want do address this shortcoming here by drawing on my personal experience in early 2021 when I authored an article in the leftist monthly Analyse & Kritik which dedicated a special focus on the tenth anniversary of the Arab Spring (Woller 2021). The reactions revealed what offline dynamics that are attached to the authoring of mnemonic content could look like: In the course of the

following weeks and months I received almost a dozen reactions on the article ranging from circulating the article on Twitter, over requests to participate in discussion meetings and radio interviews, to publishing a book on the matter. Each of the events that were realized involved communication with people around the topic and/or entailed reactions that would lead to further publishing or invitations to discussion meetings. By hindsight, I became a memory worker beyond my academic dealing with the topic. This gives an impression of the richness of communicative processes that are associated with potentially each publication at least of lengthier written pieces: new connections of people dealing with similar topics are knitted. Moreover, it shows how offline and online processes are intertwined: The published article was in a printed paper, but also available online – the discussion meetings in Summer 2021 were held online and streamed due to the pandemic situation and archived on Youtube and it entailed a contribution to a follow-up conference book – but one discussion meeting was live and involved travelling and follow-up conversations with people who had rather focused on Rojava so far.

5.1.2 Research steps: operationalizing the research questions

5.1.2.1 Construction of the corpus and coding

The corpus aims at encompassing all instances of digital memory work with regards to the local councils from an anarchist perspective mainly in an Anglo-, franco- and germanophone sphere. In order to grasp the whole constellation of memory work the corpus selection aims identifying actors, practices and sites as well as central texts. In the following I will justify the validity of the search criteria and then the coding procedure first regarding the web, Facebook and Twitter. Drawing on articles that reflect on research methodology referring to social media platforms, I am aware that even small numbers of sources can entail an overwhelming amount of digital data (Latzko-Toth et al 2018, 3; Stewart 2018). Thus, the definitions of search terms aim at creating a corpus that is on the one hand sufficiently broad and on the other hand manageable. Table 2 gives an overview of the results per year per corpus:

Table 2: Results per year for searches in web, Facebook and Twitter respectively

Year	Web	Facebook	Twitter
2013	28	22	28
2014	5	7	4
2015	8	2	3
2016	18	13	11
2017	21	11	8
2018	11	9	11
2019	9	10	6
2020	12	2	8
2021	17	10	6
total	129	86	85

5.1.2.1.1 Web

Searching and selecting. I used the search engines Google and Duckduckgo, ensuring that in the advanced search settings that all regions and all languages were searched as well as all parts of the text (not only the title). I chose ["local councils" Syria "Omar Aziz"] as the main search terms and modified them in several steps. Defining the period as starting on 1/1/2012 and ending on 1/6/2021 the latter keyword combination eventually yielded 204 results. On that basis the links identified by the search engines were opened and the retrieved content was included into an excel spread sheet (appendix 6).[17] Acknowledging that Google may render highly biased results according to my place (based on recognition of IP-addresses) and on my search habits as a consequence of trained algorithms, I cross checked every search using Duckduckgo in order to at least reduce the risk of missing relevant results. I first conducted the Google search and repeated everything with Duckduckgo immediately after the search with Google. To my astonishment, Duckduckgo delivered 33 further results out of a total of only 80 results (and thus appeared to have a more valid algorithm or at least one that catered more to my interest). Searching in Arabic with the search terms "مجالس محلية" "عمر عزيز" and within the same period yielded ten results on google.com and five on Duckduckgo. No additional results emerged from the latter. Half of the results were excluded from the corpus, because they dealt only marginally with Aziz or the councils (e.g. Al-Haj Saleh 14.10.2019) or were not explicitly leftist (e.g. creativememory.org 9.5.2019). I repeated this for a search in French and German, since I command these two languages sufficiently. For the former I modified search terms to ["Omar Aziz" conseils locaux Syrie], without quotes around [conseils locaux], because French authors oftentimes used the term [comités locaux], which indeed yielded more results. Using ["Omar Aziz" "lokale Räte" Syrien] for a search in German language made no sense and terms had to be adjusted to ["Omar Aziz" Räte Syrien], perhaps because in German oftentimes the adequate term is "Rätebewegung" in one word. Moreover, I decided to make an adjustment in the search period, shortening it by six months, to 1/1/2021 for the following reason: I submitted an article to the left radical monthly paper Analyse & Kritik that deals with the topic and which now figures prominently in the German web search (Woller 2021). This indeed yields only ten instead of 22 results on Google and among the roughly 50 results from Duckduckgo six additional results were considered. In contrast to the English and French search, Duckduckgo surprisingly delivered less satisfying results than Google – many of the results were irrelevant and didn't contain Omar Aziz.

In order to make a recognizable distinction between general references and references to the respective corpus I use the following format for the latter: 1_Al-Esh_18.09.2017. 1_ indicates the web corpus (appendix 6), followed by the name of the actor, followed by the date of publication (dd.mm.yyyy). In total, 41 results (regarding searches in all languages) were excluded on the basis of three reasons: First, purely academic publications (nine results, e.g. 1_Galiàn 25.7.2020), second, if Aziz/the councils were only very marginally dealt with (seven results, e.g. 1_Hassan 13.10.2013), and third if the articles cannot be associated with a leftist community (26 results, e.g. 1_Human Rights Watch 22.2.2013) (see appendix 6, sheet "excluded results").

In the process of selecting the corpus I used a snowballing procedure with each web search in the respective language: I followed links underneath blog posts or articles. This yielded almost a dozen extra results apart from the search itself, especially for the search in French, and particularly with regards to translations of texts into languages other than English, French, Arabic and German.

[17] Appendices 1 to 5 are printed, whereas appendices 6 to 12 are provided digitally on USB stick.

Each time I visited the link I checked for hints to the circulation/remediation of a piece, which I noted in order to bookmark which pieces appeared as important for the further analysis. Importantly, when the visited result displayed an original source, I followed that link and registered the original source and not the replicating source. Clicking on each article, I considered the following aspects for selection: If the source mentioned Omar Aziz only marginally, e.g. in a footnote, it was excluded from the corpus. Similarly, one site figured prominently in Google's results list, but this was only due to the fact that it displayed a link in its blogroll containing [Omar Aziz] which is visible on each individual post even if the latter is not related to the topic. If the source was not leftist itself or if the interview partner could not be considered as leftist, it was also excluded. I broke the selection rule in two instances by including two obituaries in Arabic language although they do not address/stem from a leftist perspective, but were selected, because they were in Arabic language (1_Al-Esh_18.09.2017 and _19.09.2017). As a result, the corpus encompasses 129 entries.

Coding. The coding guideline (appendix 1) departs from the three theoretical dimensions of actors, practices, technology. Regarding each dimension categories were defined in a deductive-inductive manner in the first step, for instance "author" and "site/source" for actors, or "type of platform" for technology. In a second step, the characteristics of these categories were defined inductively. Appendix 1 displays the categories, their characteristics and a description of each characteristic. In the coding process authors in the web sphere were differentiated into authors of a text – which can be their own or one originally written by others – and into replicated authors, thus additionally highlighting those whose texts have been translated/amended/submitted to an archive etc. Coding the site/source of a text in terms of authorship intends to make groups/collectives visible apart from individual authors (for instance the collective blog project Tahrir-ICN where individual author Al-Shami published texts). Regarding archiving practices, not only sites that are clearly identifiably as archives were subsumed under the category of archive (The Anarchist Library), but also Wikis, notably Wikipedia, based on the reasoning that they aim at creating a predominantly stable knowledge. In terms of the coding of the genre it is noteworthy that the line between the characteristics "obituary" and "article" is sometimes thin, but I chose "obituary" as category where Omar Aziz was really fore grounded and where his name figured in the title. As opposed to that the category "article" is broad: sometimes articles are rather informational and journalistic in style, they are also mostly from an activist perspective, and sometimes essayistic – mostly all of these styles come together. The last remarks dealing with the coding guideline concern the characteristics of the category "type of platform": In contrast to the perspective of archiving practices, where Wikis and proper archives are treated as "archives", the focus on different platforms suggests differentiating between the technologies, one affording the static archiving of a given text, and the other affording a collaborative authorship based on a Wiki software as content management system. Lastly, the code "blogs" comprises personal blogs (e.g. 1_Hassan_19.05.2016) as well as blogs run by collectives (e.g. 1_Tahrir-ICN_22.09.2013). Sites are coded as blogs when their address already makes a blog content management system identifiable (such as wordpress.com) or when their character is predominantly one of blogs, for instance featuring a reverse chronological order of content. Whereas blogs, by their content may appear news-oriented, a site is coded as "news portal" when it predominantly publishes content in a periodic manner. This also includes online magazines, for the sake of simplifying the corpus. The code "web portal" applies to websites that contain more complex possibilities of content management, for instance including a blog within the website and enabling user interaction in the form of a forum where users can sign in and post content, and they may also include blogs (e.g. libcom.org).

In terms of circulating practices, I used two informal codes in order to gain a better overview of connections between actors and content in order to back up my later research steps: I noted when content reoccurred throughout the search as "circulated to" or as "taken from". This helped to grasp an accumulation of attention which proved helpful, because the overwhelming visibility of few main memory activists tends to make other authors and their pieces rather invisible at first sight. Based on this manual approach I gained a first impression of which texts appeared as most important, but I objectified this impression with the help of a backlink analysis. A backlink "is a link from some other website (the referrer) to that web resource (the referent)." ("Backlink", n.d.) Each backlink can also be considered as a form of citation (ibid.) of one page by another one. The relevance of backlinks is usually seen in the fact that "search engines often use the number of backlinks that a website has as one of the most important factors for determining that website's search engine ranking, popularity and importance." (ibid.) From among the numerous existing tools both open source and commercial that offer backlink analyses, I compared a handful of tools by testing two prominent articles/obituaries (by Al-Shami 2015 and Hassan 2013 respectively) in order to estimate the validity and to ensure that it allows for searching the direct link to an article instead of only the domain link. I opted for the free version of the backlink checker by Ahrefs, "a software company that develops online SEO tools and free educational materials for marketing professionals." (Ahrefs 2022, About)

5.1.2.1.2 Youtube

Several keyword searches on Youtube were conducted in order to ensure that this platform would not be missed as a relevant site of memory and eventually one video was selected (MezzawiLens 2013). Search terms were modified several times, but yielded only one result referring to Syria's local councils. A corpus for Youtube was hence not created.

5.1.2.1.3 Facebook

Searching and selecting. Researchers point to the challenges in researching Facebook as a result of the platform's configuration: Whereas it is relatively easy to analyze specific groups or fanpages and their respective networks it is much harder to grasp network structures around specific topics (Vitak 2017, 5). Moreover, the algorithm within Facebook "driving content display in Facebook is relatively opaque" (Vitak 2017, 8) and my attempt to systematically search Facebook based on keyword combinations confirms that the reliability of the search algorithm is rather ambiguous. Selecting data from Facebook from the corpus was thus a trial and error process that eventually yielded almost 86 results.

In order to mine Facebook I tried several strategies: The first strategy used the integrated search tool in Facebook. On the one hand the tool is quite convenient as it allows for keyword searches and to filter the search by 'photos', 'persons' or 'posts'. I used different keyword combinations in the respective language, always applying the filter 'posts' so that the defined keywords would be searched in the texts of the post. For a search in French language none of the combinations with [Omar Aziz, Syrie, comités locaux, conseils locaux, anarchism] was fruitful. I tried to verify this lack of discussion on Facebook in French language by searching for actors previously identified in the web search and then by searching within their group, but indeed no results were found. I additionally searched well-networked actors (e.g. L'Alternative Libertaire [Union communiste libertaire – UCL]) and found one post. Likewise in German language only one result was

found based on different combinations of [Omar Aziz, Räte, Anarchismus, Syrien]. Searching in English language with different combinations of [Omar Aziz, local councils, Syria, anarchism] similarly rendered only two results. The only satisfying result I drew from this search was the group [First of May Anarchist Alliance] that accounts for eight entries on the topic between 2013 and 2020. That there are, in fact, many more posts on the topic in English language is obvious when searching within profiles of previously identified memory workers. I thus decided to check if those authors/groups who appeared several times in the web corpus as memory workers had a Facebook page and searched within their page for keywords. Apart from one profile this proved rather futile. Whereas the search tool appeared to be very unsatisfying in the mentioned languages, surprisingly, the search in Arabic language using [عمر عزيز مجالس محلية] was prolific and rendered 34 results. This is in stark contrast not only to the other language searches on Facebook, but also to the web search where Arabic was rather marginal. Interestingly, the structure of the results is also quite different: there is a high quantity of comments, reactions and shares. However, the actors – those who post and those who react – are all individuals and the character of the comments comes much closer to collective mourning than to sharing information. It appears that the 34 results represent less a leftist community than a network of individuals who commemorate Omar Aziz personally and as a 'shaheed'/martyr and less as an anarchist-political-leftist figure. For this reason, the results were not considered for further analysis. The second strategy to search Facebook was by using entry points and snowballing from there. I chose two groups as entry points and used the integrated search function searching for Omar Aziz in both Latin and Arabic characters. Whereas this yielded some results, I would argue that the validity of the search in Facebook is overall rather unsatisfying so that interpretations have to be cautiously made.

Coding. The coding procedure for the results of the Facebook search principally follows the same guideline as described for the web above with a few modifications. Authors are here coded in terms of Facebook profile names. Because the reference to other authors and their original texts is a salient characteristic of posts in Facebook, the posts were coded by indicating the referred author and the source. Circulating is analyzed in terms of languages and circulatory acts consisting of the number of reactions a post received, the existence or absence of a reference within a post to other authors either within Facebook or on external sites. In terms of the theoretical dimension of technology two categories were formed: first, the post characteristics (whether a post contains an outbound or internal link, a repost, only text or additional embedded pictures/videos), and second, the type of the referred platform to which the outbound links lead, e.g. to a blog, news portal, archive, or internally to other Facebook profiles. References to the Facebook corpus (appendix 7) are in analogy with the references to the web corpus, but use a 2_ instead of 1_: 2_profile-name_dd.mm.yyyy.

5.1.2.1.4 Twitter

Searching and selecting. The total number of coded tweets is 85. As opposed to Facebook, Twitter offers a convenient and rather valid integrated search function (Vitak 2017, 5). I specified the search in the advanced search settings with the following parameters: In analogy to the web search the time frame was defined to 1.1.2013-1.6.2021 for all languages. A search by hashtags proved meaningless (e.g. #omaraziz is dominantly related to @OmarAzizSenador, a Brazilian politician). In English, I opted for several rounds of keyword search with different combinations of [local councils Syria Omar Aziz anarchism]. One example for a search command in English language is: Omar Aziz local councils min_retweets:1 until:2021-06-01 since:2013-01-01. For French,

the combination [Omar Aziz Syrie] was the most fruitful with 11 results. Even less is found in German (two results) and combinations with [Räte] were futile. The Arabic search was tricky. Using [“عمر عزيز ”سوريا] and [“عمر عزيز”] the search yielded a lot of irrelevant results that I had to exclude, but the adding of more specific keyword such as [“مجالس محلية”] (local councils) reduced the results to nearly zero. In order to identify a leftist dealing with the local councils I had to focus on the personality of Aziz. Trying out different thresholds of minimum retweets for a tweet, I eventually decided to set a minimum threshold of 1 retweet. On the one hand, this excluded a great number of tweets with zero retweets (roughly 40). Had they been included, the scene would be filled with many more memory workers. However, the underlying logic of the decision is to focus on those communicative acts that demonstrably contributed to the circulation of memory (one retweet minimum is interpreted as at least one instance of circulation that potentially engenders more or renewed circulation).

Regarding the results in Arabic language I have to note that I included seven tweets from early 2013 (i.e. the very beginning of the analyzed decade) that have no relation to a leftist community, but rather displaying a character of personal mourning. I nevertheless included them, because they reveal an interesting temporal dynamic of the very early phase in which remembrance started. We can plausibly assume that there was a similar dynamic on Facebook, but since the latter’s search algorithm was unsatisfying, I opted to use Twitter here as exemplary social media tool in order to shed some light on the interplay of personal mourning and the ensuing rather political remembrance.

Coding. The coding guideline for Twitter is very similar to the one for Facebook. The authors are coded in the form of the user name (e.g. @tahrirICN). As with Facebook, the reference to other authors and their original texts outside of Twitter is a salient characteristic of tweets, the latter were coded by indicating the referred author and site. In order to grasp circulatory acts, the number of replies, retweets and likes that a tweet received were coded as well as the existence or absence of a reference within a post to other authors on external sites. Regarding technology, the tweet characteristics were coded (whether a tweet consisted of text, a link, embedded pictures/videos/audiofiles, of reposts, shares or replies) as well as the type of the referred platform to which the outbound links lead. References to the Twitter corpus (appendix 8) are in analogy with the references to the web and Facebook corpus, but use a 3_: 3_@username_dd.mm.yyyy.

5.1.2.2 RQ 1 What does the constellation of remembrance look like?

In order to grasp the constellation of the mnemonic field the different spheres are contrasted with each other by combining different categories for interpretation. For understanding the importance of each sphere the number of mnemonic acts are considered over time was well as the number of memory workers active in each platform/sphere. Specificities of technology shall be detected by looking at the resonance of mnemonic acts, grasped through the amount of reactions (retweets, likes etc. and backlinks). Analyzing temporality draws on the coded dates of texts/posts and aims at showing the evolution of the mnemonic field. The lens of temporality is combined also with the category of language and or genre in order to grasp how different practices and different genres became more or less salient over time. Additionally, in that context differences across platforms are considered which also aims at finding conclusions about the affordances of different technologies.

In terms of **actors** more specifically, the analysis follows the impulse of the literature to look at different levels of commitment of memory workers (activists as opposed to brokers). This level

of commitment is identified through the numbers of texts that individual authors published. Apart from that I seek to identify how roles are differently defined in the context of different practices: what roles do actors assume in the practice of archiving as opposed to in the practice of circulating for instance? Moreover, attention is paid to how roles may vary due to the different technological settings in which actors roam. The backlink analysis serves to identify which authors are most influential, measured by the scope of the circulation of their texts. This helps not only to identify the most important memory workers, but also a constellation of actors and the interplay of their different roles and levels of commitment.

5.1.2.3 RQ 2 and RQ 3– Practices: Archiving, circulating, claiming

The practice of **archiving** is analyzed on the basis of the content which was registered in the web corpus and neglects the social media corpuses, because their functioning doesn't afford archiving as argued in the theory chapter. It encompasses three platforms that I consider as archival formats: The Anarchist Library, Wikipedia, and the Wiki page Anarchy in Action. Temporality is considered by looking at what points in time archiving took place, e.g. sporadically over several years, or condensed at one point, in waves, etc. This will be contrasted with the overall temporality of the mnemonic field as grasped by the corpus in order to shed light on the relation of archiving to circulating and claiming. Furthermore, as far as possible, the discursive background behind archiving is considered by the help of the sites' discussion pages and page histories. Beyond those archival sites, the analysis will treat the blog Tahrir-ICN in more detail as a case of a blog that functioned as an involuntary and temporal archive.

With regards to **circulating**, the respective corpuses are interpreted under the following aspects: For each platform/sphere an indicator of circulation is defined. For blogs, this indicator is backlinks. Backlinks constitute what Latzko-Toth et al. (2018, 3) have treated as "data traces" of the fact that someone in the past linked a post and thus contributed to circulating as memory practice. This draws on the backlink analysis as explained above. For Facebook, "reactions", "shares" and "comments" are considered as indicators for circulation, because if a user likes a post made by someone else, that post is fed into the user's timeline and becomes visible to his/her friends. I also register if the Facebook post displays outbound links to external content, which is considered as a hint to the importance of texts published in the web sphere. Thus, the posts are further coded as text only posts (consisting of text only produced by the posts' author), posts with outbound links (consisting of a post that mainly presents external content), and posts consisting of text plus outbound link (which is a combination of the previous two). Lastly, I also registered the amount of comments that a post attracted which may hint at discursive processes of claiming. For Twitter, "retweets", "replies" and "likes" are treated as indicators for circulation of content. And in analogy with Facebook I coded the tweets in terms of their characteristics: text, outbound link, combination of both. This includes for both Facebook and Twitter the registering of the link destination so that it is revealed what texts circulated.

The practice of **claiming** is analyzed through a qualitative text analysis of five texts. That analysis is limited to the web sphere, because first, the preceding analysis crystallized that content from Facebook and Twitter most often referred to content in the web, and second because I am interested in the argumentative strategies of authors for claiming. To that end the five most important texts from the web corpus are selected, where importance is defined by the combination of two criteria: The high ranks in the backlink analysis explains the selection of Hassan (2013; 385 backlinks) and Boothroyd (2016; 176 backlinks). The other high-ranking texts were not chosen,

because the topic here was not dealt with in a central way or not decidedly enough from an anarchist/leftist perspective (e.g. Naisse 2013; or Smith 2016b). Considerations apart from the high amounts of backlinks regarded language, chronology and genre of text: In order to have both a French and a more recent text represented, Amilcar was included (2019; 104 backlinks). The text by BbS (2017; 82 backlinks) was included, because it offers the most thorough discussion of the councils next to Al-Shami's texts and will most likely continue to be circulated, because it is attached to the somewhat authoritative English translation of Aziz' original text. Lastly, the most recent text by Al-Shami (2021) instead of her most widely circulated one from 2013 was selected in order to ensure that texts from the whole time span of 2013-2021 were represented and based on the assumption that it is likely to circulate more broadly in the future because of this author's role. According to RQ3, the analysis of these texts aims at finding out how authors have been negotiating the Syrian uprising from an anarchist perspective. The text analysis is roughly based on the principles of a structured qualitative content analysis as laid out by Mayring & Frenzl (2019, 638f.) and uses a combination of deductive coding and inductively identified stylistic devices. The deductive categories are derived from the theoretical discussion of anarchism as being defined through four principles (left side in table). Additionally, stylistic devices were identified in an inductive manner that function as further discursive strategies to back the authors' claiming strategies (right side in table).

Table 3: Content Analysis: Deductive categories and stylistic devices

Deductive categories	Stylistic devices
Agency/self-organization (23)	Personality of Aziz as anchor (in all texts)
Anti-authoritarianism/critique of state (23)	Explicit claiming (in 3 of the 5 texts)
Prefiguration/correlation of means and ends (10)	Paris Commune quote (in 4 of the 5 texts)
Association/cooperation (12)	Mnemonic chains (in 4 of the five texts)

The texts were mined for passages that referred to the categories and the stylistic devices. The coding unity is on the level of sentence or phrases within sentences. Accordingly, matching text passages were coded in one of the four categories or respectively in one of the four stylistic devices. When sentences contained references to more than one category they were split up while guaranteeing semantic consistency, so that there are four instances of redundancy in coding. Whereas the instances of categories were counted in order to get an idea what aspect is prevalent in the authors' arguing, the counting of instances of the stylistic devices makes no sense. Instead, it is relevant to know whether or not the stylistic device is used in each text and then to understand the 'quality' in which these devices are used, e.g. if a used mnemonic chain is rather 'thin' or 'thick', or how strongly Aziz' (anarchist) personality is highlighted.

5.1.2.4 RQ 4 – Technology: affordances and limitations

In order to discuss RQ4, the analysis focuses on each of the platforms/spheres by looking at how each of them allowed for one of the three practices and by considering what has *not* taken place within the specific platform. For that purpose, I revisit the different corpuses with regards to the relation between platforms and practices: What platforms allowed specifically for archiving, circulating or claiming? This takes into consideration the general patterns as they emerged from the corpus as well as the surprises and the lacks.

5.2 Local councils in Syria

I explore the real-existing local councils through a combination of description and interpretation. Instead of analyzing them deductively against the background of a preceding theoretical discussion, I only use the four principles of anarchism, carved out in chapter three, as a heuristic to roughly structure the description and interpretation. Using the four principles of anarchism as a framework to shed light on council theory is not random. Rather, if there was no congruence at all between councils and anarchism it would be hard to explain why councils have been figuring prominently in the anarchist tradition as explained in chapter three. Based on this, I inductively use the empirical insights to draw references to the debates from the realm of council theory. Most of the time, I draw theoretical conclusions at the end of the respective subchapters, but sometimes also more in direct dialogue with the material. The inductive knowledge production aims at producing insight that considers both practice and theory on eye level. This avoids a trap that Bardawil pointed out, namely using critical theory for "adjudicating political practice", as critical theory has done too often according to him in the case of the Syrian revolution. However, his suggestion that "critical theory ought today to be rethought in light of practice" (Bardawil 2019, 176) might also be misguiding. What is needed rather, I argue, is a dialogue between both and I am confident that the analysis will make a point in that regard.

The empirical basis of the analysis is a mix of three different sorts of material. The first and largest body of literature consists mainly of over a dozen most relevant reports and studies produced on behalf of international (western) NGOs from 2012-2017 on local councils all over Syria (except for the Kurdish autonomy region). International NGOs mostly produced their surveys as a basis for policy recommendation either directly on behalf of foreign governments (e.g. O'Bagy 2012; HD 2014), or indirectly in their function as sometimes more and sometimes less independent foundations for political consulting (Khoury 2013; Aljundi 2014; Becker & Stolleis 2016; Heller 2016; Omran 2017;), or as partners of or in cooperation with international donors (LACU & NPA 2015; Hajjar et al. 2017; Faviér 2016). This is mentioned in order to raise awareness that the production of these texts did follow different agendas and that the author's had distinct ideas about the meaning and function of councils. The studies oftentimes relied on interviews with community and local council members, sometimes combining quantitative questionnaires with several hundred councils with qualitative interviews and group discussion as well as with anecdotal evidence. Apart from a second field of rather journalistic and activist writings on the councils (Al-Kayial 2014; Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami 2016; Al-Shami 2013, 2015, 2021 etc.; Naisse 2013; Daher 2013, 2014a etc.; Daou 2018; Amilcar 2019) a current of literature emerged from a more rather purely academic field (Angelova 2014; Khalaf 2015; Saleh 2018; Al-Om 2018; Carpi & Glioti 2018; Pearlman 2020; Muni 2021). It is important to consider the points in time at which these different studies emerged: Especially the NGOs and consulting agencies have produced various insightful and systematic studies on the local councils both on the basis of in-depth studies of single councils and on the basis of larger samples. However, such studies with larger samples were conducted only four years after the emergence of local councils, notably by Omran (2016 and 2017), by LACU & NPA (2015) and by Hajjar et al. (2017). Rather few reports and studies on the local councils' role were issued during 2012 and 2013, whereas from 2014 onwards the number of more systematic studies grew (Al-Jundi 2014; HD 2014; LACU & NPA 2015). A short, but excellent overview of main issues of the local councils is proposed by Faviér 2016, and the lenghtier study Hajjar et al. (2017) provides interview-based in-depth studies of five very different local councils and also delivers a somewhat

systematic overview. Academic literature on the local councils only took off in 2014 (Angelova 2014; Khalaf 2015; Saleh 2018; Al-Om 2018) whereby only one of them deals explicitly, but very shortly, with Omar Aziz and his conceptualization of the councils (Carpi & Glioti 2018). These academic texts discuss the councils in light of international policy paradigms and the problems of NGOization (Khalaf 2015), or as part of a larger landscape of "non-violent" organizing or "civic resilience" in conflict and war (Al-Om 2018, respectively Saleh 2018), or as (the only available, but underdeveloped) real option for a radical contestation of the resilient Syrian state (Carpi & Glioti 2018).

The second pillar consists of two face-to-face interviews with Sami Al-Kayial who, together with Omar Aziz, took active part in the initiation of several local councils around Damascus and beyond, especially in the local council of Barzah al-Balad from 2011 until his flight from Syria in November 2012. He can be considered as Aziz colleague, friend and companion during the uprising and hence provides first-hand information on the councils in the very early phase until late 2012. His perspective is all the more valuable, first, because he is familiar with Aziz' notion and motivation regarding councils, second, because his political background was rather favorable of traditional forms of political organization such as trade unions, so that his alignment with the council approach was a novel experience that he consciously reflected upon. Contact was established through Facebook with little effort as Al-Kayial was very open to talking about the topic. I conducted two face-to-face interviews with him, roughly 160 minutes each, in a café in Berlin during the day, one in February 2019 and one in August 2020. Questions and answers were posed mostly in Arabic (otherwise German and English) and answered in Arabic. The two interviews make up roughly 5 hours of audiofiles. After each interview I asked follow-up questions by Email or videocalls. I recorded the two interviews with his consent and transcribed-translated them directly into English language (appendix 9). The chosen mode of transcription was intelligent verbatim "adapt(ing) the oral to written norms" (McCullin 2021, 2). The interviews oscillated between semi-structured and expert interviews since the choice of Sami as interview partner was defined by his insider knowledge (Helfferich 2019, 670) and because I take Sami's statements as factual evidence (Helfferich 2019, 680). This rather puts the interviews on the side of expert interviews, especially also since Al-Kayial's knowledge fulfills the suggested criteria of insider knowledge, context knowledge, and knowledge of hard to access experience (Helfferich 2019, 681). I prepared thematic blocks with roughly four open-ended questions in each block, but I prioritized the flow of the interview over strict following of the questions. The interview guide was much more open in the first as compared to the second interview: The first interview was designed to validate my knowledge about Aziz' biography, his intellectual background and his political socialization in light of the accessible information. Furthermore, I aimed at understanding the ideational architecture behind Aziz' council concept – which is not transparent from the text itself – as well as Aziz' influence within the overall council landscape. The second interview, 1,5 years later, was designed to ask for more details of the functioning of councils. At that point I had fully revised the NGO literature and had a broader knowledge about the councils. The interview then focused on Sami's and Omar's experience in the local councils that they personally helped initiate, especially in Barzeh al-Balad. I specifically asked questions about the everyday functioning of the council and in how far the practical reality corresponded to Aziz' concept or conflicted with it.

The third pillar is the self-presentation of the Darayya local council on its website which dates from 2014. Darayya is chosen for two reasons: firstly, it figures prominently in the remembrance by both anarchist-leaning and other authors so that it is promising to grasp in more detail how the council (consciously or unconsciously) implemented elements of revolutionary council

democracy. Secondly, the Darayya council has an elaborate website documenting in detail and notably from a grassroots perspective its activity through its respective offices and also a constitution, which is rather exceptional in the landscape of councils. This is different with the local council of Barzah which has hardly received any attention. It was co-initiated and influenced by Omar Aziz and Sami Al-Kayial and the latter can provide first-hand experience on the council which was according to him outstandingly well-functioning. Whereas Darayya and Barzah are both close to Damascus they feature similarities (well-functioning over a long period of time) as well as difference (rather rural suburb versus large town; very informal versus sophisticated institutional architecture; directly influenced by versus independent of Aziz ideas). Lastly, I translated parts of the website of the Darayya local council which was launched by the latter in 2014 almost two years after the council's inception that eventually lasted from late 2012 to August 2016 (Becker & Stolleis 2015, 4). Whereas several articles have dealt with Darayya's youth movement and civil peaceful resistance, none of them has focused on the local council. The latter is considered as one of the most functional local councils, even as "l'expérience la plus achevée de conseil local" (CQFD 2015, VI) by some. Hence, my contribution lies in my concentration on the work of the local council in more detail. The website reflects the status quo as of the year 2014 and thus offers an insight not only in the aspirations of the first months of the council's existence from November 2012 onwards, but also the lived experience of around two years. Since there is no contradiction between how the council describes itself on the one hand and how the different reports describe the activism and situation in Darayya I have no reason to doubt the overall validity of the website's content. The website is in Arabic and all quotes from the website are my translations. The two parts that I mainly draw on are on the one hand the written constitution (which describes the internal structure, procedures and the regulations) and on the other hand the detailed description of the ten offices and three commissions (Darayya LC 2014 a, b etc.). The advantage of this three-fold composition is that first, it allows for grasping the development of councils over time, second, it covers different geographical regions and socio-spatial contexts (e.g. rural/urban), third, it combines the perspective of outsiders' observations and insiders' reflections.

The second part accomplishes a thorough reinterpretation of Aziz' discussion papers. The basis for this is a revisiting of his intellectual background. This is necessary, because the theoretical saturation of the discussion papers has not been adequately grasped, which led not only to blind spots, but also to a few misinterpretations. To that end, I draw on a few articles written by Aziz himself in Arabic language (Aziz 2007, 2011, 2012), on secondary texts written by bloggers and translators, and on the interviews with Al-Kayial that I treat as expert interviews in this context. The analysis of the discussion papers aims at identifying the main themes and arguments by combining hermeneutic interpretation with the information from sources just mentioned. Whereas the analysis sticks close to the text in order to present Aziz' thoughts, themes are partly regrouped under new titles.

In preparation of the text discussion a text analysis was done which compared the two versions of the papers (Aziz 2011/12) and their respective translations in English and French. In order not to miss important points I compared both versions of the Arabic texts and I revised different translations (two English, one French) that refer to the second version and only parts of the first version (namely the introduction thereof). The result is a two-column table in English language that sums up the main arguments of each paper in parallel and according to the given structure of the papers. In that way amendments that Aziz made between October 2011 and February 2012 are identified, which enables me to grasp how he assessed the evolution of the councils in that period. This table also serves to highlight issues of translations that may be critical to the understanding of

the text. That this is important is evident from the discussions and commentaries in the respective foreword and afterword to the English translation written by the translators collective Bordered by Silence (BbS) in 2017. Both the text comparison and the revision of the translation are found in the appendix (4 and 5), because the detailed knowledge thereof may not be essential for the course of the argument in this dissertation, but it may prove useful for other researchers dealing with the topic in the future.

5.3 Ethical issues

My analysis of digital media relies to a great extent on naturally occurring data from social media, blogs and to a lesser extent on news sites. This raised ethical issues with regards to if and how this data should be mined and treated. Regarding blogs, Schmidt argues that accessibility and sensitivity of data should be estimated in combination and that it is a matter of balancing out the two aspects (Schmidt 2019, 1023). All content from blogs that I researched was clearly produced in order to be spread and circulated so that I had no concerns in using them for the research. By contrast, the issue is more complicated with social media, because especially Facebook is used in a mixed way for private issues and for reaching out into a sort of public of remote friends and acquaintances. Whereas researching the content on blogs in this study raises little concerns, privacy is especially an issue with regards to my research in Facebook and Twitter. One way to ethically deal with this situation is to obtain informed consent from those researched (Tiidenberg 2018, 6). Besides the fact that this wouldn't be manageable in my case, I rely on a different approach. In accordance with Tiidenberg's (2018, 15) argument I give priority to the estimation of the context over seemingly clear-cut categories such as private/public. Drawing on other authors, Tiidenberg advocates for "informed consent as a continuous negotiation (…); a series of waivers of expected and behavioral social norms (…); or a situated decision that the researcher makes by focusing primarily on avoiding harm rather than consent per se" (Tiidenberg 2018, 7). In my understanding the analysis of groups' pages as well as the analysis of committed memory workers' personal profiles is ethically acceptable, because they clearly opted themselves to be visible as authors and because it is in their interest to push the content they produced. In contrast to that, when I came across personal Facebook profiles of individuals who appear as active in circulating, but have not themselves produced articles, the ethical issue of private/public moves more into a grey zone. My reasoning here is: Although these individuals apparently have an interest in increasing the content's visibility by circulating it, they might rather address their personal network of friends and thus act not as public figures, but really as private individuals. This latter scenario concerns very few persons, also because the Facebook corpus is rather small.

With regards to the non-media part of the research I tried to ensure "informed consent as a continuous negotiation" (Tiidenberg 2018, 15) by asking my interview partners repeatedly over time for permission to use quotes for presentations at conferences and discussion meetings. Before finishing the dissertation I sent text pieces to interviewees where I used their quotes and asked for critique and consent.[18] In terms of the mentioned "waivers" and "avoiding harm", I opted to rather abstain from research strategies if I had doubts about their consequences. Especially with regards to the practice of circulating it was tempting to do a network analysis in order to show who circulated mnemonic content. However, the visualization of networks of anarchists could potentially be

[18] I did this, too, for Chapter 3 where I discussed anarchist groups in Arab countries and wherever I refer to personal communication as source of a quote.

used against their own interests and make them more vulnerable to surveillance or persecution. Moreover, the ethical guideline for me was not only to do no harm, but to actually produce knowledge that would benefit a radical leftist community for the relfection of its media practices and I do not see how a network analyses would serve that purpose. Thus, the analysis of the circulation of memory prioritizes the analysis of content over the analysis of actor networks, foregrounding the centrality of specific articles or posts etc. By doing so the most important memory activists are indeed identified, but only in so far as they made themselves visible as authors. Overall, it is my hope that those people whose texts I analyze consider my research as a contribution to their own endeavor of raising attention to the Syrian uprising from a radical leftist perspective. I also understood my repeated participation in conferences organized by anarchist or libertarian communist groups at which I talked about my research as occasions to scrutinize, question and criticize the kind of knowledge that I produce from that particular perspective. While writing the dissertation I repeatedly found myself in a situation where I lost this perspective, perhaps because academic writing has a strong dynamic of its own that sometimes pushes the researcher to produce knowledge with great effects and fancy visualization instead of putting the meaningfulness of knowledge in the first place. Tiidenberg's simple, but poignant statement was helpful in these situations: "Just because something is technically accessible and collectable, doesn't mean it should be accessed and collected." (Tiidenberg 2018, 15).

6. Anarchist remembrance of the local councils in digital media

> *When they arrested Omar I knew I was the next one. I went to Turkey to Antakya and worked for Al-Sham Journal. I wrote a few articles on the topic of the councils. And I published Omar's papers on my Facebook page and from there apparently the information spread - I don't know exactly how. (Al-Kayial, interview, February 2019)*

This chapter sheds light on the processes and different factors that have nourished the creation of an anarchist, leftist memory of the Syrian uprising with regards to the local councils and their conceptualization by Omar Aziz. The structure of this chapter is based on the research questions that have been articulated as a result of the theoretical chapter and it proceeds according to the methodological reasoning laid out in Chapter Five. Before attending to each of the research questions, the chapter starts with an overview of how anarchists have been using digital media since the Arab Spring. This helps to situate the concrete memory work engaged in by the Syrian local councils within the larger context.

6.1 Contemporary anarchism in the Arab world and digital media

A Jordanian anarchist explained in 2010, i.e. before the uprisings, how he became acquainted with anarchist thought through the internet: "We knew about anarchism from the Internet. (…) Back then, there were only a few Arabic texts about anarchism on the internet, now we find more and more." (Kalicha & Kuhn 2010, 194f.; translation A.W.). Printed books on anarchism are hardly accessible in the Arab world due to both scarcity and also marginalization in local libraries. To take Amman's university library as an example, there are only a few books on the subject, tucked away amidst a collection of Marxist writings (Kalicha & Kuhn 2010, 195). The experience of Iraqi anarchists is similar: "As far as we know there were no anarchist books in Iraq except one from Joseph Proudhon, and the reason why this was available was because Karl Marx had rejected Proudhon's politics, philosophy and economic ideas." (Salvoechea 2010). The only available book on anarchism in bookstores in larger cities such as Beirut and Tunis is usually Noam Chomsky's *On Anarchism* (as of 2017 in Beirut and 2014 and 2015 in Tunis). The only hard copy book on anarchism in Arabic published by a proper publisher (to the best of my knowledge) is Daniel Guérin's "Anarchism: From theory to practice" (Guérin 2012, and n.d.). Other books on anarchism, though, circulated as printed copies, such as one written by Ahmed Zaki in Egypt who published one book on anarchism in 2007, revised it in 2011 and distributed it in Tahrir Square during the uprising (Galiàn 2019b, 721). Moreover, Egyptian anarchist Samih Said Abud has written several books on anarchism, encompassing both original works and translations. However, these books are more akin to articles in style. They are typically distributed as copies and published online on the blog Al-Hewar Al-

Mutamaddun. The majority of Abud's works were written from 2011 onwards (Galiàn, personal correspondence).

Obviously, the availability of the internet in the context of the Arab Spring uprisings facilitated novel opportunities for the diffusion of anarchism in an atmosphere of heightened receptivity to radical ideas. In the Egyptian context, Galiàn contends that "(m)ost of these young anarchists were not members of any organizations before their participation in the 25 January revolution or before they identified as anarchists. Their approach to anarchism was a result of their participation in the revolution and their improved levels of English. This enabled them to consume information about anarchism on the internet, something that the older generations were not able to do, and rather relied on Marxist writings to educate them about anarchism." (Galiàn 2019a, 278)

The accessibility of digital media, coupled with the uprisings from 2011 onwards, has significantly contributed to the visibility of anarchist discourses and activities. This increased visibility extends to anarchists both locally and regionally, as well as on a transnationally: references have been made to anarchism as a political movement in the past. For instance, the Egyptian group Libertarian Socialist Movement has utilized Facebook to showcase scenes from various anarchist revolutions, including the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s or the Ukraine-based Makhnow movement in the years after the Russian Revolution in 1917 (Libertarian Socialist Movement Egypt, n.d. a). By referring to these past struggles and personalities in their self-mediation practices, anarchists position themselves within this larger history and also appropriate it as their own history (Woller 2018). Besides this, translations were made, digitized and uploaded - such as an anthology of Mikhail Bakunin's writings in 2012 (Arab Anarchists 2012). The largest blog on anarchism in the Arabic language, Al-Anarkiyya Bi-l-Arabiyya (in English *Anarchism in Arabic*), which was launched by Egyptian anarchists from the milieu of the Libertarian Socialist Movement, endures as a vast collection of a broad spectrum of anarchist texts. Here, the activists have been posting translations of texts on the Spanish Civil War, of classical anarchist thinkers such as Kropotkin, translations of contemporary thinkers such as David Graeber, and their own posts on free love, literature, or the Egyptian uprising. Moreover, members of the Egyptian LSM have made their self-authored books and articles on anarchist history and philosophy freely available on the internet (anarchisminarabic2021; Galiàn 2015, 363). I have argued elsewhere (Woller 2018) that all these media practices can be analyzed in terms of three distinct self-mediation practices, as suggested by Bart Cammaerts (2015), of which remembrance is one.

When discussing the role that digital media played for anarchists during the Arab Spring and in the aftermath, it is worth emphasizing the degree to which they facilitated transnational connections. Despite the fact that surveillance and repression on Facebook are serious issues, especially for political actors with a radical outlook (Cammaerts, 2015; Youmans & York, 2012), Facebook was widely used by anarchist groups to connect to other groups - if only by liking each other's posts and thus being in touch. . A few examples follow to illustrate this point. Firstly, it was evident that only a few anarchist groups had email addresses at which they could be contacted. . However, those that did showed little hesitation in sharing their Google mail addresses on their Facebook profiles or elsewhere. This eagerness to be visible and connect with others was palpable to observers during the initial period of the Arab Spring. The collective behind the blog Tahrir-ICN was very active in facilitating the linking of groups by using its Facebook profile to like other sites or groups, thus enabling people to find other anarchist groups more easily. e. It was also Tahrir-ICN who shared a "Call for a first Mediterranean anarchist meeting", thus not only making visible the Tunisian anarchist group Le Commun Libertaire who was behind that call, but more specifically helping to mobilize for the meeting held in Tunis in March 2015 (Tahrir-ICN, 2015).

Indeed, the Tahrir International Collective Network (Tahrir-ICN) is an outstanding example of anarchists' use of digital media in the context of the Arab world. It serves as an example for numerous

aspects: for the possibility of transnational cooperation of activists, for the possibility of archiving contemporary texts, of making historical texts accessible etc. It was jointly founded by British-Syrian activist and author Leila Al-Shami together with around five other individuals from different countries in 2012. The blog published posts in English and Arabic and was very active throughout 2012 and 2013. In their "manifesto" Tahrir-ICN states that "through this network we want to create a platform for discussions, for presenting the issues of struggle and their local conditions and differences, for presenting and explaining undertaken actions and planning joint activities in future" (Tahrir-ICN, n.d.). And yet again with regards to Syria, without the platform provided by digital media (especially a few key blogs), the story of Omar Aziz and his anarchist conception of the local councils would have hardly become visible to an English-speaking audience.

They used a blog, Facebook and Twitter in a comprehensive manner to create connectivity between anarchists, especially also in the Arab world, and to make contemporary anarchism in the region visible. The Tahrir-ICN blog constitutes a valuable collection of interviews, opinion texts, news, solidarity notes, calls for meeting and other texts, mostly in English, but also in Arabic, written by external authors and collected and reposted by the blog administrators. Not everything is concerned explicitly with anarchism, but nine of the roughly seventy tags feature "anarch*" and search categories include "history of anarchism" and "theory of anarchism". The Syrian revolution was one of their foci: "Syria" is the most relevant tag, followed by Egypt, Anarchism and the Syrian Revolution and there are seven texts that deal with Omar Aziz and the local councils. These include links to his discussion papers, obituaries and links to further texts. It is hard to estimate the outreach that the blog had, but some of the articles display dozens of commentaries and pingbacks and its Facebook group has around 5,000 likes. Given that the collective consisted of, at times, eight people from different countries such as Poland and Great Britain (Al-Shami 2017, interview with author), all with their own personal networks, we can assume that Tahrir-ICN was the most transnationally-networked platform, a gravitational point for information on leftist struggles in the region. If something related to anarchism or radical left perspectives occurred in the Middle East in that period of 2012 to 2014, it was most likely to be found on Tahrir-ICN sooner or later. And, likewise in the future, if anarchists Google "Syria and anarchism", they will sooner or later find their way to Tahrir-ICN. Tahrir-ICN's Facebook account is indicative of their efforts to establish links with and between anarchist groups in the region and enhance the visibility of topics, such as Syria, and of groups. They used their Facebook group as a sort of hinge by liking nearly all other anarchism-related groups in the region (see appendix 3).

However, the connections that Tahrir-ICN established and that became manifest in its digital media platforms were not the result of mere online activism. Rather, online networking interplayed with offline networking. For instance, Leila Al-Shami traveled through Greece, Italy, Spain and Poland throughout the year of 2013 and participated in discussion meetings about the Syrian revolution in squats and other leftist spaces. Another member of Tahrir-ICN traveled to the mentioned anarchist meeting Tunis in 2015. Thus, networking happens to a considerable extent behind the digital media scenes and it is that networking which lies at the basis for creating visibility and attention to such a specific topic as the local councils and Omar Aziz. Moreover, offline media matter as well. Just as one example, the Tunisian group Harakat Asyan, devoted considerable effort to publishing several issues of a printed monthly paper over several months, named Al-Mushtarak Al-Thawry.

One member's account of how his group increasingly turned towards anarchism is very instructive on how digital media interact with other important factors. In 2011, roughly half a year after the revolution erupted, an international meeting took place in Tunisia. "We had been following in the internet what repercussions the Arab Spring had in other countries. We observed what people did and we tried to evaluate how they organized, be it in Arab countries or in Europe. We heard them talk about anti-

authoritarianism and anarchism. A few of us had also had the chance to travel abroad and they brought back books or texts that we would read and discuss. And we made a few acquaintances via Internet who encouraged us to read this or that." The international conference is remembered by Yousri as a very important moment in their political trajectory: "All these groups that we somehow felt related to came, Germans, Italians, Greek, the Spanish anarchist federation, French, Americans, Polish etc., and they brought with them books and booklets". (Yousri, interview April 2021)

Figure 25: Front page one of the first issue of the journal "Al-Mushtarak al-Thawri" (November 2012) by the group Harakat Asyan

Note: Source: Harakat Asyan 2012.

Similarly, a group of Syrian anarchists in Aleppo published two printed newspapers or zines and emphasized the great importance that they attached to print media (Hourriya 2010, 109 ff.) They dedicated themselves to producing a pamphlet in a zine-style which they called Tamarod, and eventually two issues were put together, with around only 25 copies each. The distribution of the printed monthly paper, Al-Mushtarak Al-Thawry, by the Tunisian group Harakat Asyan primarily took place in Aleppo, Syria, encompassing both the city itself and the surrounding villages (p. 113ff.). Through collaborations with friends based in Deraa, in the southern part of Syria, Harakat Asyan successfully arranged for the printing and distribution of their paper by their Deraa contacts. Similarly, they reciprocated by printing and distributing copies of their friends' zines in Aleppo. "There was a lot of cooperation between different newspapers, many papers exchanged copies across different regions and distributed them as much as possible. (...) Strong ties were created between journals and it was a bit as though a newspaper syndicate had been created." (Hourriya 2016, 114).

The visibility of material in digital media and its accessibility for researchers certainly shapes the researcher's imagination of what the fields of both the media practices and the non-media practices look like. The above-mentioned examples affirm that digital media practices are always only part of a larger whole. This is important to keep in mind when discussing the memory work in digital media regarding the Syrian uprising in the following subchapters.

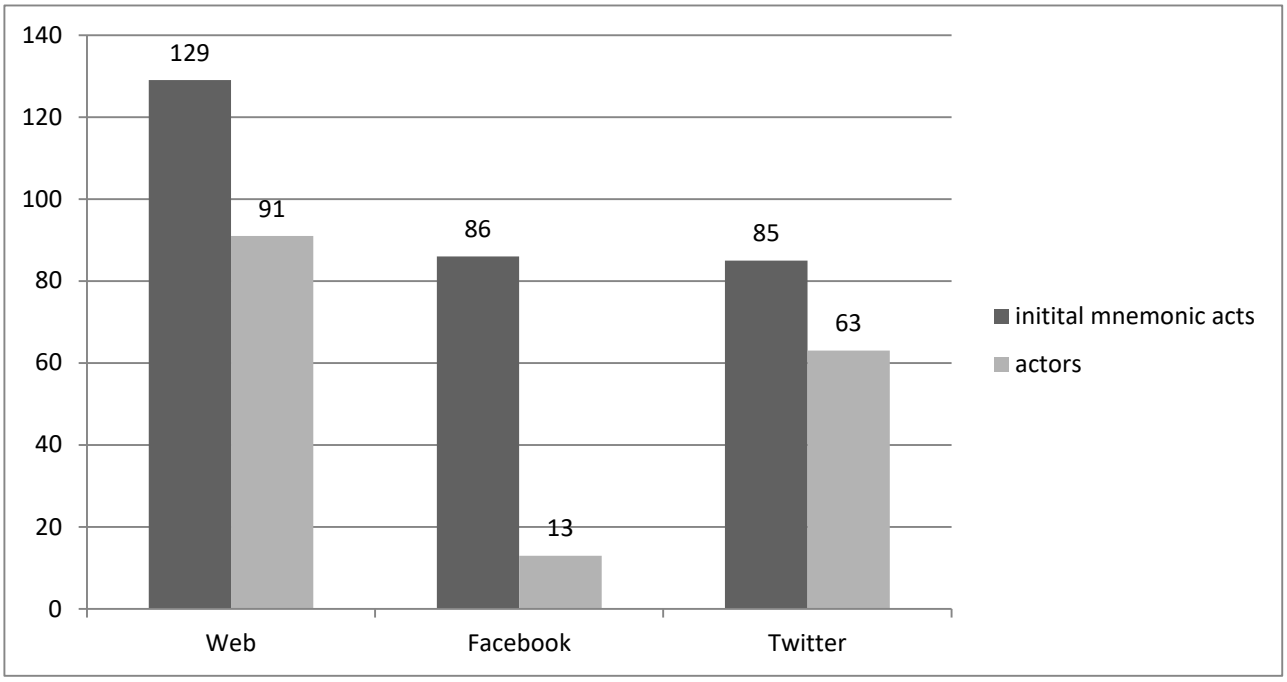
6.2 RQ 1 – Overview of the mnemonic field and actors

In this subchapter, which deals with the first research question, I provide an overview of the main characteristics of the mnemonic field. Based on the theory around media and memory, I have argued that memory can be understood as the result of a constellation of actors, practices and technology. Therefore, the first step for understanding the mnemonic field will be to obtain an overview of that specific constellation of actors, their practices and the platforms in which these practices took place. The overview looks at the empirical material from different angles and highlights different aspects at a time and sometimes in combination, such as temporal dynamics, i.e. how remembrance evolved over those ten years in that constellation, different languages and their different share in the overall corpus, and characteristics of the produced mnemonic content. A specific focus lies on actors and their different roles.

6.2.1 Overview

My analysis is based on three different corpuses for the different searched spheres. From the general web search, 129 mnemonic acts were coded, eighty-six from Facebook and eighty-five from Twitter. I propose a distinction between '*initial*' or '*primary* mnemonic acts' and the subsequent considerations of how they were received and circulated through different technical features within the respective media platform. Such reactions to initial mnemonic acts could be termed 'secondary mnemonic acts'. In the web sphere, around eighty different actors have been involved in producing primary mnemonic content on at least ninety-two different sites, and there is a big number of secondary mnemonic acts (4,058) in the form of backlinks, i.e. when further memory workers linked and thus circulated that content. Similarly to the web sphere, there was also a multitude of different actors on Twitter, specifically sixty-three different users that accounted for the eighty-five coded tweets (note that numerous tweets were not coded, because they had zero retweets, so that we can keep in mind that several dozen more memory workers contributed to the field, however, with perhaps little to zero visibility). These eighty-five primary instances of remembrance on Twitter entailed 8,548 secondary mnemonic acts in the form of 'replies' (109), 'retweets' (1,553) and 'likes' (6,886). In contrast to the web and Twitter, there were both fewer actors involved on Facebook and fewer secondary, circulatory acts to mnemonic content were provoked. The pool of actors comprises only thirteen different actors (eight individuals and five groups) that produced mnemonic content and the eighty-six posts attracted 3,748 reactions in the form of 'reactions' (emojis) (2,484), 'likes' (451) and 'shares' (813). The diagram below shows the number of actors for each sphere and their quantitative relation to mnemonic acts. This suggests that most actors in Twitter and the web sphere dealt with the issue in digital media only once and only few dealt with it several times, whereas actors on Facebook more often than not made several posts.

Figure 26: Amount of actors in each sphere in relation to amount of 'initial mnemonic acts'

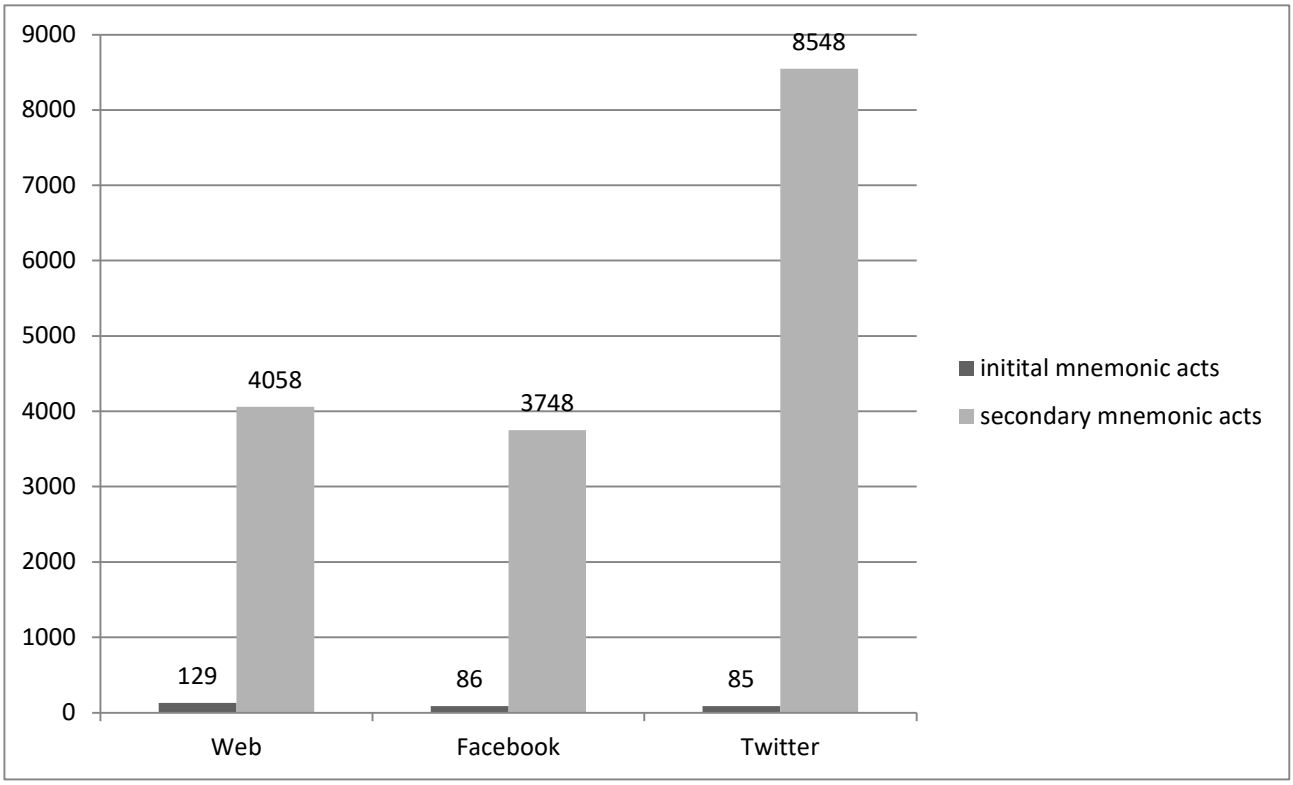


Note: 'Actors' meaning here authors of initial mnemonic acts. Actors n=167; initial mnemonic acts n=300.

By correlating the initial mnemonic acts, which encompass the original texts, tweets, and posts, with the subsequent reactions they provoked, referred to as secondary mnemonic acts, we can observe varying degrees of resonance on the platforms. These secondary mnemonic acts include backlinks, retweets,

replies, shares, and likes. The extent to which the initial mnemonic acts resonated can be visualized in Figure 27 below. At first sight, Twitter appears as a more responsive sphere than Facebook and the web in general, but as will be shown in subsequent detailed analyses, the spheres are intertwined in a way that highlights the web sphere and relegates *both* Twitter and Facebook to a sort of circulatory hub. Moreover, the sheer numbers say nothing yet about the quality and depth of remembrance, and I will indeed argue that these criteria are only accomplished by blogs (or by exceptional Arabic Facebook posts).

Figure 27: Amounts of initial mnemonic acts in relation to amount of secondary mnemonic



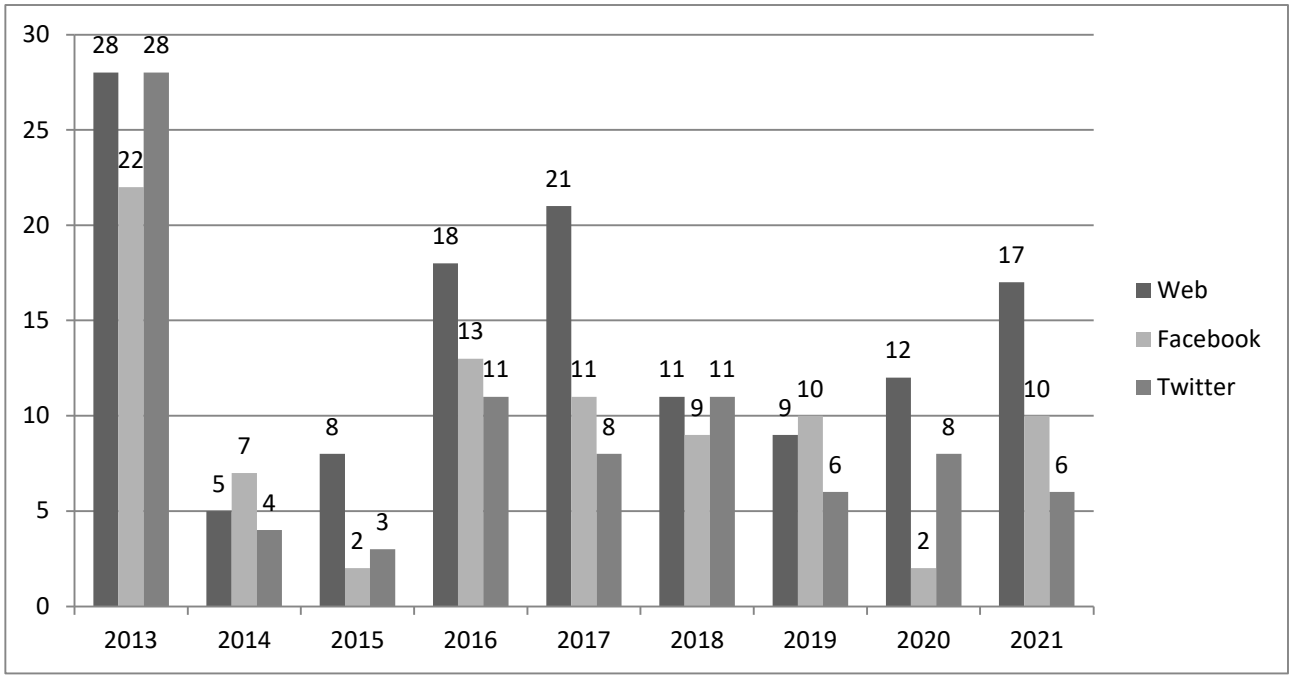
Note: initial mnemonic acts n=300; secondary mnemonic acts n=16354.

Differentiating between initial and secondary mnemonic acts draws attention towards the existence of subsequent steps in the creation of memory: a pioneering step that consists of content creation especially in the web sphere, and a subsequent step in which the content is circulated. This also implies different actor roles - as will be explored further after the overview.

After this general overview of the quantitative relation of the three researched spheres, I will turn now to a more detailed discussion under different angles, starting with temporality. An anarchist memory about Syria, the councils and Aziz has had a decade to evolve. What has its temporal dynamic been? For both the web and the social media platforms, the overall temporal dynamic is similar: 2013 was a year of intense memory activism. This was especially the case for Twitter, where the twenty-five entries for 2013 amount to almost one-third of the total sum of eighty-five tweets from 2013 to 2021. The subsequent years of 2014 and 2015 displayed a low level of mnemonic activism in all spheres, whereas the years 2016 to 2018 saw an increase of mnemonic activity. Then, from 2019 to 2021 that activity remained at a relatively stable level on Twitter, whereas remembrance on the web increased, as opposed to Facebook, where activity appears more volatile in the most recent years.[19]

[19] Although the validity of the search in Facebook seemed rather low (as I explained in the method chapter), it is noteworthy that the development of remembrance here roughly mirrors the pattern in Twitter and the web (to the exception of the year 2020; compare appendices 6, 7, 8). Thus, the Facebook corpus proves to be at least not completely random.

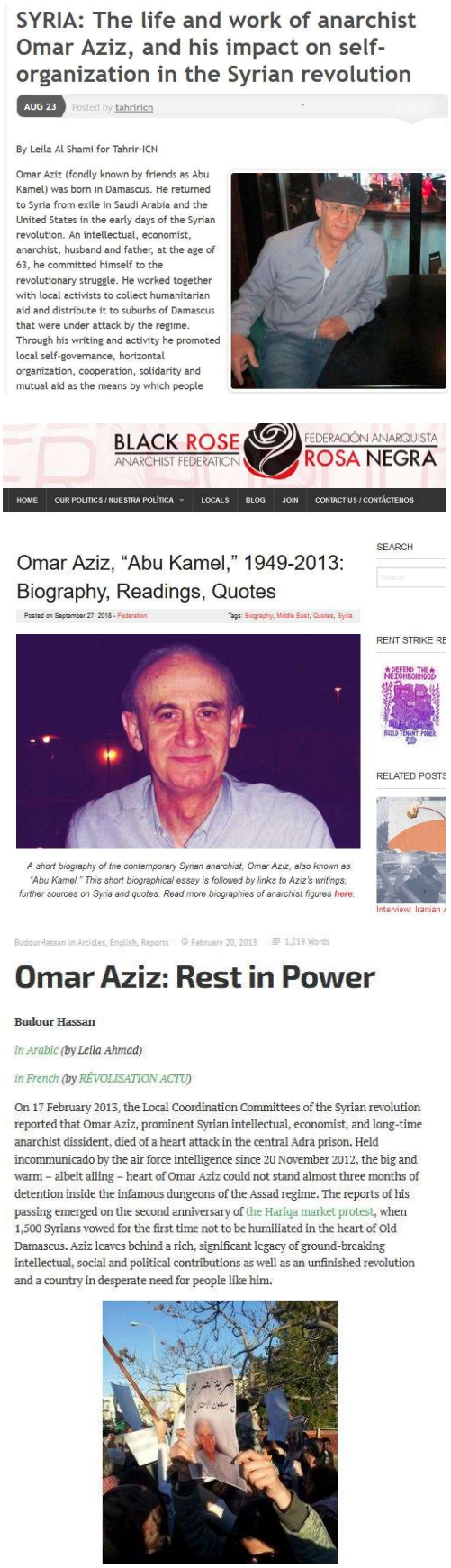
Figure 28: Amount of mnemonic acts for each year from January 2013 – mid 2021



Note: mnemonic acts in web sphere n=129, Facebook n=86, Twitter n=85.

How can we explain this temporal dynamic? Clearly, the year 2013 and especially the month of February mark the beginning of remembrance. It started with the circulation of information on Twitter, where within the space of three days roughly a dozen actors posted a tweet about Aziz' death, mainly in Arabic (some tweets were in French, none in English). Within less than three weeks, twenty-two different actors pushed the topic and helped it spill over into an English-speaking public. The character of the initial ten tweets that are predominantly in Arabic (nine from ten) display a character of personal mourning or immediate, spontaneous commemoration. Note that this very early commemoration had not yet taken the shape of an explicit leftist remembrance, except for the one tweet in French. In the early period, there was only one notable political post on Facebook that could be considered as a collective remembrance rather than a personal one (made by the LCCSyria network). However, it took additional time for the mnemonic activity to gain momentum and become more widespread on the platform. It was only in the month of September that mnemonic activity became more intense on Facebook. Whereas personal mourning was the salient genre of dealing with the topic in Twitter in the early phase in 2013, the obituaries that were linked in the tweets tied into this character of mourning while at the same time introducing an interpretative narrative that presented Omar Aziz as intimately linked with the local councils, and those in turn as intimately linked to anarchism. The genre of obituaries evidently pushed remembrance in the web in the subsequent months of 2013. Three different obituaries were produced: by Palestinian blogger Budour Hassan (1_Hassan_20.02.2013), by Syrian intellectual Yassin Al-Haj Saleh (1_Al-Haj Saleh_23.02.2013), and by Syrian-British author Leila Al-Shami (1_Al-Shami_22.08.2013). Whereas I did not come across Al-Haj Saleh's obituary again in my search, Hassan's and Al-Shami's obituaries clearly started to travel widely and became a fixed reference point from early on. Their texts appeared again and again on various sites over the years. Whereas it took a while for remembrance in Twitter to transform from personal commemoration to political remembrance, the lengthier obituaries offered a chance to use Omar Aziz' personality and biography in order to put the local councils more into the spotlight. In fact, this opened the door to the reception of the Syrian revolution and the local councils within the anarchist community. Aziz and his explicit framing as an anarchist by Hassan and Al-Shami built a bridge to raise attention transnationally among anarchists.

Figure 29: Partial screenshots of three obituaries



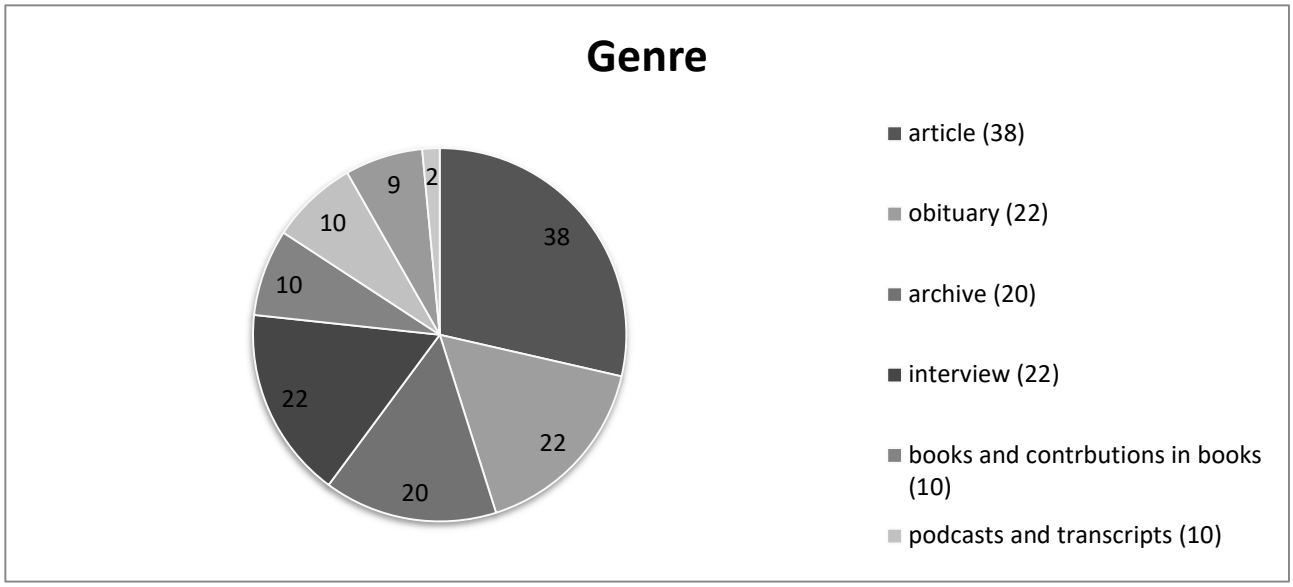
Note: Sources: Al-Shami (2013); Sethness (2018); Hassan (2013).

Since the mentioned obituaries by Hassan and Al-Shami were translated into several languages, that first year of 2013 (and also 2014) was the most diverse in terms of languages. Whereas from 2015 onwards English is the dominant language of remembrance, only very few texts appeared in Arabic language and occasionally interviews, translated obituaries, podcasts and articles occurred in French. Although the German anarchist pacifist journal graswurzel.net had translated an interview in which Omar Aziz and the councils were discussed at least in a brief way already in late 2013, not much happened over the coming years. Apart from the immediate reproduction of that interview (in which the topic is not even treated centrally), only one text per year emerged in 2016, 2018, and 2019, and two in 2020. Whereas the absence of Arabic texts in the corpus might be explained by shortcomings of either my search strategy or by the fact that journalistic articles in Arabic language newspapers were not archived by the respective newspapers (Al-Kayial 2019, personal communication; see also Al-Kayial 2013; 2014), the absence of remembrance in German before 2016 has to be explained differently. One explanatory factor here might be the 'selective solidarity' in favor of the Kurdish project of democratic autonomy in Northern Syria within the German radical left (Etzbach 2014, 25). In that context, Ansar Jasim from Berlin based NGO *adopt a revolution* remembered that "the appearance of Leila Al-Shami's [and Robin Yassin-Kassab's, A.W.] book Burning Country in 2016 was a game changer for the discussion about Syria among radical leftists. Finally, there was a sort of acceptable reference: a book, written from an anti-authoritarian perspective. From that onwards we had something to relate to, an authoritative account about Syria from an emancipatory, leftist perspective." (Jasim, personal communication, April 2021). Incidentally, this may challenge the view held by Hoskins that "the implicit authority granted by being published in a paper world" is tumbling down (Hoskins 2018b, 87). Indeed, books, both monographs and edited volumes that included mostly Hassan's famous obituary Omar Aziz – Rest in Power (2013) and different texts by Al-Shami, appeared from 2016 onwards also in other languages: three in 2017 in French, Italian and English respectively, and three again in 2018 in French, alongside one in German (a translation of one of the French books). After one more book publication in 2019 (again in French), no

more were published. Whereas a surprising number of the published books on the matter are in French, the mnemonic field is overall clearly dominated by English.

Before concluding the discussion, I would like to revisit the topic of genre within the web search and make some additional remarks. It is worth noting that while books are an offline exception to the digital corpus, there are seven other genres I have identified through which the retrieved texts can be grouped. These genres have been categorized in order of relevance to the search topic: articles (originals and reproductions), obituaries and bios (five original ones and their reproductions), entries of relevant texts into archives (including obituaries, articles etc.), interviews in which the topic is dealt with, monographs and book contributions, podcasts and transcripts thereof, the original text by Aziz on the councils and their translations, and, finally, blog posts that are too brief to be considered as articles.

Figure 30: All retrieved texts on the topic from the web search sorted by genre



Note: The total number of n=133 in this diagram exceeds the total of n=129 (initial mnemonic acts in the web sphere), because four articles are counted double as articles and as contributions in printed books respectively.

If 2013 and 2014 were the years of obituaries (and also of Aziz' papers' translations), a second phase from 2015 to 2017 was a period of heterogeneity in which the most different sorts of mnemonic content were produced: both new articles and translated older articles, an interview with different people on the topic here and there, the first few books, further circulation of the original text in a new English translation, and three podcasts which also deal with the councils and Aziz peripherally. After 2018, the year of book publications, a new phase is marked by two characteristics: on the one hand, the production of podcasts (always interviews) especially in 2019 and especially in French; and on the other hand by the increasing occurrence of archival entries. Four of the thirteen retrieved texts from 2020 and even ten of eighteen texts in 2021 are both older and recent texts that were archived in The Anarchist Library, additionally to the Wikipedia entry on Anarchism in Syria in 2021.

Returning now to the overview of the temporal dynamic, how can we explain the decline of activity after 2013, the increase again in 2016 and 2017, including some volatility, and the eventual increase in 2021? The latter is probably the easiest to explain: 2021 marked the anniversary of the Arab Spring in general and also of the Syrian Revolution. This certainly directed the attention also of radical leftists to the topic, as was the case for instance with the German leftist monthly Analyse & Kritik which dedicated a special focus to the Arab Spring in their January 2021 issue. But, importantly, 2021 was also an anniversary year for the Paris Commune – and Omar Aziz himself linked these two struggles in his famous

quote claiming that Syrians "are no less than the Paris Commune workers (…)". Indeed, this link is undermined in articles that appeared in 2021, e.g. prominently by Al-Shami's latest article that starts off from the quote (1_Al-Shami_02.03.2021), or by The Internationalist Commune that titled its article "From Paris to Rojava – 150 years Paris Commune" which also deals with Aziz and the councils (1_The Internationalist Commune_18.03.2021). Apart from the clear kick-off of remembrance in 2013 and the renewed take-off in 2021 due to the anniversary, probably the years of 2014 and 2015 were overshadowed by the rise of ISIS. If Western leftists have had trouble from 2011 to 2013 in taking sides with the revolution in Syria and were reluctant in their solidarity, the rise of Islamism probably made the situation appear even 'more complicated' and hopeless. Joey Ayoub aptly called this reaction (or rather non-reaction) by the Western Left: "general silence caused by deep confusion" (Ayoub 2017). The selective solidarity that concentrated attention and solidarity from Western, especially German leftists towards the Kurdish struggle was then perhaps all the more geared towards Northern Syria, because that struggle was much easier to understand. Critique against the Leninist PKK notwithstanding, the Kurdish project offered enough points of commonality and occasions for sympathy and interest – all the more so since the Kurds defied ISIS in a bitter battle. Perhaps the assault on Aleppo in 2016 by the Syrian regime could draw more attention southwards and bring Syria to the attention of anarchists again. At least some leftists loudly wondered "will the left hear the cries of Aleppo?" and made an effort that it would (e.g. Smith 2016b). If the local councils and Omar Aziz have become increasingly recognized and appropriated by radical leftists in the last phase since 2018 or even 2017 – and I suggest that the stable occurrence of mnemonic content as well as the increase of archival texts support this line of reasoning - then this is probably to a great extent the result of digital media practices. Declines and increases of mnemonic activity notwithstanding, a plethora of actors upheld overall mnemonic activity over the years in different forms. This shift in perspective steers us away from examining temporal dynamics, both in general and concerning genre and language, and directs our attention towards the actors involved.

6.2.2 Focus on actors

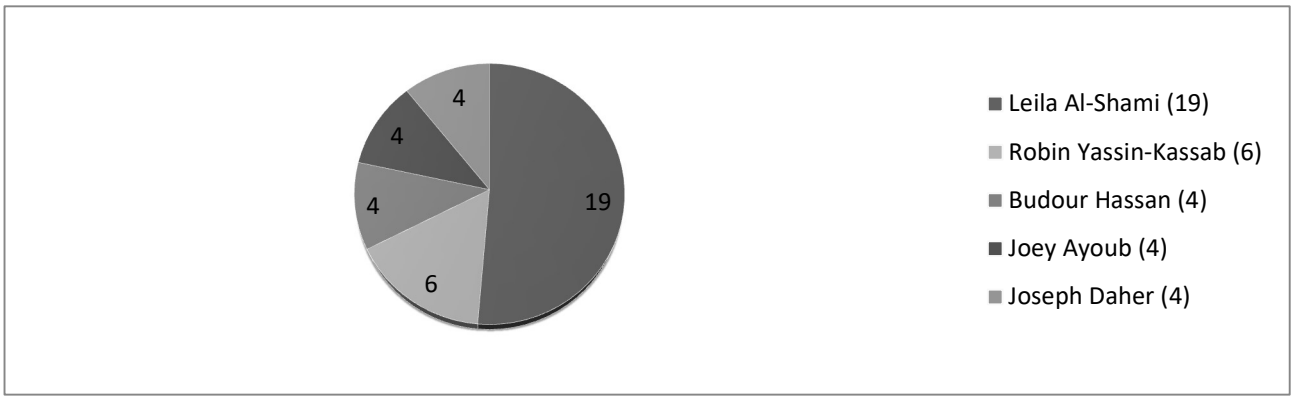
The classification of actors that has been suggested so far in the literature differentiates between dedicated mnemonic project activists and less dedicated brokers who just pass on information or participate occasionally, especially on Twitter (Zamponi 2020). This differentiation is based on the degree of intensity or dedication. However, in our case it is useful to look separately at different roles *and* different degrees of commitment. From the analysis so far, we can already identify three different roles: there are authors who write their own articles or are interviewed, and there are also those who replicate that content. Moreover, it has already been suggested that people reacted to content in different ways which we can grasp in terms of brokers. However, a role is not per se associated with a specific level of dedication. We have authors who are more or less committed, since a few authors wrote several texts over the years and others authored only one text. Likewise, there are brokers with apparently little dedication – e.g. when only retweeting something – but there are also brokers with a high level of commitment over time.

Table 4: Differentiation of authors according to roles and to degree of commitment

Role	Low commitment	High commitment
Authors	One-time authors	Repeated authorship
Replicators	Occasional replication (esp. on blogs)	Systematic replication in archive
Brokers	Occasional brokerage (e.g. retweeting)	Engaged brokerage (esp. in Facebook)

In the web sphere, we come across five individuals who have authored more than four texts and can thus be considered committed or dedicated **authors**. Leila Al-Shami, co-founder of Tahrir-ICN, is by far the most prolific author of mnemonic content, being the author of 19 different texts. After Al-Shami comes Yassin-Kassab (six texts).[20] Budour Hassan authored four different texts in which she deals with Aziz and the local councils and which were published either on her blog Random Shelling or in online news platforms.[21] The remaining ones are the two authors, activists and researchers Joey Ayoub and Joseph Daher with four different texts each.[22] These five actors who authored four or more texts account for thirty-seven texts out of the 129 texts in the web sphere in total.

Figure 31: Focus on actor roles: committed authors in the web sphere and amount of text by author



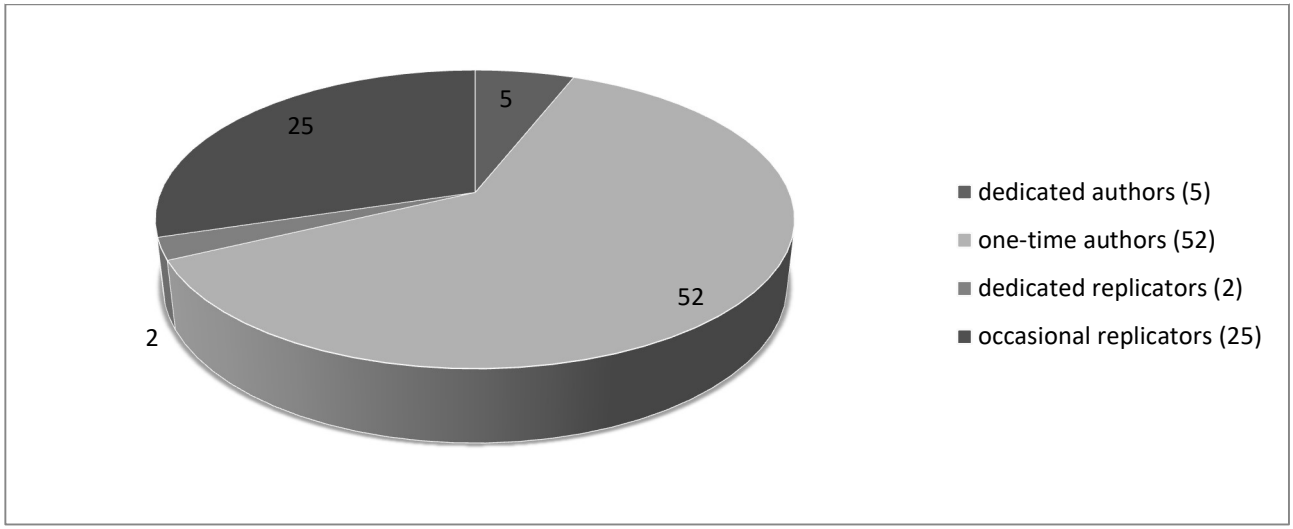
Note: Committed authors are those who authored four or more texts; n=37.

Apart from the two actors with two texts each, the remainder and thus the vast majority of actors are those who authored only one text. The latter account for fifty-two texts out of the total of 129. Although this seems like a large bulk, there are roughly fifty people or groups apart from the five relatively prolific actors who authored themselves a text that is, most of the time, an article or a translation of an original text. If we add the ten academic journal and book contributions written within academia (excluded from the proper corpus) this amounts to over sixty people or groups who have dealt with the topic in form of lengthier texts which includes research, interpretative work and discussions to the least.

Alongside the authors, the second important category of actors are **replicators**. Replicators copy original texts and repost them on another site in full length. For instance, The Anarchist Library is an actor, and, more specifically, a replicator. In 2021 they archived the biographical text on Aziz written three years earlier (1_The Anarchist Library [Sethness]_18.3.2021; 1_Sethness, 27.09.2018). 56 instances of replication could be identified in the corpus and 27 different actors engaged in replicating texts. The most active replicating actors were the archival site The Anarchist Library (nineteen replications) and the blog collective Tahrir-ICN (five replications) while most of the remaining sites of replication were also blogs. We can consider the latter as a pool of occasional replicators, while the former two appear to be dedicated replicators. Tahrir-ICN was especially active in the early phase, notably throughout 2013 by publishing both replicated and original articles as well as link collections to related material, whereas The Anarchist Library has become a major actor only lately by increasingly archiving content, both older and recent. If we look at the two different sorts of actors, namely authors and replicators, leaving the brokers aside for now, we get the following picture:

[20] 1_Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami_2016; _31.03.2016; _30.08.2016; _13.09.2016; _19.09.2016; 1_Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami_2019).
[21] 1_Hassan_20.02.2013; _23.02.2015; _26.02.2013; _19.05.2015).
[22] 1_Ayoub_11.07.2017; _2019; _19.04.2020; 15.05.2020; 1_Daher_05.05.2017; _23.11.2017; _05.04.2018; _22.03.2020).

Figure 32: Focus on actor roles in the web sphere: number of authors and replicators differentiated by degree of commitment and by relationship to content



Note: The total of actors differentiated by the indicated roles n=84.

The upcoming discussion of archiving will point out that archival practices have become increasingly relevant over time. Therefore, the quantitative dominance of authors as opposed to replicators will probably be eroded in that actor constellation.

Contrasting the mentioned roles and degrees of dedication is insightful, I would argue, because it reveals that that the first impression of few heavyweights (authors of at least four texts) distorts the true picture: Apparently, memory is constructed (through authoring) and stabilized (through replicating) by several actors and dedicated authors are only a small number in that constellation. From a qualitative view, however, authorship has an important role, because replicating (and also brokering, as we will see later) draws on authorship and handles the once created content. At the same time, replicating is so relevant, because it can be understood as a sort of validation; in other words, it indicates that others appreciated the original text and its narrative to such a high extent that they in fact copied it on their own sites (instead of only linking it). Hence, despite acknowledging that authorship 'comes first', we can view the relationship of authoring and replicating as a mutual one.

Instead of contrasting the roles – authors versus replicators – we can contrast the actors again by degree of dedication. This results in appreciating the role of less dedicated actors by virtue of their big number. Although I can neither make claims about the efficiency nor the effect of low-commitment authorship or replication, I suggest we can assume that these occasional instances of mnemonic activity do contribute to both creating and stabilizing remembrance, because they form a background against which the heavyweight authors can stand out.

Brokers form the remaining category of actors. While authors and replicators are visible and easily identifiable through a keyword web search, brokers in the web are rather invisible. A suitable tool that renders brokering visible is a backlink analysis. Running each of the seventy retrieved texts from the web search through a backlink analysis reveals how often each of the texts has been linked on other sites on the internet. It not only renders visible which text has been most circulated, but in an indirect way it shows to what extent brokering has taken place. It is important to understand that a backlink analysis does not render the complete replications of texts, but instead the *links* that lead to the original site. Hence, backlinks are a validation of a lesser degree than replicating, but they do indicate which texts have been deemed important enough to be referred to. Although the backlink analysis provides an initial assessment of the most influential texts and actors, it is essential to recognize its limitations and consider

that the results may only reflect a minimum understanding. It is highly probable, and even likely, that not only the original sources of texts have been backlinked but also replicated versions of those texts. One example is the text by Boothroyd (1_Boothroyd_14.08.2016) that has been backlinked 176 times on its original site where it was first published. But the text was replicated in full length on another blog and this replication received further sixty-three backlinks. I abstained from doing such second rounds of backlink analysis for each text, because the first degree analysis of backlinks suffices in my view to get an impression of brokerage that is solid enough, but accepts a degree of inexactitude in the numbers. The table below displays the top nineteen backlinked texts:

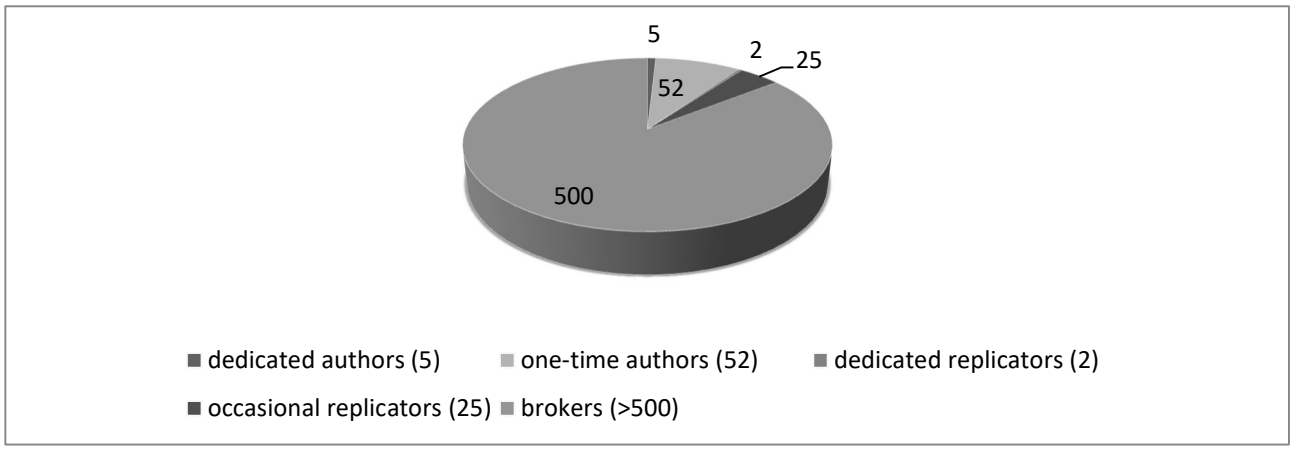
Table 5: Amount of backlinks to texts in the web sphere

Back-links	Year	Auhtor and text
656	2013	Leila Al-Shami: SYRIA: The life and work of anarchist Omar Aziz
551	2013	Nadir Atassi int. by Joshua Stephens
385	2013	Budour Hassan: Omar Aziz: Rest in Power
245	2013	Ghayath Naisse: Self-organization in the Syrian people's revolution
187	2016	Ashley Smith: Will the left hear the cries from Aleppo?
181	2013	Samy Al-Kayial [Omar Aziz]: Discussion papers (in Arabic)
176	2016	Mark Boothroyd: Self organisation in the Syrian revolution
140	2017	Leila Al-Shami: The legacy of Omar Aziz
138	2015	Budour Hassan: Radical Lives: Omar Aziz
127	2013	Leila Al-Shami: SYRIA: The struggle continues
115	2017	Yasser Munif: Syria and the Left
104	2019	Lucas Amilcar: La Révolution syrienne et la Révolution du Rojava
97	2018	Joseph Daher int. by Dan Fischer & S. Majasent: "Our Destinies are Linked"
82	2017	Bordered by Silence: The formation of local councils
77	2016	Robin Yassin-Kassab int. by lundimatin: "Burning country"
76	2018	Javier Sethness: Omar Aziz, Abu Kamel, 1949-2013
64	2017	anonymous contributor: To live in revolutionary time
63	2016	CounterVortex [Mark Boothroyd]: Self organisation
59	2018	anarchist initiative from within Korydallos prison: On the Syrian Revolution

Note: Texts with at least 50 backlinks in descending order. 'int.'=interviewed.

We can look at the results of the backlink analysis from two angles in order to understand more about the actors. First, the one that sheds light on the invisible brokers. There have been thousands of instances of brokering on the web over the research period of roughly eight years. The sum of almost 4,058 backlinks for all retrieved backlinks of all texts is a minimum result only and we may well add another 500. Whereas it is unlikely that each one of the more than 4,000 backlinks has been placed by different individuals and even though we may assume that a certain percentage of the results is flawed due to deficiencies in the tool, the number of brokers by far outweighs the number of replicators and authors together. Let us assume that not only did the tool render too many results, but that also several brokers are responsible for more than just one backlink. In this scenario, we would somewhat arbitrarily reduce the number of brokers to 500 individuals. As a result, we would observe a significant concentration of brokers within the overall constellation of actors.

Figure 33: Quantitative relation of authors, replicators and brokers within the web sphere.



Note: The figure is an approximation, because the number of >500 for brokers is speculative.

The second angle from which to look at the backlink analysis is the one that informs us more about the **authors**, because it reveals whose text has been backlinked how many times. Here, the results backed my observations while coding the results of the web search, but, interestingly, they also broaden the perspective to a great extent. Indeed, Al-Shami and Hassan are heavyweights in terms of being linked, but, surprisingly, they are not the only ones. If we look at the texts that attracted more than fifty backlinks, we do find Al-Shami three times and Hassan twice, but the remaining fourteen texts are authored by others. This clearly qualifies the overwhelming visibility of Al-Shami and Budour Hassan as an initial impression and shows that quite a few other authors have also been widely recognized.

6.3 RQ 2 Practices

The discussion of the first research question not only rendered an overview of the mnemonic field, but also shed light on one first aspect of the constellation in which memory evolves, namely on actors. Thus, after having clarified what kind of actors were on the scene, we can proceed to asking more precisely *how* memory has been constructed. The two practices that are the focus of this subchapter are archiving and circulating, since claiming is treated separately afterwards.

6.3.1 Archiving

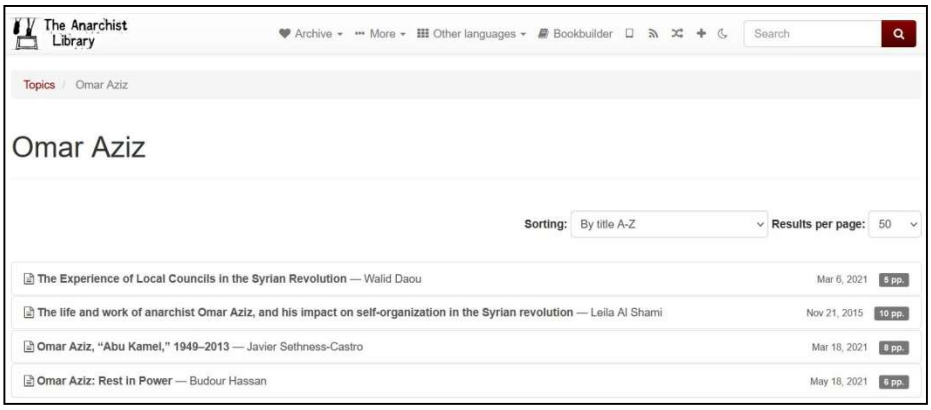
In order to get a first impression of archiving, it is interesting to contrast the time pattern of the growth of the archival corpus with the overall evolution of the corpus. Archiving started only from late 2015 onwards and has a swelling pattern: memory activists archived different content on six occasions in the three years between 2015 and 2017. Little to nothing happened in that respect for the following two years 2018-2019. And then suddenly 2020 saw four and 2021 eleven archival events, most of the latter even within the two anniversary months around Aziz' death and the publication of the papers. This is almost diametrically opposed to the pattern of the overall corpus where 2013, the first year of memory work, stands out quantitatively, then much less happens in 2014-2015, and the dynamic resumes in 2016 and remains at a stable level with roughly similar quantities of mnemonic activities in each year. Eventually, in 2021, archival activities even make up the majority of entries for the first time. Thus, apparently, mnemonic activism around the councils and Aziz foregrounds different practices in different periods. This pattern with closer regard to archiving in contrast to overall activity is actually quite plausible: in the first years, especially in 2013, memory activists were busy spreading the word, making content accessible – in

short creating and circulating content. This is the basis on which memory activists in a later phase can structure, select, and organize that mnemonic content by archiving.

There are three sites that are either archival sites, one, (The Anarchist Library) or archival-like sites (two Wikis) where content about Omar Aziz and the councils has been stored, and two further blogs which I propose to understand as involuntary, temporary archive or a kind of bridge archive. Out of the overall twenty-one retrieved instances of classical archiving, the overwhelming majority of nineteen is from The Anarchist Library, one is from an anarchist Wiki-Page by the name Anarchy in Action and "only" one is from Wikipedia.

The Anarchist Library describes itself as "an archive focusing on anarchism and anarchist texts" (TAL 2021a) committed to collecting, not creating content from other sites especially about contemporary anarchism. Everyone can submit texts without prior registration, while the collective edits and prepares the submitted texts so that they are available for different printing options and in a coherent layout throughout the site. The Archive contains seventeen language sections that are not synchronized, but are fed independently from each other (Arabic is not among them). As of 2013, they stated: "Since going live in 2009 with around 400 texts from different anarchist thinkers and their friends, the library of today now contains over 2,150 different titles." (TAL 2021b) Just as with Wikipedia, the history of submitted texts is comprehensible and thus it is transparent who was involved in authoring or creating the entry. In fact, for each entry on the councils the same two people were named as 'author' and as 'committer' (appendix 11). This suggests that the mnemonic practice of archiving rested largely on two dedicated people who over a period of 6 years – from 2015 to 2021 – observed the evolution of that mnemonic field and contributed to it by feeding selected content into their archive.

Figure 34: Screenshot from The Anarchist Library displaying search results for "Omar Aziz"



Note: Source: TAL (2022).

Apart from The Anarchist Library, it is Wikipedia and an anarchist Wiki that are sites of archival practices. Although the actors in the two Wikis are authors and not replicators and although the Wiki articles consist of newly authored content, I suggest considering them archival spaces, mainly due to their stability and encyclopedia-like character. The **Anarchy In Action** Wiki understands itself as "a resource for anyone to research and write about how and when anarchy can work" (AIA 2021a) and just as The Anarchist Library it relies on the work of volunteers that assist people who want to contribute to the site. In contrast to The Anarchist Library, the aim of this particular project is not solely to curate external content. Instead, it focuses on creating a systematic and comprehensive representation of anarchism across various aspects (AIA 2021a). Its page named "Syrian Revolution" is structured in four sections of which the second one deals with "Self-Governance" and positions Omar Aziz and his papers prominently in the account - which is overall rather short (ca. five paragraphs). Incidentally, upon reviewing the provided sources, it becomes apparent that authors Yassin-Kassab and Al-Shami, as well as Boothroyd, are prominent references (AIA 2021b). The former's book *Burning Country* (2016) holds particular significance

as a key source of information on the subject matter. The registered history of the article reveals that the page was edited by one person over a period of two-and-a-half years (AIA2021c). Similar to The Anarchist Library, the Anarchy In Action Wiki appears to be a case where dedicated individuals, rather than a group of memory activists, have contributed over an extended period of time. These individuals have acted as memory activists by curating and selecting content, as well as authoring new content with fresh interpretations. As mentioned, this sets it apart from The Anarchist Library, where the focus is primarily on collecting external content rather than authoring new content and generating novel interpretations. Therefore, this instance of archiving in a Wiki oscillates between mere archiving – as the Anarchist Library does – and going further by interpreting and thus also claiming memory. This makes clear that the line drawn between archiving and claiming is somewhat artificial, because archiving is already also claiming in that it appropriates mnemonic content and positions it within a certain semantic universe.

The appearance of the proper **Wikipedia** entry "Anarchism in Syria" in 2021, roughly a decade after the start of the creation of the first local councils, and eight years after Aziz' death and the publication of his papers, marks a special point in the timeline of remembrance. The online encyclopedia is authoritative, visible and accessible: whenever anarchists (and people in general) take interest in anarchism in Syria, they will now come across not only the existence of local councils, but also their conceptualization proposed by Aziz and their intimate connection to anarchism. The article was authored in March 2021, at the tenth-year anniversary of the Syrian uprising's outbreak, and it received minor editing over the course of the subsequent five months. Apart from the usual formal sections ("References", "Bibliography", "External links"), the article contains only one section, namely "History", which is differentiated into "Syrian civil uprising" on the one hand and "Rojava conflict" on the other. Out of the overall fourteen paragraphs, only three deal with the "Syrian civil uprising". However, just as with the article in the anarchist Wiki "Anarchy in Action" Omar Aziz and the local councils as well as his discussion papers are mentioned right at the beginning and thus received a prominent position. Although the article is short, I suggest it is an important step for the remembrance of the local councils, anarchism and Omar Aziz for two reasons. First, the entry "Anarchism in Syria" is part of a series on "Anarchism" within Wikipedia which is quite comprehensive in terms of covering numerous regions and in doing so making anarchist history visible and accessible. Not only are the councils thereby adopted into an anarchist horizon in general, but they are also the main anchor point for the further discussion of contemporary anarchism in Syria. Second, by juxtaposing the "Syrian civil uprising" and the "Rojava conflict" the article departs from the biased distribution of attention that leftists and anarchists have so far been focusing on Rojava while largely ignoring the local council movement in Syria. However, among other shortcomings, the gravest one is probably that the article so far fails to establish an explicit connection between the local council movement in Syria and to the history and theory of council movements in general. In other words, the link between local councils in Syria and anarchism is now well recognized and indeed, Omar Aziz' personality and his papers are a convenient – and legitimate - anchor for that connection. But the understanding that the Syrian council movement is part of a broader council history and that it has its contributions to make to council theory is yet unrecognized. This discussion will be picked up in the context of RQ3. Be that as it may, what can we draw from Wikipedia in terms of our interest in archiving practices? The page was authored and edited over the course of five months and little controversy over the content occurred ("Talk:Anarchism in Syria" n.d. a and b). The revision history of the page reveals a pattern similar to the two above-mentioned sites of archiving: as can be concluded from the general statistics and statistics on authorship ("Talk:Anarchism in Syria" n.d. a), the article was authored by one person and the four other editors account for only very minor edits.

I want to point out that my analysis might well miss offline dynamics that remain invisible when looking at the responsible authors and contributors to these three different archival sites. Perhaps there

were group discussions among friends before the Wikipedia entry was posted by only one person, maybe a lengthier conversation via email that raised people's attention to this or that article such as "Hey friend, look I found another article on the councils in Syria, maybe you want to post this into the Library!". This is certainly a blind spot in my approach, but what matters at this point, nevertheless, is the following conclusion so far in terms of the link between actors and archival practices. Archiving is not an automatic outcome, but rather a process that relies on the efforts of memory activists, whether they work individually or within group settings, offline or online. These dedicated individuals take on the role of observing, interpreting, editing, and authoring material, often investing years of their time and energy into the process. The fact that archiving appears to have happened over years in The Anarchist Library and in the Anarchy in Action Wiki suggests that this is not the outcome of random decisions of activists, but the result of long-term engagement. Hence, the actors involved here are to be considered memory activists as opposed to less dedicated memory brokers, especially also because they were attached to the topic over a longer period. However, I think that authoring *own content* as opposed to administering existing content hints at a differentiation within that role that could perhaps be grasped in terms of creators/authors versus curators. As shown in the theory chapter, Merrill et al. (2020) take curating as the overall category for archiving practices (their triad is: curating, circulating, claiming). Perhaps, my analysis can show that archiving is more than only curating, in the sense of being "in charge of selecting and caring for objects to (…) form a part of a collection (…)" ("Curate" 2021). It also involves authoring new content. Although The Anarchist Library keeps growing and although editing and even deleting is theoretically possible in Wikipedia, these sites can be considered rather stable archives. In contrast, blogs appear to have functioned as a kind of **involuntary, temporary archives**. They selected and/or edited content which they deemed important, and did so in a less structured manner, since their initial aims were more aligned with practices of circulation rather than archiving. They served as actors for posting content in order to make it visible, to share it. But, backhandedly, the blogs also functioned as archives. I want to highlight two examples here with different characteristics. The first is the blog collective 'autonomies.org', in which one author (Gavroche 2021) posted an article titled "Syria: Remembering a revolution". The displayed collection of four articles is again curated, but beyond that it actually amounts to the construction of a *canon* one decade after the beginning of the uprising. This canon comprises: Aziz' famous quote about the Paris Commune and his papers in English translation, parts of Budour Hassan's and Leila Al-Shami's widely shared texts from 2013, 2016 and 2021, and the interpretation and commentary by the Bordered by Silence collective to their translation of Aziz' text which includes also quotes from the French translation collective. The selection of those texts under the title "Remembering a revolution" comes as a conclusion of acceptable narratives about how to interpret and appropriate the legacy of the Syrian local councils.

This is quite different from the second example of involuntary, temporary archiving by the blog collective Tahrir-ICN where Leila Al-Shami was also involved. I will focus on this blog now in an excursus that goes beyond the discussion of archiving, because Tahrir-ICN's memory work was a comprehensive one that was not limited to archiving. It is an illustrative example of how mnemonic practices in digital media can feed off and tie into each other also across platforms. This will be discussed in the context of RQ4, but what is noteworthy for our discussion of archiving is that Tahrir-ICN was never intended to act as an archival site in the first place. Its intentions were described by Al-Shami (personal communication, April 2017) as follows:

> Tahrir-ICN wanted to address the issue of lack of knowledge on anti-authoritarian struggles in the region and outside of it (…). So a group of activists including myself got together to build this network to link anti-authoritarian activists in the Middle East and North Africa (…). It had

> two components to it: an information sharing platform through establishing the blog and social media accounts and the second idea was to build an additional network which we called 'work on practical actions and solidarity work'.

Obviously, the intention of the collective was in the first instance to connect people and to share information. That information sharing was central and the digital media platforms including the blog proved useful to that end:

> There were different collectives from across the region that were able to share what was going on in their countries. This was a time where there were lots of different uprisings across the region, also in Greece, Spain, the Occupy movement (…) It didn't have one kind of vision, it was trying to learn from a wide variety of experiences and struggles that were loosely related to anti-authoritarianism and this was very successful - it had a wide readership. It was useful for people in the West to find out what was happening in the Middle East and vice versa. (…) at the time it was updated it provided a very useful source of information to show the wide variety of struggles that were occurring." (Final Straw 2020, 1:05:50-1:09:36, transcription A.W.).

This lengthier quote is informative, because it reveals that networking and circulating information – and among this is the memory of Aziz and the councils – was the primary intention of the involved actors and not that the blog would serve as an archival site from a few years later onwards. In fact, whereas The Anarchist Library started its proper archiving of the topic only in 2015, the blog Tahrir-ICN served as a kind of provisional de facto archive. It did so by collecting and keeping articles about the topic. Out of thirty-nine overall archival texts on Aziz and the councils, seven texts were contributions posted originally on Tahrir-ICN and further five entries are replications of different texts from Tahrir-ICN that traveled to blogs around the globe, and were translated into French, Greek, Italian, Catalan and Italian. Here, Tahrir-ICN took on a mixed function of circulatory hub plus archival homebase. It was a circulatory hub, because it generated new content and/or linked and referred to others' contributions, thus made narratives visible and consequently 'spread the word'. And it was an archival homebase because up until the first appearance of texts in the proper archive of The Anarchist Library only in November 2015, Tahrir-ICN was the only site which accumulated texts and held them accessible even well beyond 2015 until today. Even though the blog has been inactive since roughly 2016, it continues to function as an archive, whereas its initial intention to circulate material is obsolete.

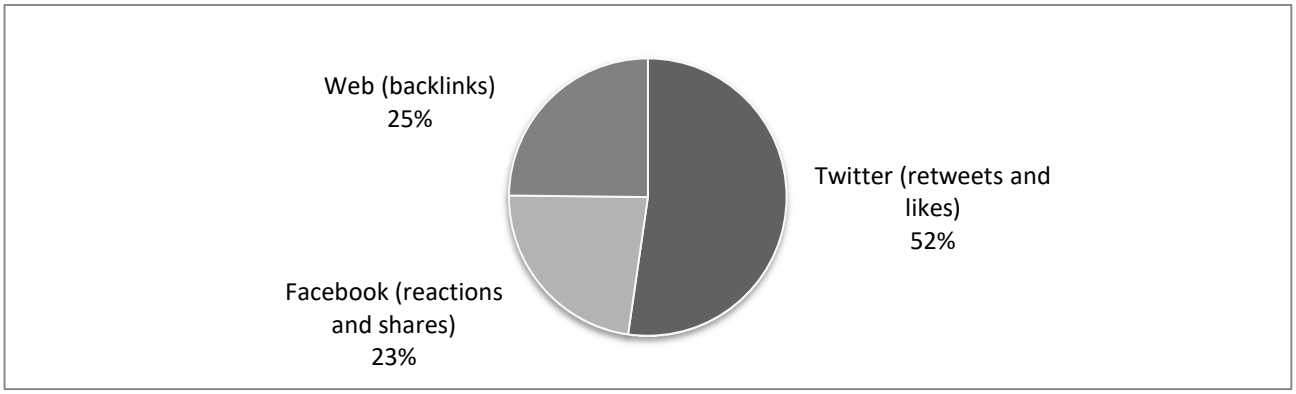
6.3.2 Circulating

I will begin the discussion of circulating by engaging with the example of Tahrir-ICN, before proceeding more systematically with the analysis of Facebook and Twitter.
Circulating, more so than archiving, has a fundamental precondition: pre-established networks, and more precisely, both online and offline networks. Circulation relies either on established and evolving networks or on specific efforts to seek information beyond one's existing network and subsequently share it. Moreover, effective circulating of memory beyond language borders is aided by actors' language skills in order to grasp important mnemonic content as has been shown with the example of Tahrir-ICN. The fact that some of their members were also fluid speakers in Arabic was a huge asset which allowed them to make content accessible for English-speaking audiences. The members of Tahrir-ICN made an effort to replicate not only texts written in English, but also in Arabic (such as by Km Almaz, June 2014). To my knowledge, no other leftist platform did this at that time or later. Moreover, Tahrir-ICN appeared to be

so well-networked that Leila Al-Shami's very informative obituary on Omar Aziz was quickly translated into Greek, Italian, Catalan and French early in 2013 and could thus circulate more easily in other languages. Clearly then, circulating memory is not a guaranteed success without considerable offline effort. Whereas the archiving of the mnemonic content required interpretative skills, some technical skills, time to invest into researching things, and occasionally writing skills, the effective circulation of that mnemonic content apparently involved networking and feeding those networks with renewed information on the topic. This shall be illuminated now in more detail when looking at how circulation took place and shape in the three different spheres.

We can get an approximate overview of circulating practices by looking at the quantities of reactions to mnemonic content. I say approximate because what we have are numbers of likes, retweets, reactions, shares and backlinks. They tell us nothing about how many people actually read a text that was, for instance, linked in a tweet. Thus, discussing those numbers gives an impression, but it cannot claim exactitude – all the more so given my doubts about the validity of the Facebook search algorithms raised in the method chapter and the incompleteness of the backlinks. Having said that, we can take the sums of retweets and likes of all collected tweets and compare them to the sum of the reactions and shares of Facebook posts as well as to the amount of all retrieved backlinks. This results in the following proportions:

Figure 35: Shares of the three different platforms/spheres in circulating mnemonic content



Note: Circulating acts on Twitter (8548): retweets, replies, likes; on Facebook (3748): reactions, shares; in web sphere: backlinks (4058). Total of circulating acts n=16354 corresponds to the total of 'secondary mnemonic acts' (see above).

We can understand the sum of all retweets, likes, reactions, shares and backlinks in the following way: there were more than 16,354 instances in which mnemonic content was circulated. Apparently, Twitter was a medium that afforded circulation most easily, whereas Facebook and the Web seem to be secondary in quantitative terms. The subsequent analysis will, however, challenge this impression based on numbers especially by showing the interrelation of the spheres.

6.3.2.1 Web

In order to understand how the circulation of mnemonic content took place on the web, we will first pick up the backlink analysis, not from the perspective of actors, but from that of circulation. The question that I want to foreground is: *what* was circulated?

We can first look at the amount of backlinks that a text received in combination with language. We find that English dominates by far the mnemonic field: almost all of the nineteen most circulated texts (backlinked fifty times and more) are in English (see table 6 on the next page). By contrast, texts in German were least likely to be widely circulated: the 'top' circulated text in German – which is a

translation of an English text by Al-Shami – gained twenty-eight backlinks (1_schwarzerpfeil_15.10.2020). It is furthermore noteworthy that seven links that I analyzed for texts in Arabic received zero links.[23]

Table 6: Backlink analysis with regards to language

Amount of backlinks	Amount of texts	Languages
100 plus	12	10 English, 1 French, 1 Arabic
50 plus	7	7 English
10 plus	17	13 English, 3 French, 1 German
1 plus	9	6 English, 1 French, 1 Arabic, 2 German
0	25	12 English, 4 French, 7 Arabic, 2 German
Total	70	

Note: One invalid result occurred and is included among the 25 texts with '0 backlinks'.

With respect to the question of language, it is noteworthy that all translations of Aziz' papers are circulated to a considerable extent: Mobayed's translation (1_Mobayed_14.09.2013) was linked on thirty-nine sites; the second, revised, English translation by BbS (1_BbS_11.05.2017) on eighty-two and the French one (1_éditions antisociales_01.11.2013) on forty-eight sites – this is to say at least, because if they were replicated (e.g. in The Anarchist Library, which is the case) and then linked again, this would add links on top. The one top-linked Arabic text with 181 backlinks is Aziz' original text (1_Al-Kayial_17.02.2013). The role of translations and of the original text are, in fact, central. I suggest that the original papers were translated and their translations considerably circulated because they have an important function in the mnemonic field. They serve as retrievable evidence that the local council movement was, at least partly, inspired and shaped by anarchism which is represented through the anarchist personality of Omar Aziz. If it had not been for these translations, everything would have to rely on the account of individual memory activists. To digress for a moment, this situation is reminiscent of the accounts provided by prominent anarchist figures during the Munich Council Republic of 1919. Despite its short-lived duration of only a few days, the events surrounding it share similarities with the discussion at hand. It lasted only for a few days, but the accounts of Gustav Landauer, Erich Mühsam and other involved anarchists 'from these days have served as sufficient proof of anarchists' engagement and of the anarchist character of the Munich council republic (e.g. Dorst & Neubauer 1966).

Returning to the analysis of backlinks, I want to investigate especially the success of circulation and renewal of circulation over the years. I will therefore focus my attention on the most circulated texts in combination with temporality. First, we can hardly explain success in circulation with the genre of a text given that the top six are quite heterogeneous: two obituaries, an interview, two informative articles, and Aziz' papers. What does stand out, though, if we look at the top sixteen, is the salience of Aziz' name in the title in six instances. This highlights the significance of Omar Aziz, his arrest, and subsequent death as a focal point. By emphasizing Aziz's role, the local councils become less abstract as their understanding becomes anchored in Aziz's personality and his anarchist perspective. Slightly similar to the perspective of genre is the one of platforms, but the picture is clearer here. Among the texts that received backlinks are thirty blogs and twelve news portals (see Appendix 12). This again demonstrates the importance of blogs for the circulation of mnemonic content.

[23] 1_Al-Haj Saleh_23.02.2013, 1_Al-Esh_18.09.2017, 21.09.2017, 1_Km Almaz_03.06.2014.

Overall, there is a notable coincidence between a high level of circulation and the early origin of publication. Half of the 100+ linked texts were written in 2013. Hassan's (1_20.02.2013) most successful text, "Omar Aziz – Rest in power" was published only a few days after Aziz' death. This is also the case for Al-Shami's (1_22.08.2013) most successful text, likewise published in 2013, but much later (in August), and for Naisse's (1_01.07.2013) article that appeared in the Trotzkyist International Viewpoint online news platform. Anarchist journalist Stephens and US-based Syrian Attassi (1_06.09.2013) picked up the topic in September 2013 in their interview and the French translators' collective presented their translation of Aziz' original papers (1_éditions antisociales_01.11.2013). These early texts and the narratives they proposed were apparently highly appreciated and they must have hit a nerve so that they accomplished this accumulation of backlinks until today (note that we cannot say with certainty when exactly that linking occurred – directly after publishing in 2013 or over the years). With the exception of Stephens, who appears to be well connected within networks, neither Hassan nor Al-Shami seemed to have a substantial following of thousands on their blogs or social media accounts. None of their articles was a guaranteed success. This will have to be reconsidered when taking Twitter and Facebook into the picture of circulation.

Lastly, it is interesting to see that it was possible to renew circulation of the topic to a high degree almost every year after 2013. In 2015, Hassan rewrote her obituary about Aziz for a news portal which has 138 backlinks (1_Hassan_23.02.2015). For the subsequent years, further memory workers enter the stage as authors of most circulated texts: in 2016 a lengthy, informative article with 239 backlinks (1_Boothroyd_14.08.2016); in 2017 two with 115 and 140 backlinks respectively (1_Munif_01.09.2017; 1_Al-Shami_01.12.2017); three in 2018 with ninety-seven, seventy-six, fifty-nine backlinks respectively (Fischer & Majasent_05.04.2018; 1_Sethness_27.09.2018; 1_anarchist initiative from Korydallos prison_12.07.2018), and lastly a heavy weight in 2019 with 104 backlinks - notably a French article (1_Amilcar_19.09.2019).

6.3.2.2 Facebook

Two overall patterns can be discerned in the beginning when looking at Facebook: On the one hand, and this is not surprising, some of the most prominent actors that had already appeared in the overall corpus, used Facebook themselves or were referred to in Facebook by others. On the other hand, interestingly, Facebook is the space in which other actors become also visible: We find the usual suspects, the dedicated memory activists, the skilled authors, such as Al-Shami, Yassin-Kassab, Al-Kayial, and Tahrir-ICN. But we also find groups and individuals who did not author themselves articles, but who instead posted and shared content. For the latter the label of brokers works well.

It is insightful to look at some details of what actors precisely did to see how this might differentiate these roles. It is especially helpful to look at the different characteristics of posts. There are posts consisting merely of outbound links to content outside of Facebook; and mere text posts; and a combination of both; furthermore, reposts of other people's posts within Facebook (the 'shares'). Whereas the text-only posts are very rare (only 11 out of the roughly 90 posts in total), the combination of text plus outbound link accounts for the vast majority, and posts that are mere outbound links are also quite common (25 out of the 90 on total). This means that, more often than not, the actors posted a short text hinting at external content, such as an article that had appeared on Tahrir-ICN, adding the outbound link which automatically displays a of the external content. Hence, we can conclude that Facebook largely functioned as a hub to circulate content from blogs, online newspapers, forums etc. Adding the language of the posts to the considerations, we interestingly find that the text-only posts are exclusively posted by

Arabic speakers. The text within the English posts is mostly very functionally reduced to hinting at the linked article as in one post by a very active memory worker:

> It is always worth a re-post of Al-Shami's work on this inspirational figure" attaching the link to Al-Shami's obituary on Tahrir-ICN written in 2013 (2_APJ_5.6.2018). In contrast to that, an Arabic speaking memory worker often posted text-only posts that are even several paragraphs long. Contrary to my expectation, these text-only posts received lots of reactions, sometimes up to 383 (2_MAE_11.02.2021).

Beyond the likes and shares, comments are interesting to look at and again there are two different patterns associated with Arabic posts on the one hand and English posts on the other: The absence or very low occurrence of comments in the English language posts is striking. In contrast to that, posts made by Syrians in Arabic usually attracted comments, in some cases up to 214 (2_MAE_11.02.2021) and rarely did these posts attract no comment at all, whereas zero comments is mostly the case with English language posts. Why is that so? The articulation of remembrance in English and Arabic works differently. What happens in Arabic, is a kind of collective mourning whereas in English reactions are information-focused. It's "May God rest his soul" flanked with lots of Emojis on the Arabic side (2_MAE_11.2.2021) as opposed to the English side that goes "Thank you for sharing, never heard of him!"-"Yeah, me neither until last year! RIP" (2_NB_19.3.2019).

In order to understand more thoroughly the differences of actors in Facebook it is insightful to look at them through a lens of temporal dynamics. Only three individual Facebook users were found who only posted once about the topic. Hence, the impression prevails that such occasional, one-time memory brokers are very rare. All other nine actors posted at least four times about the topic. An individual based in Australia appeared as the most active memory activist with 19 posts over a period of five years since 2016 (2_APJ_02.06.2018-21.03.2021). Although the latter one seems so be a sort of lonesome memory ranger in Facebook, his activity is worth looking at: being based in Australia and staying alert to the topic over a long period may well make a considerable contribution to both introducing the topic on another continent and in keeping remembrance alive by renewing its circulation at a certain rhythm. Since he is neither an author nor a replicator of texts published elsewhere in the web, but rather a broker who circulates others' texts, he is a good example of a *dedicated* version of brokering which is overall rather rare.

As a final aspect of the overview of circulation on Facebook, it is noteworthy that Tahrir-ICN and the group Syrian Anarchists أناركيون سوريون are the only two actors who posted in more than one language and who especially posted a few texts originally written in Arabic. This hints at language bubbles of circulation that have only a small degree of overlap: an obituary that had appeared 2017 in an Arabic online journal and which was reposted on Facebook in 2021 twice by the author himself, received 383 reactions, thirty shares and 214 comments – it was obviously a widely read and circulated text (2_MAE_11.02.2021). In fact, this obituary did not reappear in any of the other actors' posts. Vice versa, the two active Arabic-speaking memory workers (2_MAE; 2_SAK) have not reposted or shared prominent articles and obituaries that were either posted on Facebook or circulated outside Facebook.

Having looked at actors in combination with the characteristics of their posts, I will zoom out again in order to get an impression of the temporality of their circulating practices. Over what periods did mnemonic content circulation take place on Facebook? Almost all of the identified actors who circulated material about Aziz and the councils did so over a longer period of time. Only four individuals or groups posted about the topic as a one-off or only in a period of six months. Then, Tahrir-ICN and Yassin-Kassab's posts are bound to a period of less than one year. The latter seems to have posted only around

the occasion of the publication of *Burning Country*, his book co-authored with Al-Shami, throughout 2016, i.e. quite in the mid-term of that decade of remembrance from 2013-2021 (2_Yassin-Kassab_20.02.2016-23.05.2016). Tahrir-ICN's posts, on the other hand, are confined to the year of 2013, i.e. to the beginning of remembrance (2_Tahrir-ICN_20.02.2013-27.11.2013). This coincides with the period of the most intense activity of Tahrir-ICN's blog. All of the other five actors remained active in renewing circulation of remembrance over at least four years. They posted at least once a year about the topic. If it is true that memory has to travel to stay alive, as Astrid Erll argued (see theory chapter), then these memory activists used Facebook quite adequately, namely in order to renew circulation and attention for the topic periodically. Thus, mnemonic activity in Facebook is a mix of mostly dedicated brokering either condensed in a short period or temporally spread over a longer term.

Lastly, we can look at the posts that received the most attention, measured by reactions, shares or comments which are treated as indicators of circulation. Picking out those posts that attracted at least thirty reactions and shares, we get thirteen posts. Among these thirteen are five outbound link-only posts, two text-plus-outbound link-posts, two reposts of content from within Facebook, one post with text and picture, one with text and PDF and two posts with text only. To sum up: whether a post is widely circulated or not seems to be completely independent of the above-mentioned characteristics. Any post seems to have the chance to be successfully circulated and whether that circulation happens or not apparently depends on other factors. Similarly, the link destinations of the posts with outbound links are diverse: three links lead to articles by Al-Shami, two to Yassin-Kassab's articles, two to Aziz' original text and its English translation, and the remaining ones to other, different sites.

6.3.2.3 Twitter

If Facebook mainly functioned as a hub where dedicated memory activists posted and reposted links to articles and obituaries on blogs over a long period of time, then Twitter, by contrast, functioned as a platform for *immediate* commemoration after Aziz' death and for the *renewal* of circulation of obituaries, articles and Aziz' original papers by a very *heterogeneous multitude* of actors. Sorting the totality of tweets by author shows the accumulation of authorship of tweets over the years. The result is striking: only three users tweeted four times or more on the topic, among them @tahrirICN and @LeilaShami. Ten other users tweeted two to three times on the topic. This means that all other tweets are one-time tweets by a multitude of more than seventy users on the topic. The rule of circulation on Twitter is thus: everything counts in large amounts. This partly confirms the pattern that Zamponi (2020) found in his study on commemoration in Twitter: we similarly see mnemonic project activists who are somewhat attached to the topic (accumulation of tweets) and little in numbers as opposed to memory brokers who are characterized by occasional participation (only one tweet) and more numerous than the former. Perhaps this is a general rule of thumb for how remembrance works on Twitter: few dedicated activists, many brokers. Interestingly, though, actors who appear only as brokers on Twitter have appeared in other contexts as quite engaged activists. Take for instance @danfisherfour who posted only once on the topic, tweeting a link to an article by Al-Shami in 2021, but who authored a Wiki-article which demanded dedication to the topic as explained above. And this also holds for the other way round: one of the three most active actors was neither visible on Facebook nor on the web. This applies too for half of those ten users that tweeted two to three times on the issue. Moreover, if users posted more than one tweet, this was limited to a short period of time: @TahrirICN tweeted only within one year (Feb. 2013-Feb. 2014) and most of the two-time authors authored all of their tweets within few days (3_@serg***_08.10.2017; 3_@Wu_Ming_Foundt_24.09.2016) or one year (e.g. 3_@Yani***_10.09.2015-27.07.2016).

The vast majority of tweets contain a link to content outside of Twitter, only eighteen tweets as opposed to ninety tweets contain no link. Looking at the content of the link destinations, we again meet the already notorious authors and the familiar texts. Thus, Twitter is overall a brokerage place where mnemonic content is circulated that is rooted in other spheres, especially the blogosphere. Moreover, it is striking that the pool of texts and authors is much smaller than what was identifiable from the web search and the backlink analysis: there are only six authors whose texts are circulated (see appendix 8, column "genre and referred author of linked content"): Al-Shami (mostly her obituary both in English and translated, e.g. period of 27.02.2013-28.02.2013 and 17.02.2016-14.05.2016), Budour Hassan (e.g. 9 times on 20.02.2013; and 23.02.2015-24.02.2015), Javier Sethness (also his obituary/biography, e.g. 27.09.-28.09.201), and the English translations of the original discussion papers by Mobayed and the BBS collective respectively (e.g. 12.05.2017-20.05.2017). Thus, Twitter has a sort of filtering effect to the result that only three authors (and two translators) are foregrounded. This is paradoxical in a way, because n on the one hand, Twitter is a space where a heterogeneous multitude of memory workers is active, while on the other hand, it shrinks down the range of circulated mnemonic content to three obituaries or biographies and the original text. This again highlights the role of blogs - which account for the vast majority of link destinations.

Whereas it is true that the circulation of remembrance on Twitter is accomplished by a multitude of brokers, rather than by mnemonic activists, not everyone is equal within that brokers' multitude, both quantitatively and qualitatively. There is one user with 5.7 million followers, three users with more than 100,000 followers and twenty users with more than 10,000 followers, and forty-four users have between 1,000 and 10,000 followers. All other thirty-one users have less than 1,000 followers. It would probably be misleading, however, to take only the number of followers as indicative of effective circulation. Retweets are somewhat safer as indicators of circulation because the fact that something has been retweeted implies that someone not only took note of the tweet (which is of course also part of circulation), but actually deemed the content worthy of sharing. Interestingly, if we look at both followers and retweets we find that a high number of followers does not in any way guarantee circulation measured by retweets. This is reminismcent of boyd's (2010) warning that "(s)calability in networked publics is about the possibility of tremendous visibility, not the guarantee of it." (emphasis in original) The table below relates the seven top tweets (sixty or more retweets) with the amount of followers of the respective user.

Table 7: Tweets with minimum sixty retweets, their respective user and the latter's followership

User	followers	retweets
@YourAnonCentral	5,700 000	422
@Joeyayoub	33,100	160
@Serg***	1031	74
@Joeyayoub	33,100	67
@davidgraeber	121,300	63
@anarchopac	48,000	61
@libcomorg	59,000	60

Note: Tweets with at least sixty retweets in descending order. *** indicates anonymization as explained in Chapter Five.

Users with rather few followers could also accomplish a relatively high circulation of content. And vice versa: the YourAnonCentral account (which is associated with the hacker group Anonymous) reached 422 retweets of their linking to Al-Shami's article (3_@YourAnonCentral_12.06.2020) and to The

Anarchist Library in 2020, but they reached only ten retweets for the exact same tweet three years earlier in 2017 (3_@YourAnonCentral_06.02.2017). Similarly, users with a high number of followers, such as @Wu_Ming_Foundt (84,000 followers) or @IGD_News (96,100 followers) as well as @libcomorg (59,000 followers) posted tweets that attracted only three, thirty-three and ten retweets respectively (3_@Wu_Ming_Foundt_25.09.2016; 3_@IGD_News_20.05.2017; 3_@libcomorg_14.05.2016). Alongside this quantitative disparity, there is also an important I qualitative inequality: While it is probably advantageous to have influential figures like @YourAnonCentral disseminate information about the councils and Omar Aziz to a wider audience (as their followers include individuals beyond radical leftists), I believe that renowned anarchist personality and professor David Graeber, as well as platforms like libcom.org, hold greater value in promoting the remembrance of anarchism in Syria. This is due to their more concentrated followership, which is specifically interested in anarchism and libertarian communism. The seven tweets with more than sixty retweets all date from 2016 and later. In fact, the year of 2013 is the one with the most tweets per year whereas there are only a handful of tweets in 2014 and 2015! Only four tweets within the first two years (2013 until the end of 2015) garnered more than ten retweets and this applies notably also to all the tweets by @tahrirICN. Whereas the temporality of remembrance is similar in all searched realms – web search, Facebook, Twitter –a sort of *immediate commemoration* or *mourning* was quite striking on Twitter. I opted to take this into account, even though my primary research question focuses on political remembrance. Notably, out of the 42 tweets analyzed from 2013, a significant proportion of 26 tweets were posted in February, coinciding with the month of Aziz' death, which was announced on February 17. Nine of these twenty-six tweets are in Arabic, a significant figure relative to the low overall occurrence of Arabic tweets (fourteen out of ca. 110). One example is Aziz' colleague from Saudi-Arabia who was among the first people to tweet (@Za***_17.02.2013). Those very first nine tweets in Arabic stand out, because only two of them have outbound links. The continuous reference to obituaries, especially in blogs, starts shortly after on 20.02.2013, but from that point onwards this is absolutely the dominant form. Hassan's obituary from that date marks the turning point here from immediate commemoration within Twitter (in Arabic) to remembrance on blogs (predominantly in English), including a language shift. Twitter appears as a suitable platform for that type of immediate commemoration, as does Facebook.

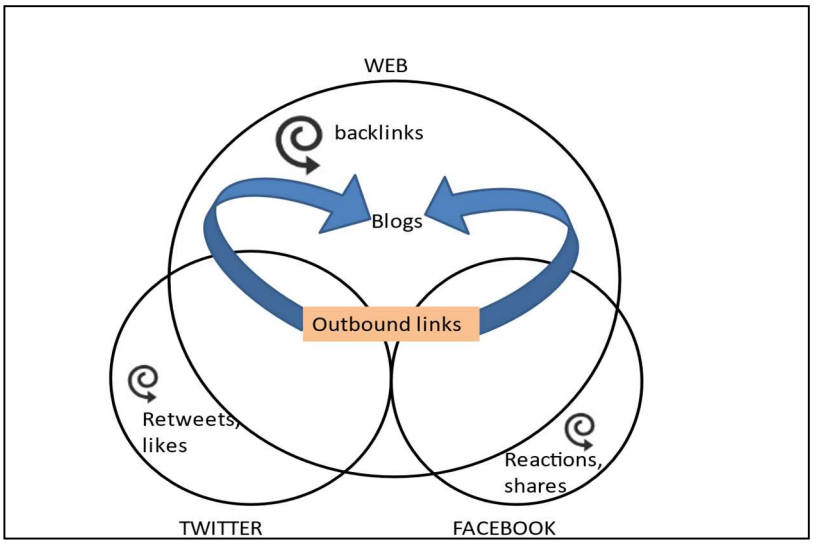
There is also a recurring pattern of commemoration over time, with tweets consistently appearing in February each year. However, it should be noted that this pattern is relatively weak. Rather, circulation of remembrance is renewed throughout the whole year regardless of the anniversary of Aziz' death. The very low number of retweets especially in the first three years suggests that Twitter was not a jump-starter for remembrance practices. Rather, circulation was sluggish up until the year of 2019. Only then were users with a large following able to attract a considerable number of retweets.

Overall, it seems that Twitter is not an independent platform for remembrance but rather functions predominantly as a conduit for (re)circulating content from external sources. Consequently, Twitter primarily serves as a means to amplify and disseminate remembrance that originates elsewhere, except for the aspect of immediate commemoration, which largely pertains to personal experiences. Second, I suggest that the circulation of memory is best imagined, with respect to the actors involved, in a rhizomatic way - to borrow that notorious metaphor from Deleuze and Guattari (1977). The timing, content and individuals involved in the circulation practices on Twitter exhibit only partial predictability (e.g. the weak February anniversaries, the entrance of previously unknown actors).

At the beginning of this subchapter, I pointed out that the analysis would provide a qualification of the quantitative overview of circulation, which initially indicated a predominance of Twitter. In fact, several aspects have revealed that the web is the eminent sphere of remembrance. This foremost basis for this conclusion is the fact that the overwhelming majority of tweets and Facebook posts contained

links to content outside these two platforms and moreover that these links precisely led to articles, obituaries and translations of Aziz' papers that had been posted especially on blogs and news portals. Second, as I argued above, the number of backlinks is probably higher, because it is possible that texts were replicated and then backlinked again. And third, reading a written article, interpreting it and linking it on one's own website obviously demands considerably more time and effort than clicking on a retweet or like-button. Even if someone reads the article that is linked in a tweet or Facebook post before retweeting it, the act of establishing backlinks manifests, I would say, a higher degree of commitment to mnemonic content. Hence, the following figure probably comes much closer to reality than just the proportion of numbers. Apart from the different kinds of circulation that take place within each sphere (the spiral arrow), the cross-platform circulation from Facebook and Twitter towards the web takes the form of outbound links that lead to content on blogs (and news portals). The lack of overlap between Twitter and Facebook in terms of linking suggests that these platforms served less as self-reliant platforms and more as vehicles for showcasing content from the wider web. There was minimal linking observed from Facebook to Twitter and vice versa, indicating a limited interconnection between the two platforms.

Figure 36: Circulation of mnemonic content across spheres



6.4 RQ 3 Claiming

As I argued in the theory chapter, *claiming* is a rather complex process made up of explaining, arguing, providing information, offering interpretations and constructing narratives. That package needs to be disaggregated by an approach which looks much more closely at the mnemonic content itself so that the 'what' of remembrance comes into focus alongside the 'how'. As laid out in the methodological chapter, I draw on the four principles of anarchism in order to reconstruct how, in the five most-circulated texts, memory workers have, on the level of *content*, remembered and appropriated the local councils from a decidedly leftist perspective. It should be recalled that every act that contributes to the construction of memory is already an implicit act of claiming, even if these practices predominantly consist of circulating or archiving. As soon as an actor archives a text or authors an entry to Wikipedia or tweets a link to a relevant text he/she, at the same time, makes a kind of claim. Against this background, the analysis of claiming focuses on the shape that claiming takes in the more *argumentative* shapes or the narratives of the most circulated texts. What do the memory workers see as the decisive, meaningful aspects of the councils? What do they present as important and hence as worthy of remembrance?

The selected texts cover a time period of 8 years (from 2013 to 2021). The content analysis can hardly make out a temporal dynamic with regards to content, such as a change in narratives or argumentative strategies. Rather, the tone of the texts is always quite descriptive with regards to the local councils,

an emphatic tone in most texts notwithstanding. The latest text by Al-Shami (2021) perhaps stands out by being able to deliver a claiming narrative from an anarchist perspective in a condensed way. The following quote is illustrative of how Al-Shami concentrates all four fields in which memory workers have carved out the councils' achievements from an anarchist perspective: "Through decentralised **self-organisation**, without the need for **leaders or bosses**, but through voluntary association, cooperation and the sharing of resources, people can transform social relations and effect radical social change. They show us that emancipatory futures can be built in the **here and now**, even **in the shadow of the state**." (Al-Shami 2021, emphases A.W.)

All texts similarly and rather unanimously attend to the four dimensions in which the councils could be appraised on anarchist grounds, however in a more dispersed and less condensed way. However, the two dimensions that appear dominant in claiming are agency/self-organization and anti-authoritarianism/critique of the state. Both categories comprise twice as much text passages as the other two:

- Agency/self-organization (23)
- Anti-authoritarianism/critique of state (23)
- Prefiguration/correlation of means and ends (10)
- Association/cooperation (12)

The councils' achievements regarding **self-organization and agency** are approached in three aspects. First, through the description of the open, horizontal character of the councils: they are emphatically highlighted as "non-hierarchical" (Hassan 2013, BbS 2017), as "grassroots" (Hassan 2013), as "horizontally organized" (Al-Shami 2021) and in their "charactère auto-emancipateur et populaire" (Amilcar 2019). This implicitly and explicitly sets them diametrically against "the state and its bureaucracy" (Hassan 2013), against the logic of authority (BbS 2017), against "state agencies" (Boothroyd 2016), against "leaders" and "coercive authority" (Al-Shami 2021). The emphasis in all texts is on how the people *themselves* acted on their own behalf: for "managing their own lives independently of institutions and state agencies" (Boothroyd 2016), "in accordance with [the community's] own needs" and "independently from centralized state control" (Al-Shami 2021). Such polarizing phrases serve to make a clear point. There is no doubt at all that the local councils were an expression of a bottom-up initiative by the people for the people and that they fulfill anarchist criteria of self-organization. The anarchist impetus of the local councils is secondly conveyed by focusing on the actors' aspirations: people are described as 'passionate' for self-organization (Amilcar 2019), to have a "élan collectif pour la démocracie directe" (Amilcar 2019), a "shared commitment to (…) not being ruled" (BbS 2017) and "a desire" and "commitment to decentralized, self-managed forms of organization" (Al-Shami). Thirdly, agency is explored through highlighting people's *capacity* – "une capacité inattendue" (Amilcar 2019) – *creativity* and *skill*, which actually reflects closely Aziz' own "tremendous faith in the human potential that is unlocked when time and energy are freed from authoritarian structures. This is exemplified by the immense creativity and joy of the revolution's early days" (BbS 2017, also Al-Shami 2021). BbS rightly explain how the local councils are linked to that revolutionary energy and thus highlight the social, affective dimension that undergirds the technical dimension of practical tasks: "In providing services and organizing people around them in non-hierarchical ways, the local councils hope to unlock this immense energy (…) and to rebuild new models of community". The keywords used by the authors - energy, human potential, creativity and joy stick close to Aziz' own wording of how the councils functioned and what they accomplish. That Aziz' perspective on the councils could actually have been read as an innovative contribution to *council theory* is, however, hardly apprehended by the memory workers.

The potential to establish connections between the Syrian councils and council theory on a broader scale remains largely untapped. It presents an opportunity to emphasize that the experiences of the Syrian councils can contribute valuable insights to council theory. For example, it highlights the significance of

psychic and affective processes within individuals and among individuals as pivotal factors for the success of self-organization. This underlines the importance of learning from the Syrian council experience to enrich theoretical debates surrounding revolutionary transformation. Agency is sometimes strongly linked to the **anti-state aspect** of the councils. Almost all authors stress the idea that it is *through* self-organization that the councils are supposed to gain and maintain "full autonomy from the state" (Al-Shami 2021), that the councils will allow people to govern "indépendamment de l'État" (Amilcar 2019), to "manage their affairs independently from the state and its bureaucracy" (Hassan 2013) and "to build a life for themselves and the people around them outside the control of the state on a non-hierarchical basis" (BbS 2017). The texts are filled with variations of the notion that the local councils are to be understood as antagonistic towards the state based on "developing new relationships independently of the state" (Al-Shami 2021) and practically through taking over governance tasks: "administrer, indépendamment de l'État, quartier et villes libérées" (Amilcar 2019). The foregrounding of their anti-state character includes the insistence that the Syrian uprising in general and the councils in particular proved "la possibilité (...) d'un soulèvement populaire sans parti dominant" (Amilcar 2019), that it rejected factions, parties or vanguard parties (Al-Shami 2021). Mostly, though, the anti-state character is explored from Aziz' perspective in which "local councils would become an alternative to the state" (Hassan 2013). Based on people's agency and self-organization "the role of the Local Councils would be to support and deepen this process of independence from state institutions" (BbS 2017). A keyword that most clearly signifies the idea of a suspension of the state and its institutions is perhaps the term "social revolution". Almost all authors explicitly stress that this revolutionary model of councils aims not only at "political activism" (Hassan), but that they open the "path towards social revolution" or aim at "a social as well as a political revolution" (Boothroyd 2016). However, it remains unclear what the abolishment of the state actually consists of. The councils are interpreted as a structural manifestation and as an institutional embodiment of agency: "that the councils should work to provide people with a space for collective expression, where each individual can be politically involved in decision-making" (Hassan 2013); "The Local Council would serve to deepen and expand these practices of self-organization as well as share more broadly the organizing skills and experience of coordinating committees" (BbS 2017). But the authors hardly discuss matters of what an alternative 'governance' in the form of councils looks like such as: who decides and who executes decisions? Is representative democracy replaced and how?

Thirdly, authors deal with the **prefigurative character** of the local councils. That the local councils were not only tools to bring down the Syrian regime and to *temporarily* fill a void until new state institutions would come, is argued in all texts: "Local councils were set up in liberated [areas] to organise civilian rule, provide aid and (…) attempt to construct a new democratic society." (Boothroyd 2016). They themselves "would become an alternative to the state" (Hassan 2013). The BbS group foregrounds how the potential erosion of the state through self-organization in councils already bears a prefigurative construction of an alternative social order. The councils, as they emphasize, represent a "dual approach (…): destroying the state while producing new forms of life", "new social forms, which would in turn further erode the state" (BbS 2017). Al-Shami (2021) articulated that aspect of the local councils poignantly in the title of her text: "Building alternative futures in the present". Like the BbS authors she stresses the destructive/constructive dialectics of the councils wherever people "not only resisted the regime but built a viable, beautiful alternative to it". Moreover, her explicit use of leftist vocabulary makes a strong point for claiming the councils from an anarchist perspective that aims at an alternative to a statist democracy. The councils represent, as she sums up, "a refusal to collaboration with [the state] through building alternatives in the present that prefigured an emancipatory future" (Al-Shami 2021).

The last semantic field in which memory workers claim the local councils from a leftist perspective revolves around **association and cooperation**. Collaboration, solidarity and mutual aid are visible

keywords used by all authors to describe the way in which local councils brought people together on the basis of practical tasks. As is the case with agency, the councils are understood in a way commensurate with Aziz' own terms as social spaces "for collective expression that supports the collaboration of individuals" (Boothroyd 2016). Collaboration not only alludes to cooperation within councils between individuals, but also to the networking of several local councils among each other (Hassan 2013). Hence, there are two aspects in the treatment of cooperation: between members of a local community, within a council where "people worked together for their mutual benefit", and on a larger social level that aims at "building egalitarian social structures and recreating social bonds of solidarity, cooperation and mutual respect" (Al-Shami 2021). These two levels notwithstanding, the discussion of cooperation and association within the texts remains limited to a realm of 'ethics' while neglecting matters of material structures: The way in which the authors claim that the councils worked along a sort of anarchist ethics of solidarity and mutual aid focuses solely on the way people *behave* towards each other in their social interaction and that local councils obviously created social spaces that, indeed, fostered cooperative interaction in a successful way. The notion that the Syrian local councils would have benefitted from the implementation of (more) cooperative *structures* of material-social reproduction, in addition to a revolutionary *interpersonal ethics* of cooperation, will be discussed in the empirical chapter on councils. This chapter will specifically examine the role of food and security as primary domains where councils could either consolidate cooperation or be eroded.

The authors employ further rhetorical strategies to build bridges for anarchist remembrance: the 'anarchist' personality of Aziz that serves as an anchor (in all texts); explicit claims (in three of the five texts); mnemonic chains (in four of the five texts); and the evocation of the Paris Commune (in four of the five texts). The first one is strongly present in all texts. Since Aziz is consistently **framed as anarchist** (which he both is and is not, as will be discussed in Chapter Eight), his personality already serves as an anchor that ties the Syrian ship to anarchist shores so-to-say. He is described as "public intellectual and anarchist dissident" (Al-Shami 2021 and Hassan 2013), as "anarchiste Syrien" (Amilcar 2019) and his role is described as "influenceur des conseils locaux" (Amilcar 2019) and co-founder (Al-Shami 2021). Hassan briefly refers to his intellectual background by evoking Espinoza, Marx and Foucault which serves to substantiate his trustworthiness as leftist thinker and influencer of the councils. However, interestingly, Hassan (2013) is the only one who draws on this. The ways in which Aziz uses his sources of inspiration for conceptualizing the councils are innovative and thought-provoking (see chapter 8) so that there is a big potential that remains untapped in order to not only claim the Syrian councils for anarchism, but also to enrich the theoretical debate on councils. Nevertheless, the connection between the councils and 'the anarchist Omar Aziz' helps to bestow legitimacy on claiming the Syrian councils via Aziz as part of an anarchist lineage. It is as if Omar Aziz's name symbolizes and supports the validity of that assertion.

I would argue that the effectiveness of this claim would likely have been diminished if Omar Aziz had not left behind his Discussion Papers on the local councils, which serve as substantial evidence that these councils were conceived from an anarchist perspective. Indeed, all authors draw on his text and rely on it when making such claims.

Apart from Aziz' text, it is his famous quote about the **Paris Commune** that is an eminent bridgehead for claiming. Only one author refrains from making use of it (Boothroyd 2016), whereas all others incorporate it into their arguments, using it as a climax at the end of the text (BbS 2017), or even as a frame and as a thread that goes through the whole text (Al-Shami 2021). The quote had been tweeted by American Syrian anarchist/socialist Nader Atassi[24] after Aziz's death. With that quote, Aziz handed a

[24] This tweet has been deleted together with Atassi's Twitter account (Atassi 2013, n. d.), but the tweet had been referenced and linked by numerous authors while it was still functioning.

claiming strategy on a silver platter whose role cannot be overestimated for the remembrance of Syria from an anarchist perspective. The Paris Commune claim functions on the basis of a **mnemonic chain**. Within memory studies Bisht (2020, 188f.) has recently fleshed out this concept in his analysis of how social movements in Bhopal, India, have referred to past events of industrial disasters to construct and preserve their own memory of suffering. These groups establish connections with other actors on a transnational level, aiming to exert political pressure on the governments and corporations responsible. He explains that a "chain of mnemonic connections and identifications" that connects the Bhopal disaster to e.g. Fukushima functions on three different levels: "At the level of cognition, it helps the local membership make a connection between Fukushima and Bhopal (…) caused by state and corporate neglect. On an emotional level, it seeks to generate anger (…). At a moral level, it invokes the memory of Bhopal movement's long struggle for justice and identifies Fukushima as an instance where the aims of the movement and its achievements get recognised at a global level." In that way the mnemonic connections "secure the local memberships' identification with the movement's (…) aims". We can well draw an analogy to how the mnemonic chain works with respect to Syria: the Paris Commune is a similarly strong reference point for anarchism, as is Fukushima within the environmental movement, especially also because the Paris Commune is globally recognized among leftists as a foundational event for the history of anarchist, communist struggles. Thus, the line Paris-Syria mobilizes an interpretative framework which works all the better because Paris was the first instance at which councils came to play out practically in a revolutionary moment. Emotionally and morally, it allows for connecting with revolutionary Syrians not only because they are victims of repression just as the communards were, but more precisely because they, just as the communards, are at the same time heroic rebels defying state tyranny and fighting for emancipatory goals. Thus, the line Paris-Syria also helps to restore Syrians' agency in the face of their victimization. On this basis, indeed, an identification with Syria on anarchist terms becomes possible which goes beyond mere solidarity. This is important, because solidarity is always an external relationship of a stronger actor recognizing, helping or supporting another actor whereas an appropriation of Syria as part of anarchist struggles establishes a more intimate, organic and equal relationship.

In the analyzed texts, the mnemonic chain comes in different shapes. In some instances, it is left empty when the Paris Commune quote stands for itself and is not further discussed. This is the case with Hassan in her obituary, who uses the quote in a way that underlines Aziz' commitment to a leftist tradition, because it is directly adjoined to Aziz' intellectual background (Marx, Espinoza, Foucault), thus foregrounding the cognitive level of how the chain functions. In other cases, the mnemonic chain is filled so that the Paris Commune and Syria are the two outer links in that chain embracing further struggles. In fact, in her later revised obituary Hassan (2015) filled the chain by referring to the Zapatistas' struggle in Chiapas since the 1990s and to the Russian Revolution 1905 and Rosa Luxemburg's account thereof. In the other selected texts the mnemonic chains are prominently used (except for Boothroyd who neglects it). The BbS authors use it as a climax at the end of their text, filling the chain with the Spanish Civil War, a reference point which is a similarly strong given the notorious role of anarchists in Spain in the 1930s: "Think of how much inspiration we still draw from struggles like the Paris Commune or the Spanish Revolution -- the Syrian revolution is no less rich." Similarly, Amilcar (2019) evokes the Spanish Civil War: "S'intéresser à la révolution syrienne et à ses échecs est nécessaire au même titre que pour la Commune, malgré son écrasement (…), ou que la Révolution espagnole (…)" Amilcar's insistence on the suppression of all three events as a common trait perhaps stresses the emotional level of the mnemonic chain, but it also functions on the cognitive level ("s'intéresser … est nécessaire"). The French text is the only one that not only fills the chain with past struggles (Russia, Spain, Chiapas), but draws the line to the yet more recent protests of the Yellow Wests in France: "D'autres vont plus loin encore, et tentent de faire dialoguer le surgissement de 'la révolte des Gilets jaunes' avec la Révolution syrienne." The

wording, however, is less a strong suggestion than a tentative thought. Finally, Leila Al-Shami's uses the empty mnemonic chain, however, she is the only one (also in the overall corpus) who really works with the chain in depth. I suggest calling it an empty, but thick mnemonic chain. The connection Paris-Syria is not only used as a frame: it starts right away with the quote, and it concludes with Paris-Syria: "As with the Paris Commune, there is much to be learnt from Syria's revolutionary experience." Moreover, the Paris Commune runs like a thread through the text. Al-Shami uses it again and again to draw comparisons, not only between the two uprisings as such, but she also contrasts the ways in which both have been remembered – or not. Three central paragraphs contain the phrase "Like the Communards": "Like the Communards, [Aziz] believed in the innate ability of people to govern themselves (…)." And: "Like the female Communards of Paris, the women of Zabadani [place of one of the first local councils, in which Aziz was also involved; A.W.] also created their own forums." And: "Like the Communards of Paris, the people of Zabadani, who dreamt of a free and just society, managed to creatively self-organise their community independently from centralized state control." Since her text was written for a special issue about the 150th anniversary of the Paris Commune by The Funambulist, a leftist magazine that is associated with the well-known Jacobin magazine, the topic of remembrance is explicitly dealt with. Hence, Al-Shami obviously uses the chance to plead for establishing a culture of remembrance of the Syrian uprising from a leftist perspective, and the thick mnemonic chain serves to underline and legitimize that plea. Just as the Commune is used for framing the text, so is the issue of commemoration. The first paragraph in the text reads: "On 18 March 2021 people around the globe will be commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Paris Commune." And it is followed by a second paragraph that establishes a connection to Syria: "On 18 March another anniversary will pass, but surely to much less acclaim worldwide." The frame is closed at the (near) end of the text: "Whilst the experience of the Paris Commune is well known in the West, we must ask why similar experiments happening in our own time in Syria are not (…)." This explicit pleading for active remembrance of Syria can be seen as a claiming strategy of its own. Apart from its connection to the mnemonic chain based on the Paris Commune, it occurs in other texts in the form of deploring that Syria has been forgotten, neglected or misunderstood (Amilcar 2019), or in the form of underlining that Syria and Aziz' text should be used as sources for inspiration and learning (Al-Shami 2021, BbS 2017).

Overall, the authors confidently carve out the accomplishments of the local councils from a decidedly leftist perspective. The arguments that they present and the aspects of the councils that they highlight cover four eminent fields of anarchist thinking which allows for claiming of the uprising from an anarchist perspective. The particular emphasis on agency (and on cooperation in the case of Al-Shami 2021) not only serves to 'prove' the anarchist impetus of people's self-organization, but perhaps also to enable readers to somewhat identify with the actors, their learning experience and their enthusiasm. At the same time, the technical and institutional side of the councils is underexplored, perhaps for two reasons. The first is that the memory workers stick very close to Aziz' own perspective and his wording in his papers – he, too, puts a great emphasis on agency while almost reducing the councils to a social matrix in the full service of enabling more and more individual and collective agency (see Chapter Eight). Another reason, I think, is that authors have been concentrating on a very descriptive and emphatic mode of claiming that had to concentrate on making people recognize the emancipatory impetus of the councils in the first place, before complicating the issue. Focusing on the "remarkable" (Al-Shami) experience of agency (and cooperation) provides the authors with unambiguous and compatible arguments for claiming. Mnemonic chains and the reliance on Aziz' personality have been shown to play an important role for claiming the memory of the Syrian uprising. Omar Aziz' quote, circulated initially on Twitter, in combination with the 100th anniversary of the Paris Commune in 2021 was a lucky coincidence that offered a powerful interpretative entry point for memory workers to draw attention to Syria.

6.5 RQ 4 Affordances and constraints

The discussions of the previous research questions serve as a basis for drawing conclusions about the affordances of digital media and their limitations with regards to the construction of an anarchist memory around the Syrian revolution. I stressed in the theory chapter (Chapter Four) that these affordances are bound to specific platforms. Therefore, this chapter proceeds from platform to platform and checks in how far the platform enabled the three practices associated with remembrance or not.

Blogs have been a central technology/platform to the creation of memory around the councils, because they served all three practices (archiving, circulating, claiming). First, they drew on persistence. Content about Syria and Aziz on blogs could theoretically be constantly amended, but it was not. Instead, blogs served as transitional platforms, bridging the gap between the initial creation of mnemonic content and its eventual archiving in more formal archival formats. Moreover, the blogs were stable enough and served as 'landing' platforms over time. This stability allowed for circulation on Twitter and Facebook to rely on these blogs, enabling the renewal of circulation over the years by repeatedly using the same link. We could say that memory has to travel to stay alive, but it also needs to be able to land in order to be accessible. Whereas the aspect of landing may be irrelevant in the context of anarchist/radical activist networking around protest mobilizations that benefit from decentralized, flexible and fluid media networks (Juris 2005, 197), it appears all the more important for remembrance to take roots and grow. Flexibility becomes important from another perspective: blogs allowed for the deletion of content when actors decided that it was for the better. Mobayed's first translation of Aziz' papers was published on a blog (1_14.09.2013) which has been deleted in the year of 2017. The revised English translation is by far better and thus the flexibility of blogs to also forget content served remembrance in that case, because it made Aziz' narrative of local councils much more consistent. This affordance of persistence, however, is dependent on the renewal of attention and thus of circulation. Blogs also helped the circulation of content in a passive way: by being replicable and by serving as link-destinations. The analysis showed that texts from blogs were often copied and reposted or were linked elsewhere. Blogs allowed for both simple reproduction – texts were copied and reposted entirely on other blogs – and for diffusion in a scaled way – the link to those blog posts were circulated through several ways: in tweets, in Facebook posts and in the form of links/backlinks on other blogs or news portals. All this calls into question the assertion that "(d)igital media (…) might reconfigure the regimes of memory toward an economy of circulation, moving away from questions of preservation." (Kaun 2016, 5397). Rather, the analysis showed that it is precisely the combination of both: persistence and replicability.

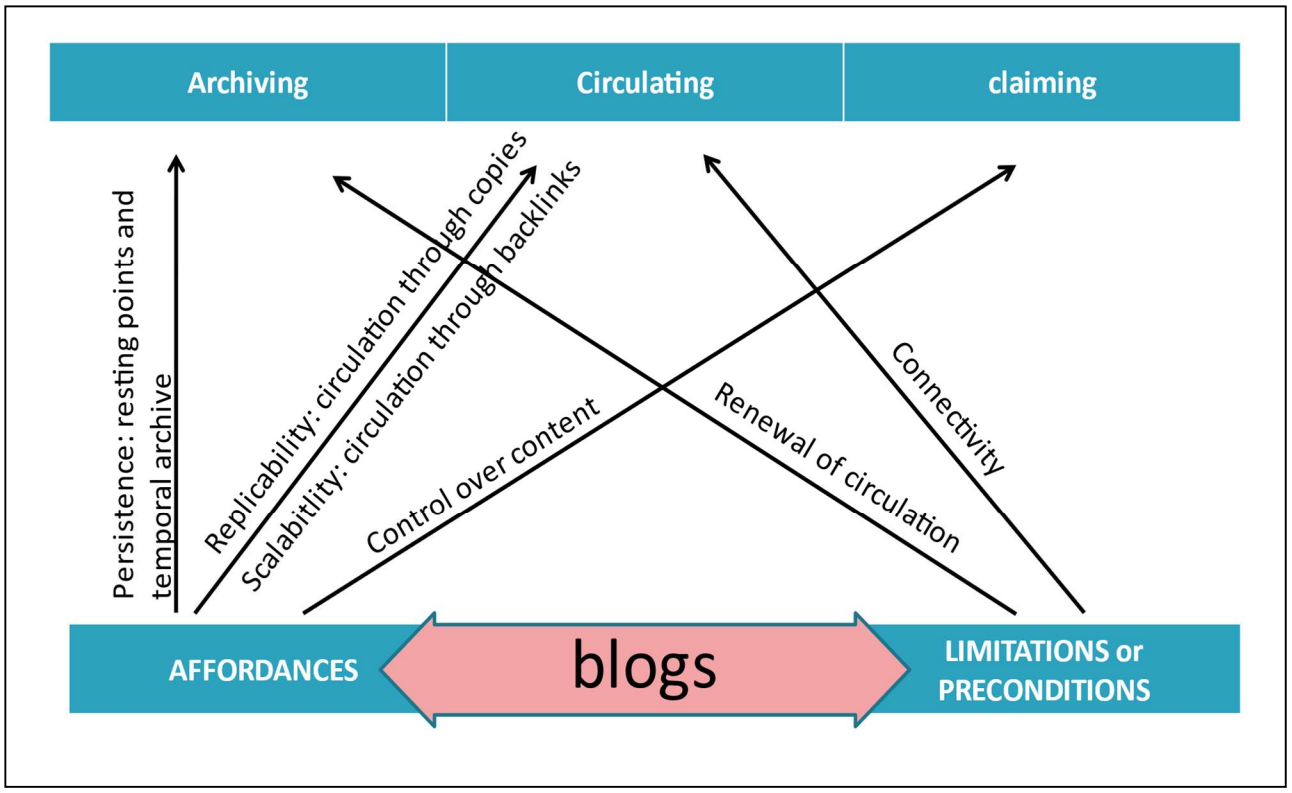
That the affordance of replicability can play out through circulation is, however, preconditioned: some sort of connectivity among actors must exist which leads to attention for the content in the first place so that texts were then shared on Twitter, on Facebook or through links on the web. The affordance of blogs that weighs most heavily, though, is the absolute control of blog hosts over content and thus over narratives. As opposed to news portals, blogs offered their authors a high degree of freedom. For instance, Al-Shami and Budour Hassan could frame Aziz as an anarchist and thus created an easy point of linkage and an interpretative framework for an English-speaking leftist audience.

Another temporal dynamic is interesting when looking at blogs' affordances: blogging platforms converted practices of circulation into practices of archiving over time and by hindsight without the involvement of memory activists. This is, first and foremost, based on their technical possibilities and limitations that are obviously bound to temporality. The act of posting content initially served as a means of circulation, but as time progresses, often within a relatively short span of time, that very act of posting transforms into an archival act in retrospect Again, Al-Shami's evaluation of the overall intention and

functioning of the blog is illustrative: "Our aim was to give voice to perspectives usually not seen and heard and to make anarchist and anti-authoritarian struggles visible. I think we have achieved what we wanted." (Al-Shami, personal communication, April 2017). Thus, the traveling of content in that digital media format ceased, but – hopefully and probably – it reached people and thus enabled further remembrance in other settings.

If we translate the scheme developed in the theory chapter into the specific context of blogs it would look like this:

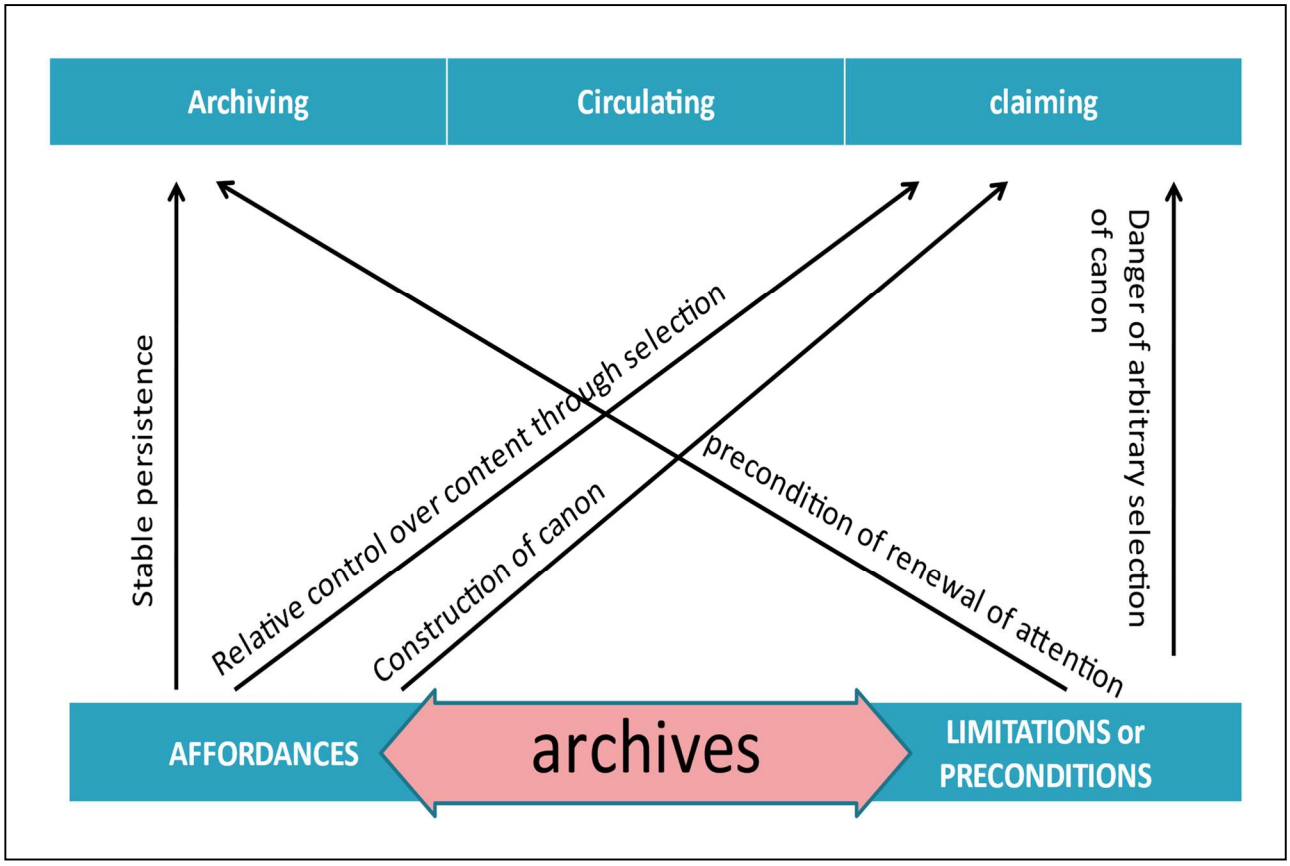
Figure 37: Affordances and limitations for remembrance with regards to blogs



Note: Source A.W.

This first discussion of affordances suggests that it might be more suited to speak of preconditions than of limitations. This may become even clearer in the discussion of the following platform, namely archival sites that are in some regards similar to blogs in terms of their affordances. The relevant archival site that we dealt with (The Anarchist Library) has even weaker affordances for circulation of memory. To the contrary, as with blogs, circulation is rather a precondition for archiving to work or to fulfill its function. This, again, necessitates some sort of connectivity between actors (such as following someone on Twitter) or between actors and sites (such as readers who visit Budour Hassan's blog and then choose to replicate or link her text elsewhere). In contrast to that weakness, the strength of archival sites lies of course in their solid persistence – which they are designed for. But as the analysis showed, they also have a strong affordance for claiming memory. Similar to blogs, they have control over content. In contrast to blogs, though, this control comes not by the virtue of authorship, but through the selection of content which eventually results in the construction of a canon. However, this strength of archival sites is accompanied by the inherent risk of arbitrariness in the selection process. Looking at the *de facto* canon that has been constructed in *The Anarchist Library*, the criteria are not clear based on which texts find their way into the archive. Rather, it all depends on actors' choices, their skill, and on their efforts to research and to enter the texts into the archive.

Figure 38: Affordances and limitations for remembrance with regards to archival sites

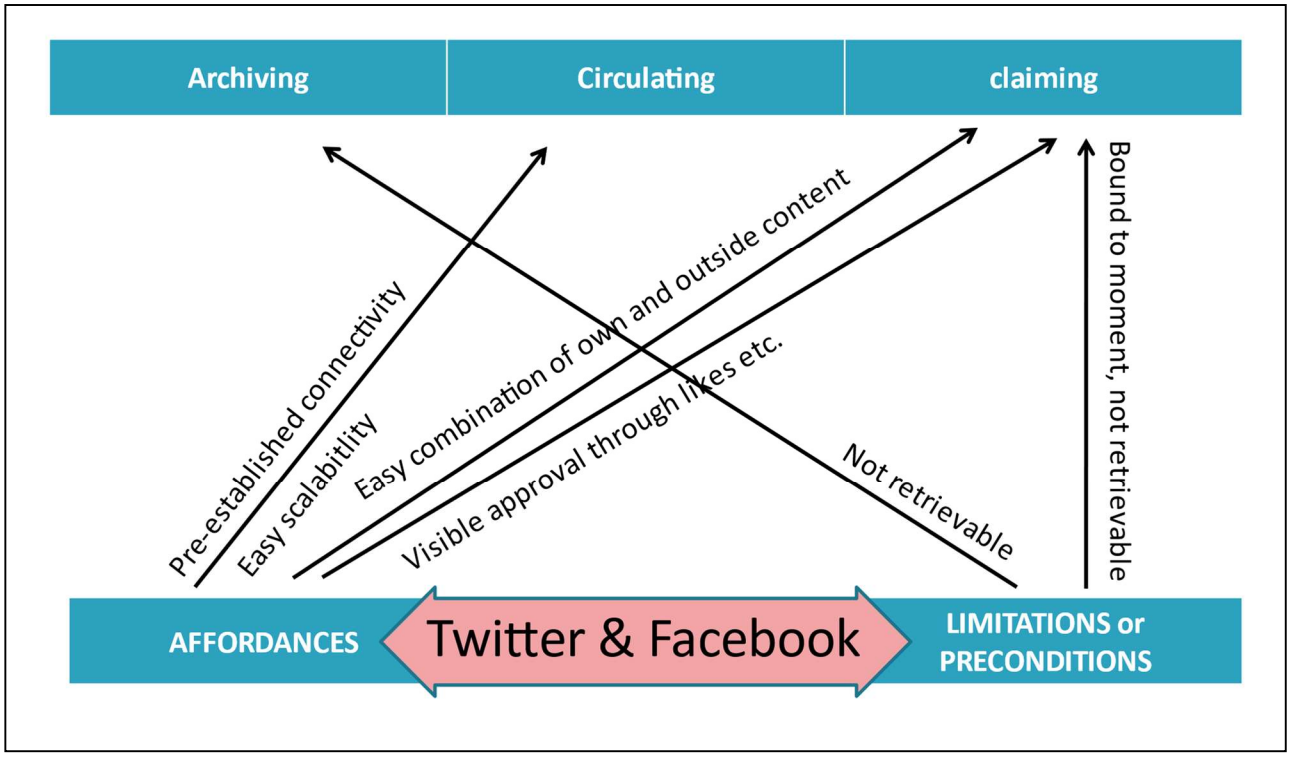


Note: Source A.W.

Looking at Wikipedia as a specific platform with affordances and limitations will render a similar picture. In the encyclopedia, however, the affordance of claiming weighs even more heavily since it is such an established, authoritative site, and for that same reason it is also less susceptible to being overlooked.

The last 'translation' of the affordance scheme that I will present is with regards to the social media platforms. Clearly, their weakness lies on the left side in the figure: archiving is just not what that technology allows for. Yes, Facebook content and Twitter were accessible for me to research, but it only has worth in the moment, in the seconds or days of ongoing circulation. In contrast to blogs, the charm of Facebook and Twitter lies in their actuality, their "character of liveness" (Kaun & Stiernstedt 2012, 349). Therefore, as soon as the act of circulation is over and the posts or tweets have gone down in the timelines, their function is fulfilled and they have no future value for remembrance. Hence their contribution to remembrance is quite limited to short time frames, at least in our case. Interestingly, however, Facebook and Twitter are not reduced to serving circulatory practices, they also afford claiming in a way, I would argue. Firstly, the instances of liking, sharing, reacting, retweeting etc. functioned as visible approvals of content, of certain authors and of their narratives. The analysis showed, though, that reactions were overall rather scarce in English and much more visible for Arabic posts. Secondly, the possibility of not only linking content from outside the social media platform by embedding it into the post/tweet, but also of combining these links with one's own (approving) commentaries substantiate the claims from the linked texts.

Figure 39: Affordances and limitations for remembrance with regards to archival sites



Note: Source A.W.

As was true for blogs and archival sites, and as goes almost without saying, the functioning of circulation in social media sites is again preconditioned by existing connectivity, although the analysis also showed that high numbers of followers are no guarantee for massive circulation.

At his point I want to raise the issue of lack of remembrance on Youtube. This lack is indicative of the lack of *visual* remembrance about the councils. The only material found here are two files: an audiofile of an interview conducted by The Final Straw Radio with Leila Al-Shami and Joey Ayoub under the title "Social Justice and Struggle in Lebanon and Syria" dating from 23.2.2020. The Final Straw Radio which is networked internationally "is a weekly anarchist radio show and podcast (…) featuring English-language interviews with artists, authors, and activists engaged in struggles for liberation worldwide." (Final Straw, n.d.). The second instance is a two-minute video under the title "Homage To OMAR AZIZ / تحية إلى ذكرى عمر عزيز" which has 1,518 clicks and no comments (MezzawiLense 2013). The date when it was uploaded, 25.03.2013, i.e. only one month after Aziz' announced death and the title points to its commemorative character. The video itself was deleted (in 2021), but was reposted in 2015 (Pierre Alhag 2015) and, importantly, it was archived in the Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution[25] website which lists this video as one of four entries in total connected to Omar Aziz. There, the relevance of this video is explained as follows: "The video footage depicts snapshots of the largest and last demonstration organized in Damascus in the Mezzah neighborhood on 18 February 2012 (…). On 18 February 2012, the inhabitants of Basatin organized a procession in honor of [three assassinated youth; A.W.]. (…) The footage is made in homage to the late Omar Aziz, an inhabitant of middle-class Mazzeh, who had been present with the demonstrators at the time and, like the thousands of other participants, was forced to run for his life as the regime forces opened fire. (…) He was then arrested and passed away in detention

[25] The Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution is an important project that "aims to build an archive of national intangible heritage" by documenting traces of people's activism and their biographies, thus "building a collective memory" about the revolution and especially its cultural expressions (Creative Memory 2021).

on 16 February 2013." (Creative Memory 2013). The irrelevance of Youtube in an explicitly leftist remembrance of councils triggers some insight: The lack of visual evidence of the councils is a problem for remembrance or at least it is not a resource. Why that lack? I think that what makes up the relevance of the councils relies entirely on the social processes between people. These processes are invisible and intangible, they elude empirical research that relies on mediated traces – they are literally *unspectacular*. This is one reason why the personality of Omar Aziz is so important: it functions as an anchor for the remembrance of the councils and to a certain extent compensates for the lack of concrete, tangible evidence of the councils. That remembrance is – for better or for worse – compelled to take place in a cognitive, text-based setting that analyzes and interprets the councils. This setting was provided to a large extent by blogs and by articles published on news portals. This is in stark contrast to the more general remembrance of the Syrian uprising and of the activities around the Local Coordination Committees as Budour Hassan poignantly writes: "Through the footage we've inherited, we are witness to even the most miniscule of protests in the rural, long-forsaken peripheries, each significant enough for somebody to upload to YouTube along with their greatest of hopes." Youtube is perhaps *the* central platform that would enable Syrians "to salvage fragments of their collective memory from the ashes of revisionism", which would "preserve a corpus of uncontestable evidence" of the uprising (Hassan 2016). Socialist author and activist Joseph Daher maintained that the huge stock of footage and documentation are a capital strength of the uprising that a future resurgence can build on (Kniewel 2017; see likewise Jasim 2014 who sees the footage as basis for the 'collective memory'). This may well be the case, but the overwhelming presence of footage on the 'spectacular' forms of protest might well override other meaningful, but 'unspectacular' forms of self-government and may as a result shape memory and learning processes. This discussion underlines the notion that affordances are never a property of a certain media technology, but that they are highly dependent on the particular topic.

I assumed that the site libcom.org would be a space where people discursively negotiate how the local councils in Syria should be brought in line with the overall theory and history of councils. I assumed this especially because of its technological affordances: the site was founded almost twenty years ago, contains a blog, a library, a public forum where registered users can make contributions, start discussions, and more features. Libcom, which stands for libertarian communism, describes its mission as follows: "The site contains news and analysis of workers' struggles, discussions and a constantly growing archive of over 20,000 articles contributed by our 10,000+ users ranging from history and biographies to theoretical texts, complete books and pamphlets. We have incorporated several other online archives over the years, and in addition have hundreds of exclusive texts written or scanned by or for us." (libcom 2006) Moreover, the forum is structured with different regional foci, the Middle East among them. It serves as a central destination for people interested in discussions on revolutionary and radical movements aligned with libertarian communism and anarchism. Therefore, I assumed that it would be a prominent source for discussions on the Syrian revolution from a leftist perspective, especially in relation to the councils that hold such significance within the libertarian communist tradition. However, the available material proved insufficient to conduct my own analysis, resulting in only a brief examination from the perspective of its limitations. Why is it that not only were there few entries on both the forum and the blog (five in total) but that they triggered little commentary – let alone *informed* commentary? Moreover, the submitted posts (which are the texts by Al-Shami 2013 and Daou 2017) were replicated very late (in 2016 and 2018 respectively). In one of three forum posts, from January 2015 (i.e. two years after the start of remembrance), participants are rather puzzled with questions about the 'claims' that "there are 'councils' organized from bottom in liberated sectors of Syria." A user asks: "So basically does anyone know anything about them? 1) Are they still around? Do they have any real power? 2) How bottom-up are

they? (…) 3) How big are they? How inclusive are they? 4) If they exist and [are] important why we do not hear much about them?" (kurekmurek 2015).

This is not to discredit the forum users and their questions – it is of course the first step to ask openly and the questions are good ones. What is so striking though is that apparently a forum like libcom.org has not got word about Syria by 2015 – the answers beneath by other users display similar puzzlement (ibid.). In no way do I intend to blame individuals. Rather, I want to suggest that the absence of information indicates that remembrance of Syria and Aziz has not yet been mainstreamed, but has been outsourced in a way. Actually, the intense activity of Tahrir-ICN was thus a double-edged sword: it functioned as an outsourced space for the topic so that all information was fed into that blog, instead of also feeding the existing knowledge structures in digital communities such as libcom.org. It would have been crucial that the most invested and informed actors such as Tahrir-ICN members, who *did* understand the meaning of the local councils from an anarchist/communist perspective, threw a bridge to the established anarchist/communist digital spaces. It would be worthwhile from the perspective of memory activists to stir more discussion in those realms that display a high degree of continuity and a high degree of connectivity in different countries. This would be a fruitful place for future memory activism around the Syrian council experience that could make a meaningful contribution to advancing the theory and history of councils.

6.6 Conclusion

The preceding subchapter about limitations and affordances already offered several conclusions from a perspective that looked on everything predominantly through the **technology**-lens. For my conclusion, I will begin with the latter and proceed backwards to practices and lastly to actors. Looking at each platform or realm separately we found specific affordances and how these affordances were crossed by limitations or, rather, preconditions. The technology that functioned as a strong affordance structure is the one of blogs. Indeed, most of the time, posts or tweets from other platforms referred to outside content on blogs by linking and/or embedding it into the posts and tweets respectively. In fact, Twitter and Facebook largely functioned as hubs to circulate content from blogs and news portals since almost all of the posts/tweets contained links to articles outside the platforms. The only exceptions to this rule were shown to be a very early phase of rather personal mourning and an Arabic language bubble which functioned in a slightly different way. Blogs have assumed such a central role in the creation of memory, because they served all three mnemonic practices. This was especially due to the combination of the affordances of persistence and replicability, but I suggested that the affordance weighing most heavily is the absolute control of blog hosts over content and thus over narratives. To be sure, the topic has not been widely embraced by leftists, and its complexity may have deterred engagement by those who were even aware of it. Additionally, there is a language barrier that prevents people from having easy access to – from their perspective – trustworthy information. Hence, in order to initiate and sustain discussions on the topic and foster also its remembrance, memory workers needed to explain, to argue, to provide information and to offer interpretations and narratives from a leftist perspective that would allow other anarchists to connect to the topic. Blogs allowed for this rather complex interpretive and analytical engagement with the topic. And, in fact, we can put it the other way round: *because* the aim to get discussions and remembrance going demanded so much effort in claiming, a technology was needed that would allow memory activists to make their arguments, to give them space to articulate a leftist narrative.

The analysis revealed that mnemonic activism around the councils and Aziz flowed into different **practices** in different periods. Archiving was a practice that became salient only in the recent years,

whereas memory workers were busy with circulating and creating content especially in the first months or first year. Archiving manifested as a practice that actors dedicated themselves to over long periods of time and it involved much more skill and effort, because it demanded to observe, research, interpret, edit and sometimes author material. If archiving was the practice that grew in relevance only over time for plausible reasons, then circulating was extremely relevant in the beginning, but also was claiming: in order to spread the word, the word was needed in the first place. Circulating was largely oriented towards the web sphere. Facebook and Twitter both functioned as circulatory hubs, but Twitter even narrowed down the pool of circulated content to very few authors. Over the years, circulation in Twitter and Facebook could also be renewed over time, sometimes with little time invested such as through a Facebook post every half-year or so, sometimes with more effort when dedicated authors published new and revised articles on blogs or news platforms. The backlink analysis revealed to which extent articles have been circulated within the web sphere to the surprising result that many more texts than those of the 'usual suspects' have been linked dozens and sometimes hundreds of times. The content analysis of five widely circulated texts reconstructed how memory workers have laid claim on the Syrian uprising from an anarchist perspective: they relied, on the one hand, on the assertion of the anti-state character of the local councils, on emphatic descriptions of the agency, creativity and skill that unfolded in them and on highlighting the councils' working towards a cooperative mentality which all together anticipated 'an alternative future in the present'. Next to catering to such anarchist touchstones they particularly benefited from the coincidence that Aziz had referred Syria to the Paris Commune, whose 100th anniversary in 2021 opened a window of opportunity for claiming through further insisting on the connection between Syria and this iconic revolution that had pushed councils into the center of leftist revolutionary concepts. The framing of Aziz as an 'anarchist' personality and hence as a key witness for the qualities of the Syrian local councils in combination with textual evidence (his papers) served as further important strategies to lay claim on the Syrian revolution from a leftist perspective.

Blogs were identified as the technology that enabled claiming in that particular way: it provided the actors with the necessary editorial freedom was - an affordance that weighs heavily against the background that anarchists lack more powerful means to write history. 'Editorial freedom', which has been pointed out as an affordance of blogging in the context of journalism (Graves 2007, 341) could be rethought as only one expression of a broader affordance of digital media under the notion of 'accessibility' (and added to the set of affordances discussed in the theory). The affordance of blogs for remembrance was, however, heavily qualified by the precondition of authorship skills. This backs the insistence on a differentiation between 'instrumental' and 'social affordances' with regards to blogging (see Hopkins 2015, 4) and perhaps particularly so with regards to claiming memory.

The analysis of **actors** has shown that remembrance of the local councils from an anarchist perspective has lied in that last decade on the shoulders of a plethora of memory workers. Three different roles of memory workers have been carved out – authors, replicators, brokers – and it has been shown that each of these roles can vary according to the degree of commitment of the respective actors. Whereas the mnemonic field appears at first glance as dominated by only few dedicated authors, the systematic web search and the subsequent backlink analysis revealed that, beyond the famous two to five authors, there have been more than 50 one-time authors of own texts dealing with the topic to various extents. I have argued that the replicators who 'only' copy the authors' content have assumed an increasingly important role over time as remembrance started to rely not only on creating and circulating content, but also on preserving it in archives. These replicators, too, have displayed different degrees of commitment and so did the brokers, Twitter being the realm of many one-time brokers as opposed to Facebook - where brokers remained rather committed over time.

I would like to conclude by underlining the importance of actors and at the same time making a link to the subsequent analysis of the local councils. In fact, I suggest considering actors a fundamental category in the overall constellation of actors – practices – technology. My research focused entirely on digital media and within that framework we did see how the affordances of certain technologies played out and shaped remembrance. However, if digital media didn't exist, remembrance would have probably taken place as well, only differently. If we think of the contemporary observers of and/or participators in the uprising of the Paris Commune such as Karl Marx, Peter Kropotkin, Prosper Lissagaray, Louise Michel, Mikhail Bakunin and many more, we can well understand them to be memory workers: it is based on their oral and written accounts, their interpretations that radical leftists have come to appropriate the Paris Commune as the event in their history that it is nowadays conceived of. What else is it than claiming when Marx hailed the council-based Commune "as the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labor" (Marx 1871). Marxist Karl Korsch (1929) critically analyzes Marx' move to claim the Commune in opposition to anarchism. Indeed, Marx's great opponent in the First International, Michael Bakunin, had on this point the historical truth on his side when he sarcastically commented on Marx having annexed the Paris Commune retrospectively: 'The impact of the Communist insurrection was so powerful that even the Marxists, who had all their ideas thrown to the wind by it, were forced to doff their hats to it. They did more than that: *in contradiction to all logic and their innermost feelings, they adopted the program of the Commune and its aim as their own.* It was a comic, but enforced travesty. They had to do it, otherwise they would have been rejected and abandoned by all - so mighty was the passion which this revolution had brought about in the whole world.'" Korsch (1929) sharply notes: "Having written the Address to the General Council of the I.W.A, directly after the glorious battle and defeat of the Paris communards, Marx not only wanted to *annex the Marxism of the Commune but also at the same time the Commune to Marxism*." (all emphases in original) Be that as it may, memory workers such as Marx, were certainly aided by further memory workers who assumed other roles than authorship by circulating pamphlets, sharing newspapers, organizing discussion events and acts of solidarity. What this brief reference to the Commune is supposed to underline is that remembrance needs intention and it is the actors who develop their intentions, who deem the history of a struggle worthy of being remembered. The specific digital media technologies did enable certain practices quite well, when especially blogs allowed authors to present their narratives quite freely. And the pool of memory workers may be small or large, there may be a spectrum of different roles, but at the end of the day the construction of memory was borne out of "personal investments of individuals who express themselves and share their contributions" (Smit 2020, 104). The actors, their intentions, their narratives, their interpretative skills and their commitment over longer or shorter periods of time is what has made remembrance about Syria from a radical leftist perspective emerge over the last decades the way it did. The link between local councils in Syria and anarchism is now well recognized and indeed, Omar Aziz' personality and his papers have been a convenient – and legitimate – anchor for that connection. However, the understanding that the Syrian council movement is part of a broader council history and that it has its contributions to make to council theory will need more years – and personal investment by actors – to be deepened and to seep in the consciousness of radical leftists in the West.

7. The local councils in Syria

Whereas the previous chapter dealt with the first dimension of this dissertation, which focuses on the 'how' of remembrance, this chapter is devoted to understanding the very object of remembrance. The discussion of claiming (RQ3) in the context of the media analysis has already anticipated aspects of understanding the councils, because claiming memory is inseparable from its content. The picture would be incomplete (or perhaps even distorted) if we implicitly identified the real-existing councils with their reflection within (anarchist) remembrance. Analyzing the councils as such will enable us, first, to understand the object of remembrance, and second, to enhance the understanding of the ways how memory was claimed. Whereas memory workers have highlighted the explosion of agency, their discussion of councils as *institutions* of an alternative democratic governance remains superficial: they were well perceived and portrayed as 'anti-state', but precisely how councils potentially suspended or eroded the state and what institutional alternatives they realized – and failed to realize – was little explored. NGO studies, on the other hand, ignore the more radical, prefigurative and anti-state potential of councils. In the following, I aim to add analytical depth to the descriptive accounts of councils by reconstructing the Syrian local councils along four dimensions. Mostly, the theoretical interpretation follows the empirical account, but where appropriate both aspects are discussed more reciprocally. The aim is to sound out how the experience of the Syrian local councils would resonate in the 'theory' of councils, asking in how far they follow a typical trajectory (e.g. the explosion of agency), whether they challenge seemingly solid assumptions (e.g. Marx' idea that councils are executive and legislative at the same time), what issues they raise on an empirical level that have hardly been thought through so far (e.g. the role of assemblies), and what crunchpoints they reveal (e.g. the socialization of resources).

In order to shed light on the local councils in Syria, it is important to understand separately how Aziz conceptualized the councils and the reality of the local councils as they actually operated. Anweiler (1958, 7), in his seminal account of the council movement in Russia 1905-1921, hints at a stark divergence, if not "contradiction", between "the factual existence of councils" on the one hand and how council experiments have been theorized retroactively. His assertion that Marx's interpretation of the Paris Commune as well as Lenin's theorization of a 'soviet state' had drawn "an idealized image" is taken here as a warning against *either* putting Aziz's conceptualization over the council movement in Syria or neglecting conceptual kernels within the councils that Aziz may have well detected just as Marx has detected principles in the Paris Commune that transcended what the Commune itself was actually able to unfold. This is why I approach the analysis of the councils in Syria in a way that allows me to differentiate between 'real-existing' councils on the one hand and their 'ideal' conceptualization of councils on the other.

7.1 Councils as spaces of practice: agency and self-organization

7.1.1 The characteristics and the content of self-organization in councils: evolution of tasks, learning processes and the de-professionalization of 'politics'

> *Who could imagine that local people would run the high school exams or climb an electric column to repair the wires? (man from Yabroud council, quoted in Aljundi 2014, 20)*

The explosion of agency among Syrians has been highlighted unequivocally as a decisive characteristic of the Syrian uprising. Being involved in self-organization, be it in the form of LCCs or later in the form of councils, meant "(f)ostering agency to counter learned helplessness" (Barkil-Oteo 2017) in an environment that had been cultivating a mentality of "total acceptance" and had been deliberately blocking people's sense of self-efficacy (ibid.). Consequently, authors have maintained that the growing sense of agency among people was perceived by the regime as a prime threat: "all the cities and neighborhoods in which there was a popular, democratic, and inclusive alternative were targeted (…). These examples of popular and democratic self-organizations are the elements most feared by the regime since 2011." (Daher 2017; also Smith 2016a; Faviér 2016, 9). The accounts by many observers as well as by participants in councils is often nothing less than enthusiastic. Munif, being involved in Manbij (Aleppo province) writes about the council experience during 2012/2013: "Here, during an interlude of relative stability when neither the Syrian government nor foreign-backed jihadist groups had taken over the city, Syrians were deciding how to run their city for themselves—and they were excelling at it." (Munif 2020, 145) In quite similar terms, Al-Kayial recounts his experience in Barzah during 2012: "In that early phase the society was able to accomplish these tasks in a fantastic way, really in a fantastic way." (Al-Kayial, interview, August 2020) Darayya's local council is highlighted as an outstanding example of self-governance that constituted "the antithesis of the Assadist state. The people themselves built a society which was democratic and free" (Al-Shami 2017; also Saleh 2018, 145). Studies across three provinces throughout 2013/2014 likewise described the emerging councils as indicative of people's "eager(ness) to manage their communities and determine their own future" (Aljundi 2014). There is no single report that does not acknowledge that councils were a means by which people managed at least basic issues of daily life in a quite satisfactory way, criticism notwithstanding. To the contrary, reports often stress the functioning of councils even in difficult circumstances, such as in besieged Ghouta: "Ghouta is self-governed. Given the harsh conditions it is impressively well governed" (Turkmani et al. 2015, 36).

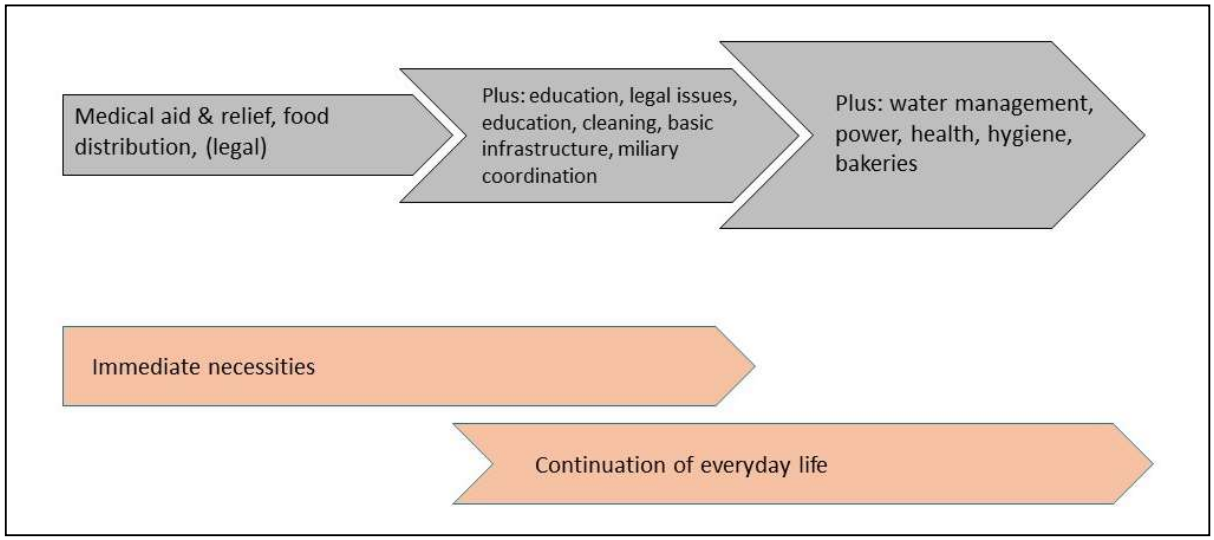
"Starting small, with only a few revolutionary activists and supporters" (Hajjar et al. 2017, 7), councils usually emerged in a very unspectacular way. Usually "it was simply a group of about ten leaders" (activist quoted in Hajjar et al. 2017, 7) These groups of 'leaders' usually formed committees for specific tasks, but as Al-Kayial explains: "We called them lajna, but in reality it was one or two persons that were charged with certain tasks." (Al-Kayial, interview, August 2020). These nuclei then assumed a gravitational point from which agency expanded in the community. Al-Kayial's account manifests a sort of ease and even triviality of this process: "In the beginning we didn't really change anything fundamentally. (…) We merely helped bring people in contact with each

other (…). We especially encouraged people to get in contact with people not only from their hometowns, but from other places in the country. (…) We thought, as soon as people are able to be in contact and communicate, they would be able to solve their problems." (Al-Kayial, interview, August 2020). In some cases, the councils were founded to anticipate the rupture and they functioned as organs of struggle 'in waiting' since the beginning of the uprising until the regime would withdraw from a city. For instance, in Manbij a network of more than 50 popular committees was formed for the purpose of protecting the city and filling the vacuum on the day the security and the police would be forced to leave the city (Munif 2020, 147ff.; see also Khalaf 2015 on the Aleppo City council).

On the one hand, **tasks** of the councils varied according to situations on the ground and to contextual factors such as whether the area was liberated or regime-held, its proximity to the restrictive Jordanian or, conversely, the rather open Turkish border, as well as the presences of Islamists (Aljundi 2014, 15; see background chapter). On the other hand, the similarity of tasks in principle is evident: everywhere councils directly dedicated themselves to the most immediate needs for survival. Councils were clearly not designed according to a constitutional architecture or along an abstract ideal, but instead they always emerged out of concrete action that responded to perceived necessities in the communities – their creation was "spontaneous and reactive" (HD 2014, 9). Only in rare exceptions were councils prepared over weeks or months to take over control once the regime withdrew (e.g. in Manbij, Munif 2020). Al-Kayial's account of Barzah is exemplary: "In the beginning the tasks were clear, immediate and oftentimes spontaneous. (…) Humanitarian aid and medical relief was the most important thing in the beginning. These two issues were central to the people at that time. We needed to address these issues in order to keep life going on. (…) We needed a local structure to diffuse aid in these two realms in an organized way. Then things evolved to include other issues into self-organization." The self-organization of medical aid, especially in areas controlled or located near to the regime, was also a pressing need, because "people feared the public hospitals. (…) The hospitals were a place of horror." (Al-Kayial, interview, August 2020) Medical aid was at the center of councils' local activity and translocal coordination in the whole Ghouta region where an increasingly sophisticated regional infrastructure for medical aid grew (Angelova 2014). Over time the range of tasks or "portfolio of offices" of councils grew to 11 to 15 offices in average (HD 2014, 13; Hajjar et al. 2017, 7), so that councils "soon managed most aspects of daily civil life" (Aljundi 2014 16). For instance in Yabroud, whose council started with offices on legal, medical, educational and engineering issues, further offices were added for media, civil defense, relief, security, statistics, finance, public relations and military coordination (Aljundi 2014, 21). Next to medical aid and relief, food provision was among the most important tasks of the councils in the early phase, and over time the continuation of education "rank(ed) very highly among core services." Schools often ran "double shifts because available locations were limited after bombings." (HD 2014, 13) By 2015, the provision of water, power, education, health, hygiene were listed as prominent tasks in councils (LACU & NPA 2015, 9) as well as "infrastructure, cleaning, reconstruction" (Hajjar et al. 2017, 7). Operating bakeries and improving bakery facilities came increasingly into the focus of councils over time (e.g. in Idlib region, Heller 2016, 8; overall Hajjar et al. 2017, 13) – albeit the latter only to a limited extent as will be discussed further below. Hence, the evolution of tasks followed immediate necessities for survival, but then turned towards enabling the continuation of everyday life – rather quickly with regards to children's education – and ensuring livelihoods. Localities often added offices according to "shifting needs and priorities of the inhabitants" (Hajjar et al. 2017, 7): "The adaptability and responsiveness to the demands of the population have so far overridden the need to standardise the councils' structure throughout the

region. As a result, unique offices have appeared in each city council, highlighting some of the additional needs of the residents (…) and their ability to offer institutional solutions to their problems." (Angelova 2014, 8) The Darayya local council, for instance, stands out with its "office for the continuation of the peaceful movement" and the "office of neighborhood committees" (Darayya LC 2014l, 2014m). Both offices deliberately aimed at expanding agency by "integrating more people into the activities of the council's offices" and by "continuously involving as many people as possible in self-organization". (Darayya LC, 2014). The figure below illustrates the evolution of tasks:

Figure 40: Evolution and character of the tasks that councils adopted



Note: Source: A.W. based on studies and interviews cited in this chapter.

Whereas agency unfolded along the lines of 'learning by doing', councils sometimes deliberately organized the passing on of competencies in order to increase people's agency as the example from Darayya shows. One of the three subcommittees of the neighborhood office in Darayya was dedicated to map competencies among the residents, especially regarding medical aid and "urging them to take over tasks and responsibilities" (Daraya LC 2014m). In Al-Raqqah, similarly, "(t)he council conducted workshops on how the local council operates and a group of activists were trained on civil defense" (Aljundi 2014, 29). The experience of learning had **empowering** effects on the people involved: Yabroud council members are cited as being "proud of what the community had been able to accomplish on its own" (Aljundi 2014, 20). One council member's quote is exemplary in that regard: "Who could imagine that local people would run the high school exams or climb an electric column to repair the wires?" (man from Yabroud council, quoted in Aljundi 2014, 20). The medical offices that were part of each local council in the East Ghouta region and that have been interlinked are described as effective in learning to adapt to situations of crisis: "They were able to create emergency plans and training procedures in the preparation for possible further attacks as well as to implement programmes for the standardization of the use of medical equipment" (Angelova 2014, 7). Similarly, the council in Manbij reacted to the regime's attacks on bread-lines in front of bakeries by quickly re-organizing bread distribution in a decentral way in the neighborhoods (Munif 2020, 139f). Authors highlight that councils cultivated such **creativity** in dealing with everyday problems. For Yasser Munif, participant and observer of the Manbij council in Aleppo province, "the 18 months of locally guided government (…) were positive proof that Syrian society was able to produce an original democratic culture and creative alternative governance institutions

that were vital to solving everyday problems." (Munif 2020, 145) For the Ghouta region, Angelova points to the "high degree of creativity and adaptability" of councils with regards to their activities on the ground as well as with regards to their internal institutional structure (Angelova 2014, 5). She especially refers to the relief offices in the councils of East Ghouta that were spontaneously "created as ad-hoc civil defence teams (…) when streets and buildings had to be cleaned from the debris and the residents had to be instructed on how to clean their own houses from the chemical residue." (Angelova 2014, 8) The "highly improvised" character of the council allowed for "their flexibility, decentralization, and resilience to different types of attacks" (Angelova 2014, 5). At the same time this improvising was not contradictory to "building a relatively unified model of governance". The account of such "institutional creativity" (Angelova 2014, 5) is echoed in the experience in Manbij where "(t)he city and its inhabitants reinvented every institution and came up with creative ways to solve everyday problems." (Munif 2020, 132) More often than not, the cited studies (except for Munif 2020 and Angelova 2014) miss this package of dynamics of agency. The institutional creativity is interpreted as lack of plan, the broadening of agency as inefficient, de-professionalization as a deplorable brain-drain, and learning processes as inconsistent. . Regarding the latter, one study laments in an indicative way how "people who have been trained as members of the LACs may not be elected (…) again" and that "then new members would need new training again" which would cause "weak accumulation of expertise." (Turkmani et al. 2015, 21) In light of council theory, however, such 'volatility' can precisely be identified as a possible strength, because it broadens participation and enables learning processes beyond a cast of experts and technocrats. Munif's account about Manbij rightly highlights the experimental dimension of agency: "The [council] was an experimental space par excellence where grassroots politics, experimental processes, and participatory democracy could thrive." (Munif 2020 151)

The displayed creativity, accumulating skills and the sense of empowerment among those involved in self-organization within councils contributed to, and was made possible by, the **deprofessionalized character** of self-governance in the Syrian local councils. Whereas early reports (O'Bagy 2012) were desperately trying to identify leadership figures, the absence of parties, interest groups and unions remained a salient characteristic of the councils so that by 2017 it was acknowledged that the councils' "roles and functions were never (…) centrally guided" (Hajjar et al. 2017, 1) and there is no single account that attributes any role to parties or unions. To the contrary, as Al-Kayial who was politically socialized in unions reports, he initially reckoned "that we would need trade unions and not local councils", only to find out that councils evolved based on locality and with no orientation towards the realm of labor. Councils sometimes deliberately prevented interest groups, also in the form of militias, from running for council elections, because the overall ethos of councils was a sense of civility, e.g. in Deraa where "'people organizing the elections told them it was not possible because the council wanted to maintain its impartiality.'" (Al-Jundi 2014, 26) Apart from councils' distance from established political actors or unions, the deprofessionalized character became manifest in the informality of procedures, partly out of the necessity to work in secret to avoid bombings of official elections or council meetings, partly because agency within council work evolved intuitively and needed no experts. In Barzah, for instance, "Everything was informal and there was no office. (…) There was no bureaucracy. The uprising was fundamentally based on trust." (Al-Kayial, interview, August 2020) Trust and credibility weighed more heavily than formal qualification for the nascient councils. In Manbij, "(t)he revolutionaries built credibility and gained symbolic capital before they took control of the city. Once they had it, they used the legitimacy they had accumulated during the previous period to build their strength." (Munif 2020, 150) Accordingly, council work started off as a voluntary activity and it remained so over years in

many places across regions. Throughout 2013, civil servants and especially teachers continued to work even if their salaries were cut (Naisse 2013; HD 2014, 13). In Al-Raqqah province throughout 2013/14 "(m)ost staff members are volunteers and have been paid only once" (Aljundi 2014, 28) and in the northern Idlib province as of 2016 "council members typically aren't paid a regular living wage" and "largely work on a volunteer basis" (Heller 2016, 9). That, indeed, councils prioritized revolutionary legitimacy and motivation of participants rather than "experience or knowledge" as the criteria for electing council members or for letting them get involved (e.g. LACU & NPA 2015, 14; Munif 2020, 147), was deplored in NGO reports (e.g. LACU & NPA 2015, 15). However, the fact that council work largely functioned on a voluntary basis and no formal qualification was required did not mean that work was done unprofessionally. First, lack of know-how was compensated by quick learning experiences. Munif cites the example of Manbij, home to one of the largest wheat mills in Syria: "When the director of the mills threatened to leave due to repeated disputes with various powerful actors in the city, the revolutionary council created a team of volunteers to shadow the mills' technicians and engineers and gain the necessary skills to operate the mills independently and avoid a possible starvation of the population in the event the director or the employees decided to leave." (Munif 2020, 139) Second, civil servants often continued to work in their fields such as water and electricity and hence ensured the continuation of the most basic services; and third, professionals of all realms contributed in their fields to the functioning of the councils, such as professional accountants in the Yabroud council, doctors and nurses in the numerous medical offices of the East Ghouta councils (Angelova 2014), or teachers in the education offices etc. (Aljundi 2014). Overall, people drew on their pre-existing competencies and invested them into self-organization. For instance, in Douma (city north of Damascus in the Ghouta region) "the members are elected in different categories according to their expertise" (e.g. Turkmani et al. 2015, 36) and likewise in Darayya, south of Damascus, "(t)he medical care office started off as a group of doctors and nurses and humanitarian aid activists" (Darayya LC 2014f.). The level of satisfaction with the councils' work was mostly high among the community members (Turkmani et al. 2015, 36) and despite the deprofessionalized character, the councils displayed a high level of commitment "to its need for justice and accountability" (Angelova 2014, 7). Some authors argue from a somewhat elitist perspective that "the participation of the middle class" was a decisive factor in that by "boost(ing) the respectability" of the council and by "ensur(ing) a minimum level of professionalism and competency in the administration (…) and in the interaction with the outside world." (HD 2014, 13) This may well be true for some councils, such as the one in Manbij, where "the majority had a university education and came from middle-class families. (…) Members included lawyers, engineers, doctors, and teachers, in addition to a few Muslim scholars." (Munif 2020, 146) But in other cases, the participants in council work came from all walks of society. Al-Kayial points out that "in the course of the uprising, we observed that young people from poorer strata became more present and started playing their roles in the council." (Al-Kayial, interview, August 2020). Contrary to what the authors of HD 2014 insinuate, the respectability of councils was not frequently challenged, but rather established through the respectability of the individuals involved, rather than relying solely on the supposed respectability of formalized procedures.

Where observers disapprove of the councils' 'unprofessionalism', council theory helps to reframe it as democratic achievement: if general participation, the widening of agency and learning processes are desirable, the notion of 'politics' becomes radically de-professionalized: "politics as a distinct profession linked to the state apparatus (is eliminate[d])" (Dubigeon 2019, 264). At the same time, society becomes politicized: "What is here at stake is the 'deprofessionalization' of politics, the abolition of politics as a special and separate sphere of activity and skill, and, conversely,

the universal *politicization* of society, which means just that: the business of society is, in act and not in words, everybody's business." (Castoriadis 1993b [1961-1979], 261) This necessarily implies a refutation of political parties and leaders (Arendt 1963, 265; Pannekoek 1936; Barwich 2007 [1920], 443ff.; Bookchin 1999, 185).

Discontent regarding the work of the councils usually stemmed from two sources. In some cases, the dominance of influential families in the locality or region was evident within the councils. This situation was occasionally, unproblematic, as long as the council's performance effectively addressed the community's issues. However, there were instances when such dominance also led to criticism and necessitated the reconstitution of the councils, depending upon the power relations on the ground. Further discontent stemmed from councils' dissatisfying performance and in these cases, certainly, a lack of professional personnel was a contributing factor that garnered criticism, ont only from an ultra-professionalist NGO-perspective, but also from leftist observers who problematized "the need for particular professional and technical skills" (Fisher & Majasent 2018). However, in order to assess the councils' achievements in terms of agency and empowerment, I would argue for emphasizing the fact that, on the whole, agency was actively promoted and cultivated through and around the councils. This resulted in empowering people on the ground to varying degrees, enabling them to effectively manage their everyday lives.. This positive picture is certainly tainted with regards to the participation of **women**: Lama Kannout's in-depth study about women's participation suggests women were nearly absent from official positions on the councils, but did hold a presence in the lower executive branches (Kannout 2017, 50ff.). Saleh maintains that councils were nevertheless spaces in which a new sense of "inclusiveness" was fostered, for instance in terms of gender when men came to realize that they could work alongside women in the councils (Saleh 2018, 144). As of 2016, women did work for the councils, albeit hardly in decision making functions and mostly in executive functions in fields of care work, such as education, health, and relief. This is consistent with observations by others since the beginning (Aljundi 2014, 12, 23; Hajjar et al. 2017, 0). In Barzah, women were especially present in the organization of demonstrations and in relief work, but, notably, the female head of the school put herself in charge in coordination with the council for continuing to run the school (Al-Kayial, interview, February 2019). Hajjar et al. attribute the impediments for women's integration less to the local councils per se than to the reluctance of society to support their participation, especially in context where Islamist groups had a strong presence (2017, 11; e.g. Aljundi 2014, 30 regarding Al-Raqqah; Heller 2016, 6 regarding Idlib). Notwithstanding the general reality that gender equality in Syrian society both before and after the uprising is far from achieved, and that sometimes pathetic prejudice against women prevails (Hajjar et al. 2017, 11), it is plausible to assume that the uprising created spaces for cross-gender cooperation in councils, increased womens' visibility, but these spaces were subsequently diminished, notably due to the rise of Islamism (Daher 2019, 137f.). At least for the first months or even first year or two, anecdotes show that in certain localities women did play both important background and visible roles. This is certainly the case for Darayya, where women were particularly involved in establishing a widely recognized newspaper (Ayoub 2019, 15ff.; "Enab Baladi" 2020), and for the southern city of Deraa where a women's group "helped establish the council" in the first place and a woman was member of the Civil defense office (Aljundi 2014, 26). In contrast to the councils' obvious impetus to deprofessionalize, a dynamic of **re-professionalization** took shape over the years in correlation with the increasing influence of NGOs and foreign aid. In most reports, NGOs promoted 'capacity building' in a top-down way: "Priorities should be established in consultancy with (…) the Governorate Councils" – instead of prioritizing what councils on the ground would articulate themselves as needing. (HD 2014, 27) HD for instance

suggested that "a trainer for trainees at the level of governorate councils would be the most appropriate approach." (ibid.) By 2015, the authors of LACU & NPA were likewise promoting capacity-building trainings, defining them as "top priority" despite their own repeated observation that councils members themselves argued that these trainings were of little value to their work on the ground (LACU & NPA 2015, 4; 10; 11). The latter study was especially concerned with suggesting professionalized selection criteria and training first and foremost in accounting – a field of importance for donors who expect correct handling of granted financial resources. (LACU & NPA 2015, 14). By 2017, professional background was defined as highly important in terms of selection criteria and councils are reported to focus increasingly on "technical expertise" (Hajjar et al. 2017, 8; 10) of potential members: "For most posts in the Executive Bureaus, a high school degree is required, while the president must have a university degree." (Hajjar et al. 2017, 10) Sami Al-Kayial rejected this concentration on formal qualification as counter to the ethos of councils: "The NGO-ist vision of the local councils is paranoid[26]: They want a council in which people go to work, take trainings, receive their wages, have their defined tasks, they have their diplomas." The vision of council work that they, by contrast, aimed at in Barzah "was designed as a voluntary and non-paid social work, not as a profession. And the idea that a formal qualification such as a diploma was needed to participate in the councils was the opposite of our idea." (Al-Kayial, interview, August 2020) Trust and interpersonal relations were supposed to be foregrounded and increasing agency was supposed to outweigh bureaucratization: councils "would gradually evolve from personal-social relations between humans based on trust into a form of democratically elected organization that would remain based on social relations instead of bureaucratic ones. The basis would be an increasing level of organization by the means of elections and on the basis of the growing capacity of the society (…) and with the accountability towards the people." (Al-Kayial, interview, August 2020) Even though this did ultimately not materialize, the unbureaucratic impetus of councils that Sami describes was clearly existent.

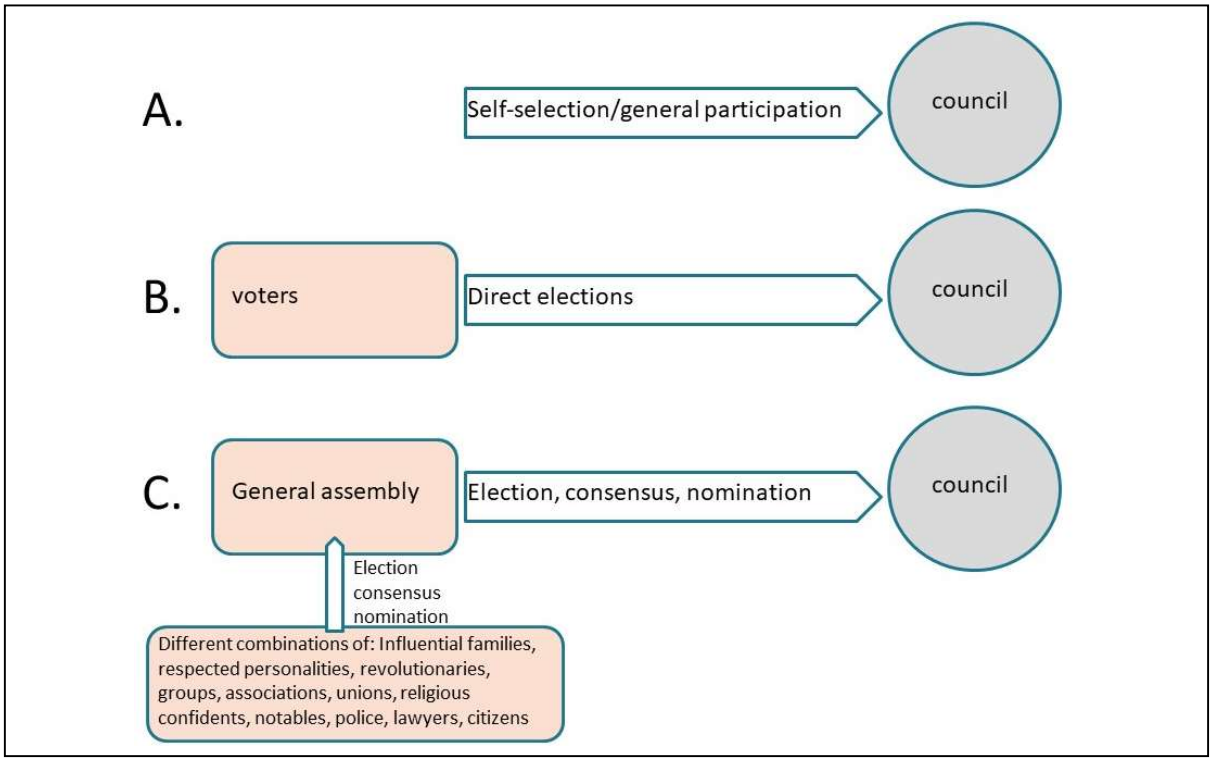
It appears that the pressure put on councils towards re-professionalizing played a role in undermining their broader agency and also eroding general participation over time. A sort of consumerist attitude towards the councils shines through in the NGO reports whenever observers recount the dissatisfaction of communities with their councils' performance regarding service provision. This suggests that people apparently sometimes viewed councils primarily as service providers rather than perceiving them as 'their own' councils that they 'themselves' establish and sustain. It is difficult to say whether this dynamic can exclusively be blamed on the pressure exerted by NGOs and by the higher opposition bodies or also on people's passivity and councils' hindrance of broader participation. Regarding the latter, Munif recounts that Manbij's council "made a serious political mistake by excluding a large section of the population. Their minimalist definition of who qualified as "revolutionary" was polarizing. Many in Manbij were insulted by their exclusion from the council" (Munif 2020, 151). Be that as it may, strategies of cultivating such a sense of ownership and thereby eroding – preexisting or emerging - consumerist attitudes towards councils are aspects that deserve attention and the example of Darayya's neighborhood committees are certainly a good example for a successful approach in that regard.

[26] 'Paranoid' in the sense intended by Deleuze & Guattari, meaning here that NGOs aim at upholding division and order. "For Deleuze and Guattari, paranoia and schizophrenia describe the competing tendencies to both conformity and quasi-individuality that mark the capitalist subject, torn as it is between the paranoid investment in maintaining capitalist productive mechanisms and the social institutions that support them, craving order, meaning, and stability; and the schizoid pressure to apprehend one's self as a consumer and micro-capitalist entrepreneur, craving change, flux, and creative destruction." (Paradis 2007, 32)

7.1.2 Self-organization versus representation: ambiguities of assemblies and elections

The question as to who qualifies for participation in the councils, and in what manner, manifests itself in the modalities with which the councils were constituted. The literature has made only minor attempts to understand more systematically the different procedures of both elections and assemblies, how they are linked and what they imply in terms of democratic agency. The figure below visualizes three different mechanisms for constituting local councils that could be identified from the material.

Figure 41: Different mechanisms for constituting local councils



Note: Source: A.W. based on studies and interviews cited in this chapter.

From a conventional democratic perspective one might expect that there would have been a more or less linear evolution from pragmatic *ad-hoc* mechanisms – such as self-selection and no public elections – towards more formalized and unified procedures aimed at public, general elections. Such a linear evolution did not occur, however, but rather flexibility and experimentation with procedures prevailed over years, much to the discontent of NGOs, which sought to establish representative mechanisms but deplore the existence of only "quasi-democratic representation" (HD 2014, 21). The persistent predominance of a strongly decentralized nature in councils, much to the dissatisfaction of NGOs and opposition bodies, has resulted in a significant heterogeneity regarding the mechanisms of council constitution, duration, and eligibility as of 2015 (LACU & NPA 2015, 17).Two years later still, modalities differed from council to council and even within single councils according to context and priorities and hardly any codification of procedures were found. Elections, if they took place at all, were set according to perceived need rather than on set dates. Electoral procedures were sometimes "public, but informal", sometimes secret, especially if publicity of elections posed a threat, since the regime targeted localities and voting queues (Hajjar et al. 2017, 9ff.); sometimes there were no elections at all, as in Barzah, but rather self-selection and

invitation to participate (A. in the figure) – the female head of the school mentioned above is an example for how people joined the council framework in self-initiative (Al-Kayial, interview, February 2019). As of 2014 the supposedly "fully democratic model" with "direct elections by all citizens" was the rarest model (B. in the figure) (HD 2014, 21), whereas representation of families through nomination, or self-selection of members or consensus among an initial general assembly was perceived as the dominant model (C. in the figure) (HD 2014, 21; Naisse 2013; LACU & NPA 2015, 17). Especially the initial constitution of councils happened on the basis of general assemblies whereby the latter could be composed of influential families (Naisse 2013 on Idlib region), respected personalities, revolutionaries (Munif 2020 on Manbij), groups, associations and unions of a mix of religious or secular confidants (Aljundi 2014, 27), police, notables, relief organizations, LCC members, lawyers, media persons etc. (Hajjar et al. 2017, 9) Such general assemblies then came together to elect and select the executive offices of the councils (C. in the figure): As of 2016/17 "the pattern that can be observed mostly is that influential individuals from the communities nominate persons to the General Assembly who then (s)elect the Executive Bureau in a gathering." (Hajjar et al. 2017, 8)

The concept of "representation" varied significantly, exhibiting clear heterogeneity. In some cases, representation sought to encompass influential families (Naisse 2013), while in others, it aimed to represent "groups and unions in the city" (regarding Deraa, Aljundi 2014 27), or specific neighborhoods. In the case of Manbij the once-established Councils of the Trustees of the Revolution (a sort of legislative arm of the local council that added to the councils, see below) invited further participants (Munif 2020, 150). Mostly, though, councils sometimes tried to ensure a certain 'representativeness' with regards to geography and less with regards to political leanings or interests. This was the case for the Deraa provincial council (Aljundi 2014, 25) and also in Manbij where the council "was composed of the representatives of the different neighborhood committees, who were active members of the community prior to the revolution and had a vast network of contacts." (Munif 2020, 147) Representation based on geography existed in Darayya, too, but in a framework of multiple mechanisms of delegation and representation. Here, the office of neighborhood committees divided the city into twenty-four geographic sectors based on the main streets and on the distribution of residents therein so that every sector formed an independent neighborhood unit. Each sector had one representative and a structure in which several people had specific responsibilities. (Darayya LC 2014m). This structure existed in parallel to other electoral procedures with which the overall council was composed. Hence, there are overlapping structures bearing councils within the council (neighborhood councils additionally to the umbrella council) without subordinating the former under the latter, but by rather letting them function in a self-reliant way. Similarly, in Zamalka, delegates and representatives were chosen based on geography and were supposed to act as messengers from bottom to top and top to bottom – an example which is very close to the models imagined by council theorists and reminiscent of the Paris Commune: "The city is divided into fourteen committees and every committee is responsible for approximately 150-200 families." These committees "and leaders work as intermediaries, conveying citizens' messages to the [council] and distributing information from the council to the communities" in a two-way direction. However, this delegation/messenger mechanism is not clearly an imperative mandate, because delegates are not sent to councils with decisions taken in the communities, but rather as messengers and a sort of scouts. Likewise, in the town of Nawa, the city "is divided into fifteen suburbs, with an average of 300 to 400 families per suburb, each has a suburb committee and a suburb head, who is responsible for meeting with the respective families, exploring their needs and feeding them back to the [council]" (Hajjar et al. 2017, 17). Apart from this dominant model of delegation and

representation based on neighborhoods, a mixed model of representation based on locality and groups occurred in Al-Raqqah's provincial council: "activists and well-known local residents" organized "a meeting of delegates from the city and its suburbs" who then "selected an executive committee" that organized a sort of general assembly in order to establish the council (Aljundi 2014, 27). Tellingly, it is the rather typical representative procedure in which different organized "associations" nominate representatives that was accepted by the Ministry of Local Administration "as an official substitute for the general elections" (LACU & NPA 2015, 17) thereby strengthening the eventual return to representative procedures instead of alternative ones.

Alongside the electoral procedures, it is interesting to look at the various kinds of 'assemblies' that occurred in the Syrian council landscape and that I suggest classifying in the following way.

A. Constitutive assemblies: larger assemblies often took place which voted for the council members directly or for a sort of commission that consisted of trustworthy persons and was tasked with nominating or electing council members (Hajjar et al. 2017, 9). Remarkably, this practice of 'general assembly' was persistent with several councils up until 2017 and was not necessarily substituted automatically over time by general, public elections even if councils had consolidated (ibid.). Obviously, this is not only undemocratic by minimal democratic standards in the sense that it prevents the larger community in a locality from deciding about the councils' personnel, but it is also undemocratic from a council perspective, because it blocks people from participating in decision-making and implementation within the council. Moreover, and decisively, there is an innate potential threat in that model which undermines the council character. Namely, if the council is elected for a given term without some sort of community assemblies taking place for decision-making, it assumes the character of a quasi-parliament – even if representation is based on geography rather than interest/factions/parties – because it is (even if only for specific periods) detached from the community and decides regardless of the community's views on the specific project. The only approach that could safeguard the essence of council governance, or at least to mitigate the erosion of its foundational moment and agency, would be to keep terms as short as possible in order to allow for at least a sort of revocability of council members (as in Darayya). This seems to have been the dominant model in the Syrian council landscape.
B. Internal assemblies: assemblies serving joint discussion and decision-making often took place *within the councils*. The executive offices are reported to usually meet "once a week to discuss updates and brainstorm on new ideas" and the "overall council meets once a month." (Hajjar et al. 2017, 8). Likewise, in the provincial council of Yabroud "monthly meetings of the council" took place where current and planned work was discussed (Aljundi 2014, 21); in Darayya a general assembly of the whole council occurred every second month (Darayya LC 2014c, §10 A 3). This fact arguably renders the councils closer to parliaments. Once elected, they are the spaces in which discussion and decision-making take place internally, and, moreover, they report to council presidents or "division heads" "for final approval" rather than back towards the community at the bottom (Aljundi 2014, 17) – whereas it is often unclear whether the presidents have the final say or rather assume coordinative tasks. In this model, it seems that the constituent moment is somewhat blocked, because decisions are negotiated in a way detached from the bottom. In this case, we have to conclude that councils rather lacked one of the decisive characteristics of councils, namely that they are an expression of people's self-management *by the people, for the people*. Confining the constituent moment, that plays out in assemblies, to the one-time

constitution of the council, evidently bears the risk of blocking people's agency and their participation in decision-making, which then becomes reduced to periodical voting, at best.

C. Assembly as plenary: some instances of assemblies as *recurring* decision-making bodies existed for instance in the early phase of the council in Barzah, but also only among those who took part in the councils, not on the level of the community as a whole. Sami Al-Kayial explains that "(e)very day we met and discussed and decided what to do and how to organize", while there was no president or other hierarchy (Al-Kayial, interview, August 2020). A parallel structure of continuously recurring assembly plus executive existed (at least in a rudimentary way) wherever councils tied their decision-making processes to recurring assemblies or where they had at least mechanisms of delegation in order to base their decisions on the impulses, opinions and preferences of the people.
D. Assembly as (public) consultation: the study by Hajjar et al. (2017, 17) gives several examples of different forms of public gatherings and consultation processes. In Zamalka (rural Idlib), a "general assembly" was held quarterly in public spaces and in Ma'aret al-Numan (rural Ghouta) "public outreach and consultation meetings" took place regularly where participants were able to articulate concerns and needs and at the same time were regularly informed by the council about the activities. Such consultation meetings were observed in 2017 as being held quite often, but sometimes limited to "powerful elites or specialists" (ibid.). Whereas such consultation mechanisms point to a notion of accountability towards the community rather than towards elected presidents or heads, these assemblies appear more similar to a hearing than to a decision-making body.
E. Delegation and feedback mechanisms instead of assembly: It appears that feedback mechanisms through delegates, observed in several towns, supplement the notion of assembly or compensate for lacking assemblies. In Zamalka, neighborhood delegates act as messengers from bottom to top and top to bottom: "The city is divided into fourteen neighborhood committees and every committee is responsible for approximately 150-200 families." These committees "and leaders work as intermediaries, conveying citizens' messages to the [council] and distributing information from the council to the communities" in a two-way direction. That delegation mechanism does not live up to the standards of an imperative mandate, because delegates are not sent to councils with decisions taken in the communities, but rather as messengers and a sort of scouts: In the town of Nawa, the city "is divided into fifteen suburbs, with an average of 300 to 400 families per suburb. Each has a suburb committee and a suburb head, who is responsible for meeting with the respective families, exploring their needs and feeding them back to the [council]" (Hajjar et al. 2017, 17).

These different approaches to assemblies within councils and/or for their founding ('constitution') raise questions for council theory that will be discussed in the following.

7.1.3 Assemblies, elections and the moment of constituent power in the local councils

Assemblies are a central aspect in Murray Bookchin's municipalist vision of councils. Ideally, in this view, assemblies take place whenever local communities are affected by a necessary decision. They are the very space of 'the political' and hence of a truly democratic self-governance (2008, 24). Indeed, recurring assemblies are the central mechanism for sustaining the 'constituent moment' that Castoriadis emphasized so vehemently. For him, the openness of a governance framework, the permanent possibility for changing it is the most central criterion for council democracy

and councils themselves must remain open to changes: "The content of the revolutionary project can only be the aim of a society that has become capable of perpetual renewal of its institutions. Post-revolutionary society will not simply be a self-managed society; it will be a society that self-institutes itself explicitly, not once and for all, but continuously." (Castoriadis 1988a [1946-1955], 31) This has been interpreted and highlighted recently as a quest by Castoriadis for saving the revolutionary moment or 'constituent power' within an institutional framework – namely councils – that does not stifle the direct democratic experience of revolution but preserves it into the post-revolutionary period: the wit of councils lies in their ability "to bridge the antagonistic gap between constituent power and political form" (Popp-Madsen 2021, 59; 36). In that way, people are enabled to question the 'constitution' without becoming an 'enemy of the constitution'. In fact, Castoriadis' theme of the necessity of a "perpetual renewal of (…) institutions" in a true democracy is remindful of Karl Korsch's insistence that Marx referred positively to the "relatively undeveloped and indeterminate" form of the Paris Commune (Korsch 1929; emphasis in original). If for Marx the Paris Commune was "the political form discovered at last" for the emancipation of the proletariat, the councils for Castoriadis are the institutional form discovered at last allowing for both the self-government of society ("social organization") and for the safeguarding of constituent democracy by continuously remaining open to changes. In the wording of constituent/constituted politics, the imperative mandate has the underlying meaning of "a perennial 'against'", a permanent antagonism to the emergence of an independent state-like formation, by ever "drawing back the instituted/constituted to its instituting/constituent moment" through discussion, delegation, possible recall (Mazzocchi 2019, 282f., emphasis A. W.).

The emphasis on agency that all council thinkers share without exception (Dubigeon 2019, 261) positions council democracy as antithetical to representative, liberal democracy. In fact, the positive recognition of agency arises from a critical assessment of the absence of agency in current democratic systems. Castoriadis calls it "political mystification" when democracy is identified with representation (1993b [1961-1979], 261). The ground assumption is that representative democracy is "not incidentally and accidentally deficient", but systematically, because the "procedures of representative democracy (…) keep the majority of the people out of reach from participating in decision-making" (Demirović 2009, 183, translation A.W.). Arendt expresses clear disdain for representation (Arendt 1963, 268f., 248), a sentiment shared by council communists (Pannekoek 1936) and anarchists alike (Mühsam 1912). Since voting for representative rulers in periodic elections entirely misses the point of politics according to Arendt, representation must be replaced by participation which, as a consequence, "will spell the end of general suffrage as we understand it today" (Arendt 1963, 297). Indeed, Hoffrogge (2019, 209) clarifies that the abolishment of voting rights does not amount to democratic deficit, but that it is "the entire political point of workers' councils" and of councils in general. However, when going through the history of council revolutions, one cannot but realize that elections in one form or the other did take place more often than not, as they did in Syria too.To the best of my knowledge, the specific role that elections are meant to fulfill has not been systematically explored. Regarding the Paris Commune, Marx recognized that the elections that did take place in the communal framework assumed a different *character*: "The general suffrage, till now abused either for the parliamentary sanction of the Holy State Power, or a play in the hands of the ruling classes, only employed by the people to sanction (choose the instruments of) parliamentary class rule once in many years, [is] adapted to its real purposes, to choose by the Communes their own functionaries of administration and initiation." (Marx 1871b) Arendt gives a similar hint, emphasizing "a criterion of qualification" which revolves around the integrity and trust of those elected (Arendt 1958a, 31) instead of aiming at the representation of

interests and factions. On a practical level, the search for alternatives to representation in favor of more agency has been translated into the idea of an 'imperative mandate': Representation is substituted by delegation based on "a double principle of trust and permanent control", of immediate accountability and the possibility of recalling delegates at any time (Dubigeon 2019, 261; Popp-Madsen 2021, 68; Azzellini 2018, 232; Marx 1871a). Delegates in that sense can never decide independently, neither based on the discipline of a faction nor on the basis of their conscience (Müsham 2007 [1930], 489). Representation is then not an abstract representation of a community for a certain period and 'its' imagined collective will – along the lines of the typical post-election phrase 'the voter has decided' – but the representation of a decision about an issue.[27]

Regarding the different elections that took place in Syrian councils, it appears that the *purpose* of elections (much more than the electoral procedures, that are secondary) is the decisive lever to either undermine or safeguard the constituent character of the councils. As soon as elections are not project-bound, but rather time-bound, they transfer sovereignty to an elected person or group who immediately absorbs the agency of the voters for a certain time. This problem is only mitigated slightly by the fact that elections were for the most part not based on representing interest groups, but rather on geography.

Whereas the HD report (2014) interprets the councils' electoral models as "extremely fragile", they could also be interpreted as aiming at rotation through short terms which would serve the constituent moment. As of 2015, terms of office were "on average (…) nearly one year" (LACU & NPA 2015, 18) and often even shorter, such as in Deraa in 2013/14 (Aljundi 2014, 25). These short terms were less "implemented according to a fixed law", but rather flexibly. Sometimes destabilizing factors (competing actors) forced the councils to reshuffle (LACU & NPA 2015, 18) so that in some instances councils reconstituted themselves several times. However, sometimes the dissatisfaction of the community with the councils' performance was determining for ending the council's term and reconstituting it or communities simply foresaw short terms as a good idea at that time (Aljundi 2014, 25). In the Darayya local council, shortness of terms – six months - was foreseen by their constitution (Darayya LC 2014c, §19B). This is indicative that councils upheld the moment of constituent power. Apart from the shortness of terms, the Darayya local councils had other mechanisms that point to councils as institutions that tend to sustain constituent power. For instance, the executive bureau must succeed in a confidence vote through the legislative body after half of the term (§19B) and revocability was institutionalized in the form of a no-confidence vote against the president and vice-president which is initiated by half of the executive members or one third of the legislative members (§14A). NGO reports misrecognize such aspects of constituent power as flaws from their usual donor/governance-perspective: "Most local councils hold 'elections' every three to six, and the reason given for these short terms of office was that it offered an opportune chance to get rid of officials who were not performing as well as they should." By mistakenly overlooking learning processes as an integral part of an alternative democratic experiment, they implicitly advocate for bypassing constituent moments. Instead, they demand greater authority from above and condescendingly deride the councils, suggesting that t "popular sovereignty is not properly understood" by the councils (HD 2014, 22f.): "With no arbiter to settle disputes (…), every election can be a potential constitutional crisis that leads to months of deadlock. The constant cycle of restructuring, coupled with a lack of experience, sometimes creates

[27] This set of principles – delegation cum imperative mandate and revocability/recall is sometimes even as the essence of councils as such (e.g. Wollner 2018, 81). I suggest, however, that it is really only an organizational operationalization, a procedural, institutional expression of agency.

bizarre political arrangements that would flummox even the most experienced constitutional lawyer." (ibid.) The cited report is valuable for grasping how the entrapment in reduced models of democracy leaves behind puzzlement. Indeed, communities primarily assessed the legitimacy of their councils based on performance rather than electoral procedures: "'the community cares more about the quality of provided services rather than the style of elections'" and was not necessarily discontent with 'only' consultative election processes as long as the outcome was "acceptable" (Hajjar et al. 2017, 9f.). Instead of focusing on electoral procedures in order to achieve legitimacy and accountability, councils resorted to mechanisms such as short terms in addition to efforts towards good practices, especially transparency and accessibility and the explicit desire for mechanisms of "popular control" (Hajjar et al. 2017, 18; 21; 29; Aljundi 2014, 29). While the study by Hajjar et al. contends that this type of legitimacy based on performance is contrary to a notion of legitimacy based "on popular sovereignty", council theory teaches us that the two are not at all opposite. To the contrary: popular sovereignty is continuously re-asserted through the reconstitution of councils if their performance is judged to be unsatisfactory. In their fixation with the electoral procedures of representative democracies, the authors struggle with their interviewee's perspective who, in fact, "felt represented by the selected members through the fact that they were from their communities and thus seen as bearing responsibilities vis-à-vis them." – as if representation of common community background was either democratically less worth than representation of 'interests' through parties or not even thinkable. Hence, they somewhat marvel at their interviewee's opinion that indeed "'the council is a reflection of the community'" (Hajjar et al. 2017, 10).

Apparently, councils often manifested a direct democratic impulse that challenged the mode of representation (and hence the alienation from agency), on the basis of assemblies, activation of participation, and sometimes delegation mechanisms. However, the way in which councils used assemblies more often narrowed down agency where it had been enabled in the first place. As a result, the constituent moment that would play out in (recurring) assemblies was in many cases limited to an initial constitution and/or forced reconstitution.

7.2 Councils as institutions of a stateless democracy

> *The councils were not an attempt to 'fill the void' as some see it, but to create a new field for activity and a social spirit. This amounts to the transcending of 'void' and of the matrix of domination instead of filling it anew. (Al-Kayial 2014)*

The notion that councils were seen as a clear alternative to a statist democracy was highlighted by anarchist memory workers, but it was never unchallenged among Syrians and was, indeed, a perspective shared by only a minority of revolutionaries – a constellation that is not unusual in council revolutions.[28] Sami Al-Kayial clearly identifies two different understandings of the councils: on the

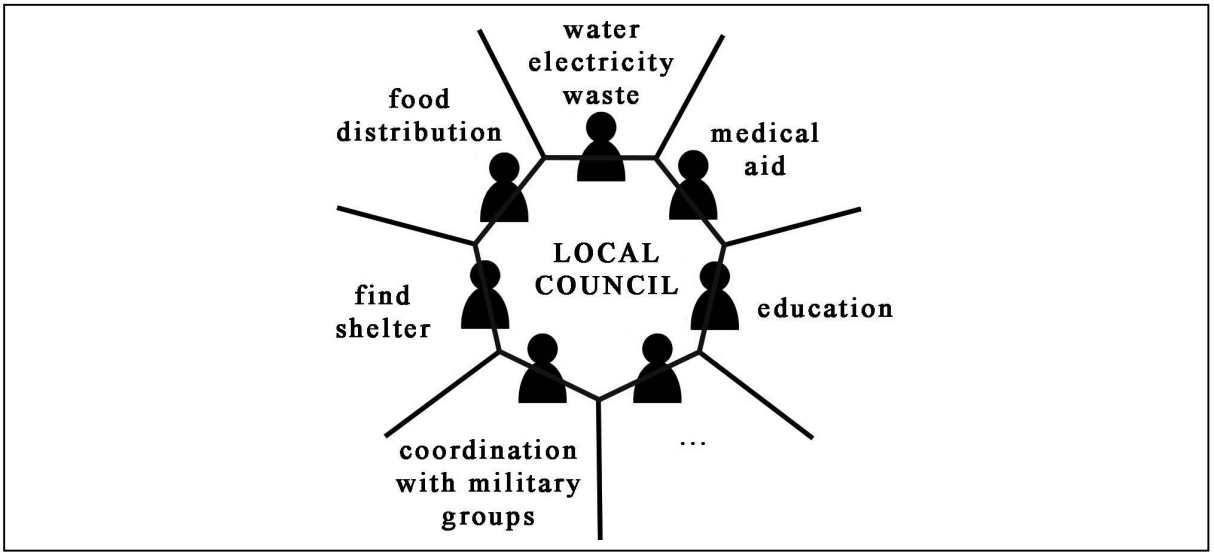
[28] It has been described by several authors that actors within council revolution are oftentimes not aware of the councils' antithetical character to representative democracy and the state. The great number of anecdotal descriptions and reflections, sometimes indeed tragic-comical, suggests that while turning the social order upside down by deeds people know not what they do (Kropotkin 1971 [1906/1891]; Bakunin 1971 [1871], 13; Barwich 2007 [1920], 436; Däumig 2007 [1920], 353; Müller 2007 [1919], 377; Sender 2007 [1919], 396; Korsch 1921). While the empirical material of this research does not serve to explore this issue further, I suggest that this manifests a crunchpoint for council revolutions that could be discussed under the notion of a psychological entrapment in statist, representative democratic ideology (see also Pannekoek 1946, VI).

one hand, the more radical perspective that he shared with Omar Aziz in which "the local councils were a categorical critique of any future state" and on the other hand, the perspective that saw "the councils as part of a new state to come": Whereas the proponents of the latter position "demanded the fall of the regime and the establishment of a new government, we wanted the fall of the regime, but we were not interested in a new government. We were instead interested in the creation of a society that would be able to organize itself" (Al-Kayial, interview 2020). The term 'majlis mahally' was compatible with both understandings and could be adapted for a categorical critique of the state as well as for the understanding of a simple 'idara mahalliya' in the sense of 'Kommunalverwaltungen'/'municipalities'. Most NGO reports ignore these two different outlooks; only few – being aware of Aziz' interpretation and theorization of the councils – grasped that "(t)he thinking behind the idea of the local councils was that the revolutionary society would organize itself independently of the state. These self-managed local councils would serve as local alternatives to the state, with the primary objective of protecting the population rather than controlling the territory." (Faviér 2016, 7; also Carpi & Glioti 2018). Whereas Al-Kayial tends to emphasize the need for a clear demarcation between the two different understandings, suggesting that the majority of councils, which did not consciously and explicitly understand themselves as a negation of the state, were not true councils at all, I suggest that we examine councils' practices rather than solely focusing on their (un)conscious self-perception. The ways in which they functioned can hardly be grasped by the conventional vocabulary of representative democracy – they were essentially different from it through their practice, as diverse as their practices and as state-affirmative as their 'ideological' perspective may have been at times. The following subchapters reconstruct how local councils have practically challenged representative, statist democracy in different aspects.

7.2.1 De- and re-constructing the separation of powers

There is heterogeneity and variation among councils and similarities at the same time across regions and localities (e.g. Angelova 2014, 5; 12 comparing the provinces of Aleppo, Idlib and Ghouta). For the most part, "councils typically amount to a central administrative council and a set of specialized executive offices focused on areas like relief and municipal services" (Heller 2016, 7). Usually, there was no parallel decision-making body next to or above this structure.

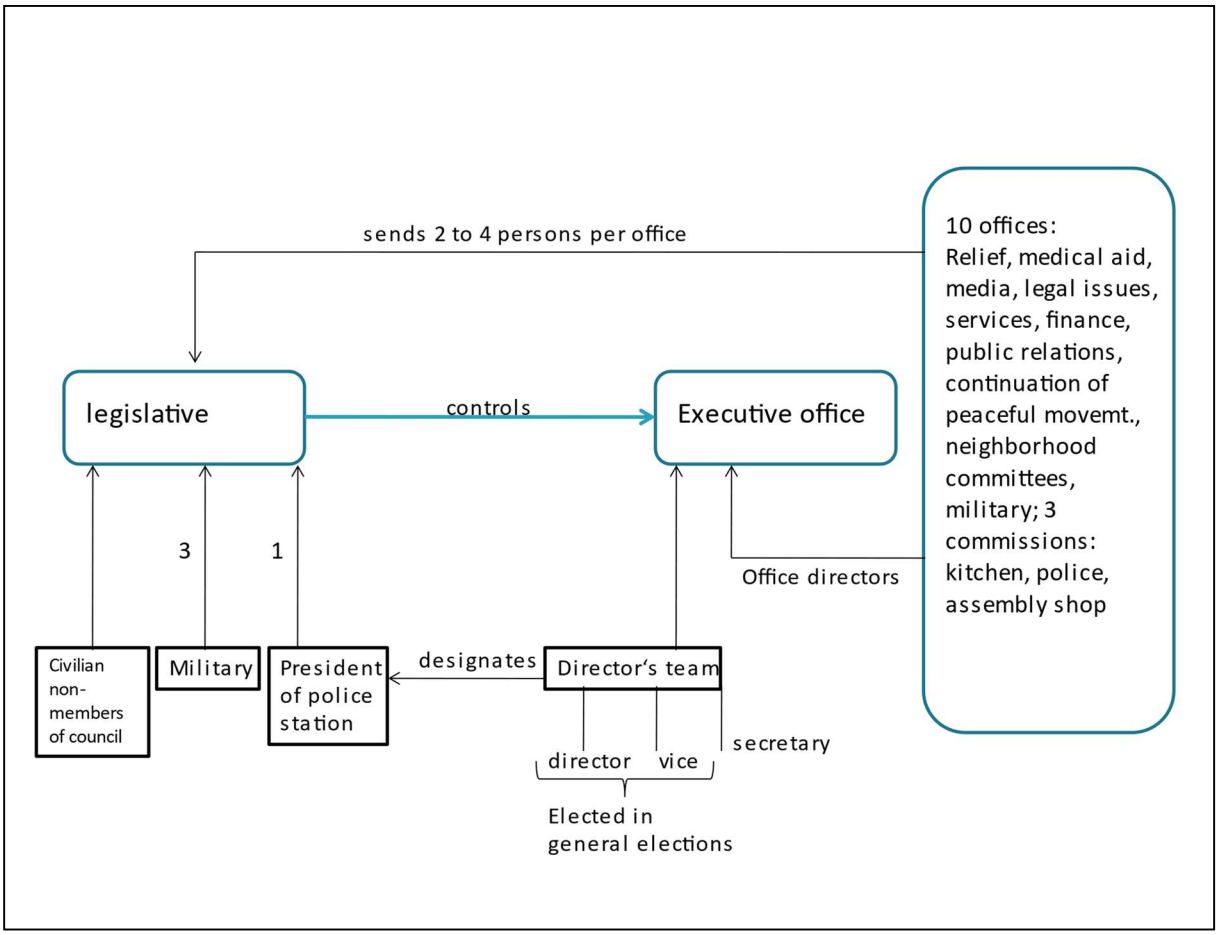
Figure 42: Basic structure of a local council



Note: Source: A.W. based on studies and interviews cited in this chapter.

Hence, this basic model displays a unity of decision-making and implementation. As of 2014, the general structure usually consisted of a version of what Aljundi describes across three regions: "executive offices (that) meet once a week to discuss updates and brainstorm on new ideas while the overall council meets once a month"; specialists were an organic part of the decision-making processes (Aljundi 2014, 21).[29] This basic structure apparently expanded over time to (in most cases) include a presidency, legal advisors, and oversight committees that assumed coordinating and sometimes controlling functions (Hajjar et al. 2017, 9; also Aljundi 2014 for provincial councils). A council that has reflected this evolution for itself was the one in Darayya: "In its first organizational structure, the Council consisted of ten offices", but it subsequently developed a rather sophisticated structure including a detailed executive branch, a legislative body, a presidency, and a general assembly (Darayya LC 2014b). This raises the question of whether the prevalence of unity of powers can be seen as a sort of primitive, transitional model that is eventually transcended in favor of a clear re-separation of powers. Overall, I would argue that institutional development took place, but the gravitational center of councils always remained in the executive branch. A good example is Darayya itself, whose organizational chart can be drawn as follows based on the written constitution that they elaborated around two years after having establische the basicestablished the basic structure. (Darayya LC 2014c).

Figure 43: Separation of powers in the local council of Darayya



Note: Source A.W. based on Darayya LC 2014c.

[29] This is remarkably similar to the vision of councils that was cultivated in the late 19th century among anarchists, notably in Spain: "Die lokalen Räte werden sich in die für notwendig erachteten Kommissionen teilen, solche für Verteidigung, Unterhalt, Verwaltung, Arbeit, Unterricht (…)" (Comarcalkonferenzen 1876, 8. Maßnahme, Bakunin quoted in Nettlau 1996 [1931]a, 110)

At first glance, there appears to be a clear separation of legislative and executive branches. However, upon closer examination, it becomes evident that the model actually resembles a fusion or unity of powers. The constitution clearly affirms: "The Executive Office is the main decision-making branch in the Council", and it is "the reference for making decisions regarding everything that is not stipulated in the bylaws." (Darayya LC 2014c, §4 and §4j) This is affirmed at other points of the description of the council (Darayya LC 2014a). The legislative body, for its part, apart from other tasks such as enacting laws, is merely supposed to "supervise the executive" (2014c, §8 A1), however, "without interfering in its work" (2014c, §8 A2). What is more, and this is an interesting point that mirrors the centrality of the executive of the council, the legislative is composed, amongst others, of members of the 10 single offices of the executive office structure: "The composition of the legislative body shall be as follows: (…) there will be two seats for each office whose number of members (…) is less than fifteen, and three seats for each office whose number (…) ranges between sixteen and thirty-five members, and four seats for each office whose number of members (…) is more than 35 members." (Darayya LC 2014c, §1e) The local council's website is a reflection of the significance of everything that happened within the nine offices and the committees as the description of each office as well as the documentation of its activities takes most of the space and portrays the offices as the relevant spaces where the council work actually takes place.

Some accounts hold that the councils act as intermediaries and coordinating bodies by, so to say, outsourcing the implementation rather than implementing themselves (HD 2014, 15; Faviér 2016, 12). In my interpretation, the delegation of decision implementation to individuals outside the council personnel does not fundamentally undermine the concept of the unity of powers. This would only be the case if the councils were dominated by a superior decision-making body, which they were clearly not (with the exception of the double structure in Manbij, see below). Moreover, which fields precisely were outsourced varied across localities and even within councils over time (ibid.) so that both the scope and content of tasks that were decided upon and implemented were quite flexible and subject to people's re-considerations in accordance with perceived necessities – an indicator that constituent power remained operative. An example illustrating the unity of decision-making and implementation, or coordination of implementation, is the office for relief within the Darayya local council f: its activity was "based on the principle of decentralization, distributing the tasks among those who are directly responsible" for dealing with different aspects: the execution of the tasks, managing the material depots, the packaging of food supplies, calculations and financing and rents, logistics, and supervising (Darayya LC 2014e).

Apart from the model by which the legislative and executive branches are fused, there is one description of a separation of legislative and executive that was established in reaction to people's discontent with exclusionary politics of the council (over the question of the revolutionary record of council members): "To regain its legitimacy after numerous setbacks, the [local council] decided to create a Council of the Trustees of the Revolution (CTR), a legislative formation of 600 residents who had a reputation as revolutionaries. (…) The council had weekly meetings to discuss issues proposed by the members. The CTR made all the important decisions, such as raising the price of bread (the RC controlled an important mill and grain silos in Manbij) and the creation of a police force in the city, while the R[evolutionary] C[ouncil] implemented these resolutions." (Munif 2020, 150) Accessibility to the legislative CTR was 'gatekept' by the CTR itself who – once established in a General Assembly – expanded its composition by inviting people to join.

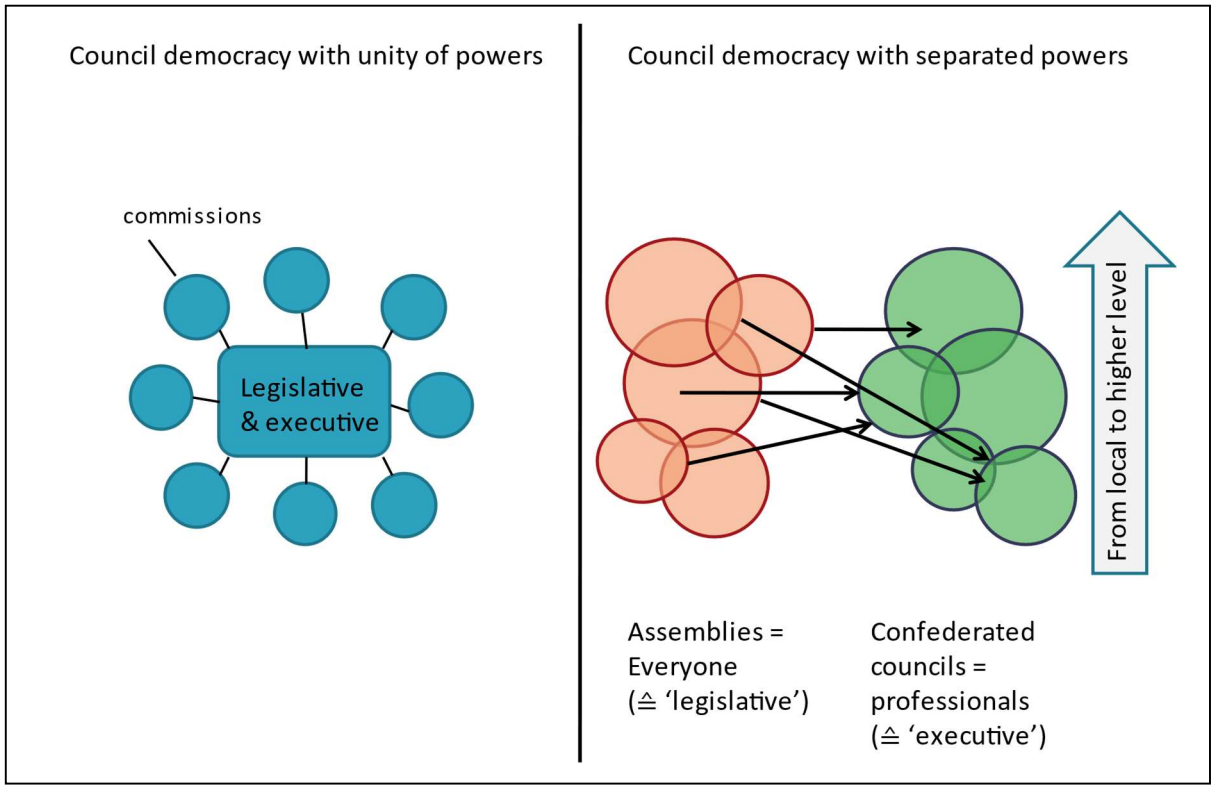
These empirical insights offer some substance for theoretical considerations about the un/re-separation of powers. On the one hand, Marx' phrase that the Paris Commune was "executive and legislative at the same time" (1871a) builds the kernel of the conclusion that the communal/council

model is "the political form at last discovered under which to work out" a future social order (Marx 1871a). Despite this, the actual functioning of governance within a council framework has been relatively underexplored. On the level of agency, this has been somewhat reflected (general participation, broadest agency possible), but not on the level of institutions and mechanisms: council thinkers have promoted an understanding of councils as institutional expression of the unity of the two central aspects of agency, of "deciding and performing" (Pannekoek 1946, I.7), of "knowing and doing" (Arendt 1963, 264). In light of the Paris Commune, Marx stressed that self-government "is the people acting for itself by itself." (Marx 1871b) Pannekoek's (1927) vision of councils implies a unity of the two dimensions. In councils, "(d)emocracy means popular government, people's self-government. The popular masses themselves must administer their own affairs and determine them." (likewise Barwich 2007 [1920], 447) If the separation of these two aspects is refuted, it is consequential to refute the separation of 'powers' in representative democracy into the triad of executive-legislative-judiciary. In a perspective that associates democracy intimately with the broadest possible agency, "the separation of powers [is] an anti-democratic principle" (Demirović 2009, 192)30 Therefore, the abolishment of the legislative-executive-separation and its reorganization is seen as one of "(t)he central institutional features" (Muldoon 2018, 3; Azzellini 2018, 233) and has remained a core motive for council revolutionaries since. However, decision-making as well as implementing decisions are processes that have to assume an institutional form of sorts. The question that arises from the idea to abolish existing separation of powers and to reorganize them is: how precisely is this reorganization imagined institutionally in a council framework? Who is it that decides and who executes? Are they the same people? At least, this is what the notion of a unity of legislation and executive suggests and what is suggested by the Arendtian notion that knowing and doing shall not be parted. Council thinkers have had different, sometimes opposing ideas as to how to reassemble the 'legislative' and the 'executive'. As opposed to the prevailing notion of unity among council thinkers (Pannekoek 1946, I.7; Luxemburg 1918b; see also Muldoon 2021, 140f.), Murray Bookchin is very outspoken about his belief that a clear demarcation between decision-making and executing must be maintained. He deplores "a serious confusion between the formulation of policy and its administration." (Bookchin 1999, 177) and maintains that "policymaking is exclusively the right of popular community assemblies based on the practices of participatory democracy. Administration and coordination are the responsibility of confederal councils" (Bookchin 2015, 75). In this double structure of assemblies and councils, the former assume a legislative character whereas councils are purely executive organs. Such a model would have to be visualized as on the right side of figure 44 in contrast to the one with unity of legislative/executive powers suggested by anarchist and council communist thinkers on the right side (see next page).

Theoretical debates about councils could benefit from revising experiments with council democracy, particularly with regards to how decision-making and implementation are institutionally expressed. Without going into detail, I would like to draw attention to a couple of still ongoing experiences of council democracy that more or less follow the Bookchinian model of a separate structure: in Rojava, North East Syria, the legislative community assemblies operate at different geographical levels, making decisions. Simultaneously, a parallel structure of commissions exists at each level, responsible for coordinating and implementing these decisions within an executive framework. The legislative (communes/councils) elects the executive (the commissions) for a year

30 Demirović meets the objections that are often raised against the abolition of the separation of powers on five levels and from the perspective of council democracy as well as other democratic philosophies based on e.g. Rousseau (Demirović 2009, 192f.).

Figure 44: Simplified models of unity of powers (left side) as opposed to separated powers



Note: Source A.W. based for instance on Bookchin 1999, 2008, 2015; Schuster 2017; Flach et al. 2015; Marx 1871a; and others).

or two. The commissions themselves are open for anyone willing to work in them (see Dinc 2020, and Flach et al. 2016, 137). The governance structure of the Zapatistas in Chiapas is essentially the same: communes or assambleas function as legislative bodies, while commissions (known as juntas) act as implementers (see the organizational chart by Schuster 2017, 60). The local councils in Syria appear to have followed the model of a fused legislature and executive, whereby the implementation was sometimes outsourced. It remains rather unclear from the theoretical literature on councils whether such outsourcing is to be interpreted as objectionable or appropriate or how the notion would have to be realized institutionally. Further empirical studies and comparisons would be valuable.

7.2.2 De- and re-constructing the separation of spheres

Observers have highlighted a kind of holistic character of the Syrian local councils, which has been judged differently. – Generally, involved revolutionaries have expressed appreciation for the councils as a "'unique place between revolutionary and public institutions'" (activist quoted in Hajjar et al. 2017, 7). However, NGO reports deplore that "the lines are blurred between actors" regarding military actors, councils and civil society organizations (Turkmani et al. 2015, 61). In 2013, Naisse in his overview of councils' functioning, grasped the interlinking of political, administrative, military, and civil society (but not economy!) as the main characteristic of the councils: they "take care to be in contact with the revolutionary opposition groups, civil or military. In addition to the above objectives, they play an important role in the revolution through the provision of civil services to these groups, designed to help them continue their work" (Naisse 2013). The local councils in East Ghouta are a good example of the councils' ambiguous character. By virtue of their heterogeneous

portfolio of tasks, they covered fields of both municipal administration, of the 'private' sector and of civil society tasks: above all the councils sustained their interconnected "medical offices" that played a crucial role in crisis response; they dealt with "the documentation of all events in the city", with "information exchange between actors" and "contact with foreign media"; they upheld "demonstrations and other political activities" through an "Office of Revolutionary Action"; and they set up training courses for women and children in "first aid, preliminary paramedic procedures, nursing, the use of ambulances, drugs" and a range of other tasks (Angelova 2014, 6f.; 8f.).

In Darayya's local council, both the structure of offices as well as their respective spectrum of tasks manifests a rethinking of what is administrative, political, or related to civil society. At least three offices exemplify the way in which the councils blurred the demarcation of spheres. For instance, the Office for Services managed civil defense, rescue and fire brigades. It also repaired and maintained machines in the city, including both military equipment and medical and relief infrastructure, and importantly helped protect ovens. It supported the military by constructing barricades, bunkers and entrenchments, and managed the water supply, waste water, and electricity facilities (electric wires and the fuel-based power generators). Lastly, it dealt with the supply of clothes for all ages. (Darayya LC 2014i). A second example of how offices functioned in between local administration, civil society and politics is the Media Office, which not only operated as a press and PR office, but also forged channels of communication between the public and the local council as well as supporting the local council internally. One important task was the documentation of regime attacks, including the documentation and identification of killed people, of the revolutionary protests and campaigns. In that context, they collected photos, videos and reports, edited filmed material and published it on the website in order to reach out locally, nationally and internationally. It produced surveys related to project planning for the council, while also functioning as a tech-support team regarding computers and mobile phones for inhabitants (Darayya LC 2014g). Lastly, the Office for the Continuation of the Peaceful Movement fulfilled tasks that would usually be labeled 'civil society': The overall goal of this office was to safeguard the goals of the revolution that were, in their words, "expressed through the rejection of sectarianism and through the struggle against any oppression and injustice regardless of what form they take and were they take place". Practically, they pursued this goal by keeping the forms and repertoires alive that had emerged during the uprising, such as demonstrations, cheers and chants, signboards with text and images, busting of road signs, theater pieces etc. Besides, they offered moral and material support to families of killed and detained people both through visits and in coordination with the relief office. The fact that this office was part of the council reflects the interlocking of politics and everyday life as well as 'civil' life across spheres.

Whereas Darayya was cut off from donor agendas due to the siege, other councils were confronted with international development agencies (further discussion in Chapter 6.3: obstacles for councils).[31] These agencies targeted the integrative institutional design by promoting a focus on representational democracy in combination with a clear re-separation of spheres, making the disintegration of councils' activities a conditionality for further aid: "Even if that means scaling back the scope of some projects, international donors should insist on (…) civil/military separation of powers before offering any money." (HD 2014, 27) The influx of funding from foreign donors in favor of civil society organizations powerfully undermined the holistic approach of councils. By channeling funds to NGOs, donors created a contentious dynamic: whereas the councils had

[31] Some, but few, other local councils deliberately remained independent of foreign aid and were quite well functioning (e.g. Kafr Takharim, see Hajjar et al. 2017, 20).

assumed 'civil society' tasks and transformed them into one community activity among others, funding reversed this process by drawing these activities once again away from the councils and transferring them into a demarcated sphere of civil society. Whereas NGOs "succeeded in becoming the direct beneficiaries" of funding, this funding was "available to Syrian NGOs but not to the local councils", because of the councils' 'political' character (Faviér 2016, 12). From their competition "for similar resources", NGOs have emerged as the legitimate civil society actors, whereas councils were only empowered as actors "in the service area" (Hajjar et al. 2017, 1). This applies especially also to medical aid and relief – which was a core task of most of the local councils and one where they excelled: "As a result, most of the local NGOs have imposed themselves as the de facto actors in humanitarian aid distribution and field hospital management." (Faviér 2016, 12). As of 2017, their "competition over competencies, authority, projects and support inevitably continue(d) as [local councils] and other organizations often engage(d) in the same fields of activities." (Hajjar et al. 2017, 21)

The dogma of the division of social spheres, in combination with the dogma of 'unpolitical' aid and depoliticized local administration, often channeled people's agency towards NGOs, while at the same time hampering agency in the realm of councils. The quote by a community member highlights how civil society is often portrayed as the domain where agency can thrive, fueled by increased funding and various projects. In parallel, the opportunities for agency within councils have diminished as they have been pressured to limit themselves to functioning solely as municipal administrations: humanitarian organizations "give (…) the community the opportunity to set priorities. This is different with the [local council] as a representative authority that sets the priorities itself" (quoted in Hajjar et al. 2017, 18). However, foreign aid messed up its own standards of separated spheres from time to time, empowering NGOs to compete with councils even in the councils' core municipal administrative functions: NGOs "supporting and funding education compete with the education directorate over the authority to hire teachers and edit curricula" (Hajjar et al. 2017, 13) or even to run schools (Turkmani et al. 2015, 22). Local councils had to struggle to assert "their authority and the leading role" over NGOs "engaging in service delivery" (Hajjar et al. 2017, 13). In Deraa, NGOs were ironically supported to run agricultural projects (farms for fresh produce and livestock), hence acting in the 'economic sphere' (Turkmani et al. 2015, 25).
Council theory highlights that the functioning of councils challenges the pre-existing division of spheres typically found in representative democracies. For Muldoon (2018, 6), the aim of overcoming a division of the given economic and political spheres is "the most important feature of the councils, and also that which distinguishes them most profoundly from other movements and institutions" (also Popp-Madsen 2021, 75). Whereas council communists see politics dissolve into economy under the joint and deliberate command of the producers (e.g. Pannekoek 1946), Bookchin's post-marxist Libertarian Municipalism[32] envisions the subordination of economy under the citizens' command where "the assembly would decide the policies of the entire economy" (quoted from Hammy & Miley 2022, 4). The separation of spheres is seen as "foundational to capitalism and the bourgeois state, which exclude the economic and the social sphere from democracy" (Azzellini 2018, 232). Questioning that division is a major challenge to "the majority of mainstream

[32] Libertarian Municipalism is less a theory than a practical program that has been articulated by Murray Bookchin: "Limited exclusively to the municipality as the locus for political activity, as distinguished from provincial and state governments (…), libertarian municipalism (…) seeks to exacerbate the latent and often very real tension between the municipality and the state, and to enlarge the democratic institutions of the commune that still remain, at the expense of statist institutions. (…) (I)t aims for the confederal linking of libertarian communist municipalities, in the form of directly democratic popular assemblies as well as the collective control or 'ownership' of socially important property." (Bookchin 2008, 69) See also the discussion of council paradigms in Chapter Eight.

democratic theory (…) [which] accepts liberalism's defence of the economic sphere as a private realm of exchange that need not be organized along" democratic principles (Muldoon 2018, 13). Demirović also points to the actually scandalous fact that, because of the separation of spheres, a great deal of the most fundamental decisions about our lives elude the procedures of democratic decision-making: not only is decision-making delegated to a small group of specialists, but additionally their decision-making competencies have no grip on the social-material reproduction of society, because "the essential part of everyday social work of production and reproduction is classified as activity of private persons" (Demirović 2009, 183; translation A.W.) – private persons being those who own the means to exercise control over other people's life choices through labor. In other words, the decision on what society does and produces, why, and how, is not conscious, reasonable and subject to common deliberation and negotiations, but is confined to the economic sphere and to private choices of participants in the market. Only a few authors highlight the split between political sphere and civil society, as Azzellini has done: "To overcome the split between the social and the political means to overcome the difference between civil society and political society." (Azzellini 2018, 232f.). The need to overcome this particular division results from the insight that civil society is the only space where agency of ordinary people can actually play out, but tragically that only sphere has neither the power to interfere in law-making in the political sphere, nor has it any grip on the configuration of the economic sphere, and much less on the judicial and material fact of private property. In fact, communal agency is not the source for shaping the course of our societies, it is reduced to a hobby in clubs, NGOs and political or social movements.

Interestingly, this focus was somewhat reversed in the practical experience of the Syrian councils. Whereas the economic sphere was not systematically drawn into the portfolio of council activity, the councils blurred the lines of what is administrative, political and civil society related. This is a strong hint for council theory to more aggressively challenge the existence of 'civil society' as an expression of the series of divisions that capitalist and state-based societies produce (see e.g. Castoriadis 1993 [1961-1979], 260). Such an exploration could well draw on Marx' early writings (Marx 1966 [1844], 75) dealing with the human being as a communal being that suffers from such divisions as well as on his seminal text "The Jewish Question", in which he tried to grasp the interrelationships of the different social spheres – politics, economics, and civil society – as well as the relationship between human beings – individually and collectively – vis à vis these spheres (Marx 1843).

7.2.3 De- and re-constructing the monopoly of violence: the judiciary, the police and the military

There is a strong notion among council thinkers that the judiciary must not be excluded from democratization. Marx's mockery of the "sham independence" of lawyers was no random polemic against the judicial *personnel* of the time, but a *principal* critique that the judiciary eludes the people's sovereignty. The emphasis that judges shall be elected by and accountable to the community remained a programmatic thought among council thinkers. Being able or not to provide efficient judicial mechanisms locally was, according to Faviér, one of the three major sore spots of the councils in context of rivalry with the Islamist's own Sharia Courts: "This competition has been taking place in three main essential sectors: the supply of bread (…), justice and police" (Faviér 2016, 13) Hence, the reality of the judiciary in the Syrian council landscape has come to be shaped decisively over time by the intermingling of Islamist groups and militias who claimed the judiciary

as their prerogative. In the early period of councils, the judiciary was sometimes organized separately such as in Yabroud where a separate sharia committee consisting of volunteer lawyers existed in a cooperative relationship with the councils (Aljundi 2014). Similarly, Faviér observed that "many civil documentation centres and courts of arbitration have been established" by councils in cooperation with a Syrian lawyers' association (Favier 2016, 13), pointing to constructive mechanisms of local conflict resolution. Al-Kayial had a pragmatic vision about the judiciary in which councils themselves deal with legal issues on the local level, while a central court system would be tasked with dealing with more complex and supra-regional issues (Al-Kayial, interview, February 2019). The Darayya local council provided a favorable context due to the cooperative relationship with the council's military structure and an absence of rival Islamist groups: The judiciary was subsumed under the umbrella of the executive structure. According to the account of the local council, parallel to the establishment of the council in the early phase "the need for a juridical body emerged that would solve conflicts that evolve between the offices within the council as well as those conflicts that arise among different armed groups in the city and in the neighboring area, and the resolution of conflicts that emerge among the civilians in the city and its surrounding area." (Darayya LC 2014h). This description of the office's tasks reflects a rather holistic approach to the notion of 'legal' or 'judiciary' which foregrounds mediation and conflict resolution.

Whereas the judiciary in Darayya may have been a model for other councils had they been spared from the intermingling or dominance of rival armed groups, the reality for most councils was that the judiciary was a vulnerable spot: the councils' inability to fill the void as efficiently and as quickly as Islamists left room for the latter to step in by establishing their own Sharia Courts. Whilst the councils were busy making life continue, the rival Islamist groups could concentrate on establishing an efficient judiciary. The resulting dynamic was either that competing legal systems coexisted or even that the judiciary became hived off from the councils and established itself above the latter. Munif points to the existence of competing and/or coexisting legal systems: "the existence of several legal systems allowed for creative experimentation, and, in some instances, turned law into an emancipatory rather than a coercive tool." (Munif 2020, 154) He concludes from the experience in Manbij that "(t)he experimentation with this plurality might have been productive in other circumstances, especially since previously marginal groups started having a voice." There, however, "(f)orce rather than democratic deliberation imposed certain legal discourses and marginalized others." Sharia Courts that were run by Islamist groups or dominant religious groups separately from the councils became widespread. This model was often accepted due to these courts' ability to execute the decisions based on their monopoly of violence (Turkmani et al. 2015, 22). Not infrequently did these Sharia Courts subsume the councils, degrading them to just one branch under its umbrella: for 2013/14, the authors of a decidedly pessimistic study by HD maintained that "most towns and villages (…) have placed the sharia court at the top of their power hierarchy" which "bestow legitimacy on the local councils, not the other way round." (HD 2014, 23) As of 2017, however, the large survey by Swisspeace and LACU identified a separation of powers in the form of distinct judicial councils overseeing the judiciary, a local police force, and separate local councils handling the legislative and executive functions, also referred to as "civil authority" (Hajjar et al. 2017, 13).Alongside justice (and bread, as will be discussed below),security emerged as a central concern for the communities, and the ability to ensure security played a crucial role in determining the legitimacy or vulnerability of the councils. (Faviér 2016). Council communist Pannekoek was confident that the councils' moral integrity would make force superfluous. Had councils in Syria had the chance to establish themselves firmly and quickly and in a less violent context, this may have worked - at least partially. Police forces could often "only resort to

persuasion and ha(d) little power to hold anyone accountable" (Hajjar et al. 2017, 12). Unfortunately, the literature scarcely addresses how far persuasion did work and to what extent. For the most part, alternative police forces were formed in the form of "'security battalions' made up of fighters from one or more brigades whose job it is to maintain law and order, arrest suspects and to guard the prison". They "remaine(ed) under the nominal control of the local councils", but often took orders from other institutions, such as Sharia Courts, if they were present next to local councils (HD 2014, 20). The majority of councils were sooner or later confronted with counterrevolutionary violence or rivalry by Islamist militias (ibid.).

Yet, some alternative approaches can be noted. Al-Kayial recounts for Barzah throughout 2012: "Of course the idea was that we don't need a police and no prisons etc. We viewed that society is able to solve its problems. (…) the idea was that actually the cause for a great deal of committed crimes is the badness of the regime. In the context of councils many of these causes could be removed or alleviated. The concept was that it is the community's own responsibility to protect its members and help them and support them." (Al-Kayial, interview, August 2020) This concept was put to a test right in the beginning when two young women were abducted from the predominantly Sunni-Muslim Barzah by regime actors from the neighboring Alawi neighborhood Esh Al-Warwar. The people in Barzah, including Omar Aziz, who was respected in the community, consulted and wrote a sort of open letter emphasizing the popular notion of unity among Syrians. Their campaign led to the release of the abducted young women which was a decisive, empowering experience: "In Barzah people then understood the necessity of putting efforts together and organize in order to solve problems. It was after that that they founded the local council there." (Al-Kayial, interview, February 2019) The local council in Darayya established a police structure that was subsumed under the councils in an ambiguous way: on the one hand, the police was relegated to the status of a commission, alongside two other commissions, namely the assembly shop and the community kitchen. As a result, it held a subordinate position below the proper offices of the council. On the other hand, the president of the police station was appointed by the council director and the police station held one seat in the legislative body (Darayya LC 2014c, §2). In the southern Deraa region, councils were able to run the police and courts as of 2015, "but their ability to impose order on the area (was) limited" (Turkmani et al. 2015, 20). Here, however, people built up community-based policing structures apart from the council: a "Civil Defense Commission" was formed which "operate(d) more like a civil society organization" than a usual police apparatus, because "most of their work is voluntary and the little they receive as salaries is very close to what other workers" in similar organizations receive. Its rootedness within the community led "(t)he locals themselves (…) to protect the [commission] and enable it to do its work" (Turkmani et al. 2015, 22).

Lastly, regarding the relationship between the military, brigades and councils, observers stress that "(a)t the very beginning of the conflict, armed groups encouraged and endorsed the creation of local councils." (Favier 2016, 14) It was not rare for seats in general assemblies of councils to be allocated to military groups (HD 2014, 20). The cooperative and supportive nature of the council-military relationship and the FSA-affiliated militia's readiness to "work under the guidance of local councils" was interpreted as a strength of people's self-organization in councils: "Evidence suggests that the FSA and grassroots opposition in Syria tend to support each other and work together when appropriate or possible." (O'Bagy 2012, 30f.) Even throughout 2013/14 the FSA-affiliated militias "have not made any systematic attempt to supplant local councils or take them over by force" (HD 2014, 19). Rather, "(i)n many instances, moderate brigades played a constructive role in the creation of local councils" and in a few instances did they even pass on financial resources to the local

councils (HD 2014, 29). The main reasons for successful cooperation seem to be the existence of personal relationships, shared experience and shared local backgrounds: "In many locations, members of local councils and brigades shared similar social backgrounds and trajectories, which facilitated and led to close cooperation and harmony between the two groups" and "contributed to forging new solidarity between [them]" (Favier 2016, 14; also Turkmani et al. 2015, 20). As long as fighters remained in their home communities, where they were directly accountable to their families and neighbors, the standards of ethical conduct and a dedication to serving their own community were prime motives for participating in military groups. In the beginning, "the armed groups were largely composed of local fighters, native from the locality they just liberated, (…) they predominantly relied on the support of the local community." (Favier 2016, 14) and were "keen to see local councils well-run" (HD 2014, 20).

Darayya's local council operated under the conditions of a siege so that the mobility of militias was impossible and the military structure remained autochthonous over years. Hence, the setting was ideal for an 'undistorted' evolution where brigades were "made up of the sons of Daraya" (Darayya LC 2014n). Indeed, Darayya is an ideal example for a liaison on an equal footing that evolved not only out of perceived mutual interest, but in a very jointly deliberated way (HD 2014, 20) with the aim and to the result that "the military office is part of the organizational structure, not its leader." (Darayya LC 2014b) The military office closely cooperated with other offices. For instance, the office for services which dealt with a wide range of tasks, supporting the military by repairing equipment, constructing barricades, bunkers and entrenchments (Darayya LC 2014i). The constitution, drafted in 2014, mirrors this approach to the military as an integral part of the council structure: the military formed one of the nine offices in the council, holding three seats in the legislative and additional seats per battalion according to size of the latter in the general assembly and in the executive bureau (Darayya LC 2014c, §1, mulahaza 2). The military office emphasizes three characteristic aspects of their work: the organizational structure, the decision-making process, and their ethics. First, with regards to the organizational structure, it is clearly stated that "the brigade is bound to the local council of Daraya and coordinates with the other offices in several regards." (Darayya LC 2014n). The working relationship between brigade and council is described as consensual and cooperative: "We are able to build consensus by cooperating in all aspects on the two frontlines of Daraya and [neighboring town; A.W.] Moadamiyya in order to allow a good working relationship and the avoidance of conflicts of interest." Secondly, regarding the decision-making process, they highlight that "(d)ecisions are taken in a transparent manner for the fighters on the ground." Moreover, elections were held "in which all fighters of the brigade participated in order to exchange experience and introduce a diverse representation [of fighters] into the local council". (Darayya LC 2014n) Importantly, the leader of the battalion and brigade commander are excluded from seats (Darayya LC 2014c, §1, mulahaza h) pointing to a deliberate distribution of power from top towards bottom. With regards to their ethics, they emphasize that the military aims at "reaching a high level of trust" and sustaining "its honorableness in its operations." The brigade founded a military school in which it trained "new members in its ranks, training them militarily, raising juridical as well as religious (moral) awareness, the treatment of prisoners of war, and dealing with human rights according to the program *fighter – not killer*[33] (...) to work against violations of international agreements on warfare and on the treatment of prisoners of war". "New members" refers to both defected soldiers and voluntary fighters from Darayya who together make up the brigade. In Barzah, too, the council aimed at bringing and maintaining military groups under its

[33] In Arabic "muqatil la qatil".

guidance: "If the revolution had to take up arms then the arms had to be under the control of society and not the other way round" At least throughout 2012, "the relations to the armed groups were comfortable, the groups did not try to impose themselves on the society." The consultation and coordination took place in an informal way in accordance with the overall informal character of the early council in Barzah and the development of strategies was understood as a joint task of the fighters and civilians (Al-Kayial, interview, August 2020).

The rather cooperative relationship between councils and military started to change at the end of 2012 with the rise of Islamist militias who, on the one hand, threatened local councils and took them over violently and, on the other hand, established rival governance structures (Favier 2016, 13). The mutual interest in compensating each other's weak points – councils benefitting from militia's armed support and militias benefitting from councils' service provision to the population – was still described as of 2014 (HD 2014, 19f.), but eroded thoroughly until 2016. For the Idlib region, Heller describes in detail how several Islamist militias have established their own well-functioning civil service structures (Heller 2016) and have been able to outrun councils in various fields also due to their better access to financial resources from abroad. As of 2017, then, the formerly cooperative character of the relationship between councils and the military groups varied between "cooperative, (…) competitive or even destructive" (Hajjar et al. 2017, 21).

From the perspective of council theory, there is little surprise about the way in which the Syrian local councils dealt with justice, police and military. Regarding the judicial power, instead of remaining a (rather) separated branch that consists of professional officers that are appointed and employed mostly by the executive and formally independent, the council framework subjects it to the same democratic procedures as the legislation-execution: judges are elected, immediately accountable and can be recalled (Demirović 2009, 191; Azzellini 2018, 233; Engels 1891; Muldoon 2021, 141; Marx 1871a). Justice, and likewise the police, according to Castoriadis, is no longer above society, but on the same level as other 'professional' realms: "Local councils, for instance, will take over such city and county services and departments as the direct application of 'policing' powers (by detachments of armed workers assigned in rotation), the administration of local justice, and the local control of primary education." Castoriadis 1988b [1955-1960], 149. The reorganization of the police and the military along the lines of widening agency and flattening social hierarchies have always been common sense within the thinking about councils and typical practical steps taken during council-based insurgencies (Muldoon 2018, 4). The model of the Paris Commune naturally implied "to substitute the military (…) by a popular militia. The independent police is to be dissolved, functions of security are to be fulfilled by the citizens themselves." (Demirović 2009, 191; Azzellini 2018, 234; Korsch 1929). Marx highlights this point particularly: "The first decree of the Commune, therefore, was the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people." (Marx 1871a) The police and the military, like all other sectors of society, were supposed to be democratized, which would be ensured, again, by elections of officers, revocability, and by "an extremely short term of service." (Marx 1871a; also Luxemburg 1918b, III) Council thinkers held divergent views regarding the role of the police. Some believed that the police would eventually vanish altogether since they did not consider it legitimate nor necessary that councils "impose their will" over others (Pannekoek 1946, 70). Others proposed the establishment of mediation committees to resolve disagreements (Barwich 2007 [1920], 443f.). This idea has been elaborated in recent decades in approaches to community justice in the United States, but also in council experiments such as in Rojava where a form of community-embedded judiciary aims at justice through negotiation instead of punishment (Flach et al. 2016, 141; 228). Whereas elements of community-based conflict resolution were obviously practiced in the Syrian councils, which backs the

claim that alternatives are possible and desirable, the experience in Syria should also caution against underestimating the need to systematically organize protection mechanisms against violence at different levels.

7.3 Prefigurative capacities of councils

7.3.1 Construction, continuity and order

> *Humanitarian aid and medical relief were the most important things in the beginning. These two issues were central to the people at that time. We needed to address these issues in order to keep life going on. (Al-Kayial, interview, August 2020)*

NGOs and government agencies promoted the understanding that councils are built as embryonic forms of future municipalities while at the same time reducing them to subordinate parts in a hierarchical future state functioning on the basis of representative democracy. NGOs and foreign governments have interpreted the 'prefigurative' nature of councils in a manner that aims to establish a new form of statist democracy, thereby diminishing the councils' potential for radical democracy.As early as 2014, reports aimed at framing councils as the "foundation of a transitional government and future democratic elections" and as "nucleus of future municipalities in a transitional government" that would "ultimately assist in the formation of an elected government." (Aljundi 2014, 16; also Naisse 2013) In this widespread understanding, councils are reduced to being interim bodies that may keep their name in a future minimal democratic order, but not their more radical democratic impetus. The notion that councils were more than mere placeholders for future incorporation into a centralized municipality was hardly grasped. Sami Al-Kayial and Omar Aziz stood for a different understanding: regarding the councils that they helped initiate around Damascus, they stressed the notion of councils as alternative to the state: "The idea that we stressed was: we don't want to wait for a new state that would make the revolution victorious, but the revolution had to succeed right here and right now, among the people and not through a state." (Al-Kayial, interview, August 2020). Consequently, on that understanding, councils could continue to exist even if no future 'democratic' state would materialize, because their functioning would not depend on a state: "We imagined that after the fall of the regime (…) local councils would be rooted in society and be completely independent from any higher body. Our vision for a long-term future was that even if there would be a central government, this government would not be able to impose its views on the local councils. The latter would organize daily life independently (…)." (Al-Kayial, interview, August 2020) This vision of the councils has materialized only episodically and indeed, Al-Kayial reckons that "(t)he vast majority of the opposition did not understand that difference." (interview, February 2019) However, the underlying logic of councils as representing a fundamentally different social order was at work wherever communities established council-based self-governance and not all communities aimed at surrendering their local autonomy and bottom-up democratic experiences to a future oppositional government. Darayya gave itself a constitution after almost two years after the councils' establishment, in 2014, indicating a strong commitment to the durability of local self-government (Darayya LC 2014c)The notion of prefiguration that Al-Kayial, Aziz and others had in mind is the one that council thinkers identify as decisive: "In whatever

revolutionary circumstances they emerged, the councils had the dual purpose of negating the existing, oppressive regime while simultaneously functioning as new, popular organs amid the revolution" (Popp-Madsen 2021, 56). As such a novel kind of institution, they "did not separate the socialist utopia from the fighting organization; rather the revolutionary organizations were to prefigure the emancipatory objectives." (Hoffrogge 2019, 205) Since freedom – which may emerge in revolutionary moments – is not supposed to be limited to a revolutionary episode, but to be instituted beyond revolution, and if councils are the suitable institutional expression therefore, they must become permanent. This is why Arendt insists: „The councils, obviously, were spaces of freedom. As such, they invariably refused to regard themselves as temporary organs of revolution and, on the contrary, made all attempts at establishing themselves as permanent organs of government." (Arendt 1963, 264) Along those lines, Dubigeon poignantly stresses against the instrumentalist approach to councils, e.g. in Bolshevism, that the councils' "*positive* political dimension" is precisely "the main originality of these organs" (Dubigeon 2019, 259f., emphasis in original). For authors who stress the notion of constituent/constituted power, the prefigurative character lies precisely in the potential of councils to "bridge the antagonistic gap between constituent power and political form", being "prefigurative organs capable of both revolutionary, constituent action *and* constituted" procedures (Popp-Madsen 2021, 56, 59; emphasis A.W.; also Mazzocchi 2019, 280).

The analysis of the Syrian uprising reveals that the process of dismantling the existing order and constructing a new one cannot be neatly separated into distinct temporal episodes. Adamczak's reevaluation of the Russian Revolution raises doubts about the existence or necessity of a complete "tabula rasa" moment in revolutions. Regarding the Syrian councils, a sort of destructive caesura through councils is hardly salient. I am led to say that, actually, destruction of the status quo was not all the business of the councils, but that they were busy constructing the new, whereas the LCCs assumed a role that was confrontational and 'destructive'. But perhaps it is more adequate to see LCCs and councils as functioning as an organic whole in a revolutionary moment or short transitory phase: While LCCs in combination with other actors made the regime crumble peu à peu through sustaining protest, the councils could step in these holes left by the state once the latter withdrew, either materially from localities or when it otherwise lost authority. This has been described several times in the notion of 'councils filling the void'. Al-Kayial has criticized that metaphor for suggesting that councils acted as mini-copies of the state when they, in fact, adopted tasks in a way that was essentially different from the functioning of states (Al-Kayial 2014). Hence, 'filling the void' should be understood in the sense of councils assuming, adopting and absorbing tasks in a way that at best prefigured an alternative social whole. Hardly anyone describes the councils' establishment or take-over in terms of a rupture. Mostly, however, "city councils have simply assimilated the Assad regime's existing municipal service offices, complete with most of their staff, who proceed with their work more or less normally." (Heller 2016, 10) Although Al-Kayial asserts that it was only the later councils which re-appropriated the regime's buildings, the predominant observation is that even in the early phase councils "aim(ed) to preserve the institutions of the state, public buildings and private property, and to protect citizens, in cooperation and coordination with the military brigades" (Naisse 2013).

The functioning of the councils as prefigurative entities was primarily focused on preserving, maintaining, and continuing, rather than on destructive actions. This can be reconstructed in more detail in three areas: A) security/prevention of chaos; B) enabling bare life to continue/saving lives; and C) enabling everyday life to continue.

A. The councils earned people's trust, because they were "a concrete demonstration which belies the assertions about the spread of anarchy and disorganization because of the present revolutionary situation or the fall of the regime." (Naisse 2013) In Manbij – a rare case of a council structure preparing thoroughly for the moment of the regime's withdrawal – order was a top priority: "One of the achievements of the RC [Revolutionary Councils, i.e. local council, A.W.] before liberation was the establishment of a network of more than fifty popular committees whose role was to protect the city and fill the vacuum on the day the security and the police would be forced to leave the city. (…) When the regime evacuated Manbij, the revolutionaries took over, and with the help of neighborhood committees, they prevented looting. The revolutionaries visited the different parts of the city to make sure that there were security checkpoints everywhere. The popular committees protected the entire city for three days, and not a single incident of violence or theft came to light." (Munif 2020, 147) Perhaps those who have romantic ideas about insurrections and revolutions are disappointed to hear that keeping order was the top priority, even in the sense of keeping the city clean. In Yabroud, "(t)he council's first project was to clean the city's river banks. 'It (was) the priority because the smell was very disturbing and diseases started spreading (…). Streets were not cleaned for months and people were suffering terribly.'" (Man quoted in Aljundi 2014, 28)
B. In places that witnessed regime attacks, councils contributed to maintaining order by reacting to immediate life necessities. This is why relief and medical aid were among the primary tasks of all councils, such as in Barzah: "Humanitarian aid and medical relief were the most important thing in the beginning. These two issues were central to the people at that time. We needed to address these issues in order to keep life going on." (Al-Kayial, interview, August 2020)
C. However, be it in areas under continued attacks such as in Darayya, or in areas quickly liberated, the 'order' adopted a third meaning, namely 'making everyday life continue' and providing a sense of normalcy. Accordingly, the continuation of children's education has been a priority to many councils: "In Yabrud, we are able to send our children to schools since the council restored some aspects of the education. Schools opened their doors after the establishment of the council. (…) It is not perfect, but (the council) is making life continue." (woman quoted in Aljundi 2014, 22) In Barzah, likewise, "(s)chools actually remained open for quite a long time even though the regime had no interest in continuing schools and thus people organized to keep the schools running." (Al-Kayial, interview, February 2019) Apart from education it was the realm of 'service provision' that was crucial for everyday life. The extent to which councils were able to uphold order in the sense of service provision "impacts on the way people perceive the [local councils] and their legitimacy" (Hajjar et al. 2017, 14) Militias as well as the regime sometimes destabilized water and electricity supply in order to discredit the councils' performance (Hajjar et al. 2017, 13; HD 2014, 13), whereas councils always strove to maintain public infrastructure (Aljundi 2014, 21; HD 2014, 13; Turkmani et al. 2015, 14).

Ensuring the continuation of life in its broadest sense was never considered secondary to the goal of toppling the regime; instead, it was an integral part and aspiration of the councils' mission and purpose. Arendt's insistence that councils are organs of order as much as they are organs of struggle is very fitting in the Syrian context. Perhaps contrary to many people's expectations about the nature of (council) revolutions, I would go as far as to say that order is the primary motive for why

people set up councils. Councils, Arendt wrote in the aftermath of the Hungarian Revolution, "were always organs of order as much as organs of action" (Arendt 1963, 263). Arendt's foregrounding of order is interesting, because it can be read as an invitation to understand councils as organs that guarantee not only a newly emerging social 'order', but order in the sense of 'orderliness', perhaps even of security or safety. Indeed, 'action and order' were almost identical, and the way councils 'destructed' the regime was through 'creating' self-management and 'continuing' people's lives. In that sense, I also read anarchist Pierre Ramus' elaborations on the necessity of "immediate reorganization". Principally, he argues, it is clear that "the social revolution as implementation of liberation is not only a principle of destruction, but is and must be much more a principle of the dissolution of the old and of the immediate reorganization of life on new grounds." This is also remindful of Eva von Redecker's account of different modern social movements – they are, as she carves out, parts of an overall "revolution for life" (title) which is concerned with saving lives, regenerating humans' relationships, sharing and caring as opposed to capitalism's and states' operational mode of dominating, utilizing, exhausting, destructing (von Redecker 2020, table of contents).

It is noteworthy that there was also a negatively subversive dimension to continuity. People's understandable and legitimate desire for continuity and stability created an anchor point for the regime which used its financial capacity to keep people attached to it. In Barzah and many other places that were not (yet) under siege, "people would also go - if they were able to - to regime held areas in order to receive their wages, withdrawing money from the cash machines, which was very helpful" – people shared money and bought necessary things, from food to all sorts of equipment (Al-Kayial, interview, August 2020). Indeed, the regime continued to pay wages to public servants, especially teachers, and bakery employees even in territories from which it had withdrawn (HD 2014, 14; Carpi & Glioti 2018, 238). However, these payments were not only useful financial resources subversively used by people to support the revolution and the actions of councils. Rather, by upholding payments the regime was "claiming and demonstrating that the Syrian state remained the irreplaceable provider of essential public services." (Faviér 2016, 9) and people "un-deliberately accommodated the power structure" (Carpi & Glioti 2018, 233). Importantly, the continuation of payments signaled to employees that they should refrain from jeopardizing their livelihoods - which only the regime could guarantee (HD 2014, 14). This had an undermining effect and hampered the evolution of self-governance: the acceptance of the regime's payments and the continued reliance on it carried with it an involuntary acknowledgement of the monopoly over order and the continuation of life (Carpi & Glioti 2018, 233ff.). It held people within the regime and prevented them from expanding their capacity to act outside of it. Carpi & Glioti (2018, 235) have traced this effect in interviews with revolutionary Syrians who "echoed the survival of the state through their efforts to preserve their own life chances" and "everyday normalcy in a time of crisis". However, whereas the authors (p. 237) argue that this ambivalence within people was a "struggle to unlearn how to be proper subjects of the state" and that they would have had "to develop a set of practices that are grounded in an alternative everyday life", I would strongly underline that this is less a matter of individual and then aggregated choices, but rather a matter of structures. The councils were precisely the social spaces in which the evoked alternative social practices could evolve – in Carpi & Glioti's (2018, 242) fitting words: they were tools to "immerse people's everyday life" in an alternative order , however, not through boycott and contestation as the authors suggest, but by expanding the council's own capacities and hence people's own capacities to provide themselves with what they need to survive.

7.3.2 Sore points of council's prefigurative capacity: The example of bread

> *(B)read and freedom are inseparable: the liberation of a city is meaningless in the eyes of its inhabitants, if the living conditions worsen as a result. The council was fully aware that success or failure depended on whether it could provide bread at the same price as in regions controlled by the regime. (Munif 2020, 140)*

In his work on councils from the 1920, Pierre Ramus sharply stresses the role of food, especially of bread, and the councils' necessary efforts in that regard in order to realize their prefigurative capacities. Ramus argues: "The ground principle of the social transformation must be: *No one hungry!* (…) The greatest feat of the social revolution may be to achieve, also during the fundamental transformational processes, a relatively undisturbed continuation of production in all realms, and to organize a new mode of distribution according to the needs of each and everyone. Nowhere is this more important than in the industry of bakeries." (Ramus 2005 [1923], 296; translation A.W.) There is a certain irony in the fact that bread oftentimes indeed played a crucial role for the success and respectively failure of councils. Bread supply was a strategic factor: "What we can say with some certainty (…) is that welfare services are prominent in the calculations of all the forces hoping to rule Syria, and that subsidized bread stands at the forefront of these concerns." (Martínez & Eng, 142; also HD 2014, 12) Accordingly, "(m)ills and bakeries were vital institutions under Assad's rule and continued to be vital in the liberated areas after 2011, as bread is a crucial staple for Syrians" (Munif 2021, 8).

Clearly, all involved actors understood this. However, their efforts to bring the wheat-to-bread chain under their control differed. The regime aimed at *destroying* bread-related facilities. Early on in the uprising and then persistently, "the regime has bombed nascent opposition-administered attempts to provide vital public services and subsistence goods, thereby presenting itself as the only viable source of such necessities (…). Bakeries in particular have been systematically targeted." (Martínez & Eng 2017, 137f.). The attacks aimed at all stages of bread production from the production of wheat grains to its storage, to baking and selling: the regime's repertoire included "subsidizing bread while at the same time bomb(ing) queues in front of bakeries, bomb(ing) fields to burn crops, bomb(ing) storage houses, [setting up] sieges for starvation. Importantly, during the revolt, the regime has also sought to transfer large amounts of wheat from opposition-held areas to those controlled by the regime, by offering peasant wheat-producers an attractive price for their production." (Munif 2021, 5) ….. The regime tried to keep "providing Manbij with wheat to maintain the state assemblage in place. In addition, the director of the mills, and approximately 100 employees were kept on the regime's payroll. The revolutionary council was initially unable to provide wheat at a low cost, or pay salaries, and as a result was forced to accept the regime's indirect presence in the city" (Munif 2020, 139) In order to deepen the understanding of how councils were or were not able to expand their prefigurative capacity vis à vis the state, it is insightful to look at the example of bread.

As opposed to the regime, the Islamist militias did not aim to destroy bread infrastructure, but rather to *control and exploit* it. "Bread, justice, security" was the holy trinity of Islamist's success in imposing themselves on the communities (Faviér 2016, 13; also Munif 2020, 149): "While observers attribute much of the Islamic State's meteoric rise to its string of military victories and clever social media tactics, the organization's efforts to provide bread, security, and other basic

services were crucial to its initial expansion in Syria. One of the organization's first steps upon taking over a town was to control key industries and services related to electricity, water, fuel, and bread in order to assert total control over the core needs of the local population" (Martínez & Eng 2017, 140). For instance, "upon taking control of Palmyra from government forces in 2015, the Islamic State immediately reopened the city's only remaining bakery and began distributing bread for free" which was a common practice (Martínez & Eng 2017, 136). Moreover, Islamists used the selling of bread as a source of income in order to finance salaries for its fighters (Martínez & Eng 2017, 140; HD 2014, 12). Under the circumstances of poverty, hunger and the necessity to care for families, people sometimes saw no alternative to turning to armed groups, "thus losing some of their independence" (Khoury 2013, 7). This is well illustrated in the case of the town Tilalyan: "To supply bread, the council pleaded in vain for flour from the international groups camped at the Turkish border. Then they tried to buy it through Tal Rifaat and finally in the battle-torn provincial capital, Aleppo. The answer, council members said, came from Jabhet al-Nusra (...). The group has distinguished itself not only through its battlefield prowess, aid workers say, but also through its determination to capture resources like wheat silos from the government, so that the group could dispense the spoils as patronage." Even though the council members and residents were well aware of this strategy, they accepted the supply by the Islamist military group of Al-Nusra by lack of choice (Kirkpatrick 2013).

As opposed to both the regime and the Islamists, councils had no interest in destroying bread supply chains, but in *preserving and using* it for providing food to their communities. As Munif underlines, they, too, understood that "bread and freedom are inseparable: the liberation of a city is meaningless in the eyes of its inhabitants if the living conditions worsen as a result. The council was fully aware that success or failure depended on whether it could provide bread at the same price as in regions controlled by the regime." (Munif 2020, 140) For instance, the Aleppo council "used donations from Gulf countries to pay for flour and bread distribution before funding other projects, such as salaried police" (Martínez & Eng 2017, 135). In Manbij, near Aleppo, upon the liberation "the revolutionary council made the provision and distribution of bread a main priority." (Munif 2021, 8). Councils were eager to establish transparent, affordable, somewhat fair and orderly managed distribution of bread, sometimes at a fixed price (HD 2014, 13). Improving bakery facilities, repairing them and constructing ovens remained important tasks over the course of time (Hajjar et al. 2017). Some cities, "such as Manbij began to challenge the regime's narrative by building autonomous circuits of bread" which was a "direct threat to its survival." (Munif 2020, 138) But since the councils had no control over the raw materials, they had to rely on donors or on deals with state-run or private mills or with armed groups in order to procure flour (HD 2014, 12). The reliance on the market created the absurd situation whereby the regime could snatch flour from under the councils' nose by offering higher prices to farmers. In addition, the reliance on flour from international donors made them vulnerable to volatility in supplies. It is not far-fetched to assume that councils would have had a much more solid stance when confronted with Islamists' rivalry in local governance if they had had brought the most crucial food supplies, such as bread, under the community's control. The missed socialization hence had a hampering effect on the councils' prefigurative capacity with regards to food security.

Faviér has pointed out that bread was, alongside justice and security, one important realm in which militias could challenge the legitimacy of councils (Faviér 2016, 13). Actually, 'bread' and 'security' are closely interrelated, because the lack of civil command over military brigades substantially weakened the councils' ability to control foodstuffs. The experience in Manbij is an illustrative example, and, in fact, a positive one: "The revolutionary council wanted to prevent powerful

military groups present in the city from controlling the mills and monopolizing the distribution of bread. The mills were difficult to guard as they were located on the outskirts of the city, making them vulnerable to attacks and as such, an easy target for belligerent military groups." (Munif 2020, 140f.) Remarkably, the council was able to mobilize the local population and successfully pressured the powerful Islamist militia (Ahrar al-Sham) out of the mills: "the entire city opposed military involvement in civilian affairs and did not approve of the forceful way the group had taken the mills. The council and several powerful groups in the city put all their differences aside and organized several protests until Ahrar al-Sham were forced to leave the mills." (Munif 2020, 140f.)

7.4 Cooperation and solidarity in and through councils

7.4.1 The cultivation of cooperation and solidarity as revolutionary ethics

> *Whether their purpose is the defense of the popular movement or guaranteeing the functioning of social networks, they help to reinforce the values of community life and civic culture. (Naisse 2013)*

Asserting their revolutionary ethics as a contrast to the malignity of the Syrian government as well as Islamist militias was a widespread concern to revolutionaries in general and it also played a role in how councils functioned. Councils acted in different ways to ensure mutual care, to increase trust among people and to cultivate a sense of pluralism. Naisse (2013) described the widespread perception "that the action of the local councils, in all areas of civil power, shall disseminate core values, including commitment to the goals of the revolution: realizing the aspirations of the people, mutual respect (…), (…) friendship and cooperation (...). The principles are those of consultation and election, of decisions taken without despotism or in an arbitrary way, within a framework of loyalty, transparency and sharing, of creation, innovation and perseverance, with the aim of developing interactive exchanges between all components of society, of strengthening coordination and complementarity, of equality of rights between Syrians without discrimination based on religious, ethnic or national criteria." (Naisse 2013) Respect, friendship, cooperation, sharing, equality etc. are strong keywords that echo an unfolding ethics of solidarity. As Naisse interestingly remarks, this was somewhat regardless of the specific content of the councils' tasks: "Whether their purpose is the defense of the popular movement or guaranteeing the functioning of social networks, they help to reinforce the values of community life and civic culture." (Naisse 2013) There are numerous accounts of how communities defended this civic culture by defying both the regime's and Islamists' attacks and reconstituting councils after forced dissolution (Angelova 2014, 11; also Saleh 2018; Hajjar et al. 2017, 6).

The Darayya local council had an office which explicitly dealt with cultivating this sort of ethics – the 'office of the continuation of the peaceful movement'.The overall goal of this office was "to safeguard the goals of the revolution" that were especially "expressed through the rejection of sectarianism and through the struggle against any oppression and injustice regardless of what form they take and where they take place". Practically, they pursued this goal by keeping the forms and repertoires alive that had emerged during the uprising, such as demonstrations in the streets, cheers and chants, signboards with text and images, road signs, proverbs and theater pieces etc. By

offering psychological and moral support to families of killed and detained people both through visits and materially in coordination with the relief office, the office integrated the values of solidarity and care institutionally into the local council (Darayya LC 2014l). The relief office emphasized that help was delivered "regardless of the political opinions of the afflicted person or their religion", similarly to the Medical Office which emphasized that they also treated soldiers that were captured by their brigades (Darayya LC 2014e and f). This is described in similar terms by Al-Kayial for his experience in Barzah: "There was also the notion of internal solidarity [Arabic: 'tadamun']. When a place was attacked by the regime it was impossible to stay neutral. Even when people differed in opinions – when your neighbors were attacked you would stand together." (Al-Kayial, interview, August 2020) The communal kitchen that was operated as one of three committees within the Darayya local council is a noteworthy instance of mutual care. Despite the conditions of siege imposed with the intention to starve the population, the councils managed to provide two meals per day to the local community, including the military brigades. But communal baking as a mechanism to mitigate bread shortages existed also in other areas. For instance in 2017, in Deraa province: "Although 45% of all identified bakeries were found to be out of operation, there was little indication that lack of baking capacity was a significant barrier to meeting the needs of local populations in the assessed areas. The survey found multiple mechanisms by which families and communities were able to organize baking. Some villages reported families gathering in groups to bake bulk bread in home ovens. In other villages, local councils set up small-scale community ovens that could bake if the village bakery was rendered non-operational." (RFSAN 2017, 25)

Al-Kayial (interview, February 2019) emphasized the cultivation of pluralism in Barzah's council, where despite the Sunni majority "activists from outside (…), Christians, Alawis, Druze, women, men, (…) were able to integrate and to take part in the council's activities" effortlessly. This point was indeed central to Aziz' and Al-Kayial's notion of what councils were about: "Omar at the time saw a lack of pluralism in the society with regards to organizing life. He valued the concept of pluralism and diversity: every village, every city, every neighborhood has its own lifestyle, history, traditions and personalities. Pluralism and diversity would emerge as a result from the networks between places and people." The notion of building and strengthening networks among people was underlined in the main goals of the Darayya LC: "We seek in the local council to build a wide network of relations with everyone who supports our cause and the cause of the Syrian people" (Darayya LC 2014a).

That the meaningfulness of councils resides much more in the relations between humans and their practices than in geographical territory.This is manifest in the experience of councils that continued working after having left their original geographical territory. The local council of Daraya is one of those councils that remained functional for a while after its displacement to Idlib in August 2016, when the remaining population had been relocated. Under the title of "Darayya's People Services Committee" the former local council turned into a 'consensual' committee that facilitated Darayya's people's affairs in Idlib. The committee consisted of seven members who each represented the respective area where people from Darayya now resided in rural Idlib (Enab Baladi 2018). Whereas the geographically-based public services such as electricity, water, construction, roads and street maintenance became obsolete after displacement, the council/committee continued to work in the fields of education, health care, and the civil and real-estate registries (Enab Baladi 2018). The fact that the council could continue on a 'demographic' basis even though it had lost its 'geographical' space (Enab Baladi 2018) indicates that the councils were not only instruments of governance, but rather served as a social matrix in which cooperation and solidarity were the most formative experiences for people next to agency.

7.4.2 Ethics of solidarity versus structural solidarity – theoretical reflections

The transformative power of new revolutionary (inter-)subjectivities rooted in solidarity has been a prominent theme for many council thinkers in the past and for the way in which they have analyzed revolutions. The experience of cooperation and solidarity in struggle, when "all spirits are jolted", is notably seen to have important transformative effects on the individual psyche (Pannekoek 1912, II; see Muldoon 2021, 131): "No one who participates in a struggle for social restructuring emerges from that struggle with the prejudices, habits, and sensibilities with which he or she entered it." (Bookchin 2015, 90) The cooperative praxis in councils entails, culturally and psychologically, "(t)he cultivation of a disposition to act in solidarity with others" (Muldoon 2021, 144). Such "action in solidarity" is a central theme of Luxemburg's late reflections on revolution and councils (Muldoon 2021, 132). She argued for the cultivation of habits in human beings who are "full of passion and enthusiasm for the general well-being, full of self-sacrifice and sympathy for his fellow human beings, full of courage and tenacity". For Pannekoek, too, "the main rationale for these actions lay not in their objective aims, but in their subjective impact on the consciousness, solidarity, and morality" (Gerber 1988, 175). He was concerned with „forces of solidarity and devotion" and was convinced that revolutionary transformation would spill over from the individual to the collective, making "new forces of community" emerge (Pannekoek 1938).

What shines through from these quotes on the relation between revolution and solidarity is that solidarity is conceptualized as a rather individual socio-psychological effect of struggle. Bini Adamczak has problematized the perspective that tends to functionalize solidarity for revolutionary struggle and to reduce it to an ethical habit or moral behavior (2017, 286). "Solidarity is (…) neither a theoretical demand nor a mere function of struggle, but the very reason why revolutions are enacted. It is not a means, but already end." (Adamczak 2017, 259; translation A.W.). Instead of viewing solidarity as something that complements or accompanies social and material struggles, it should be conceptualized as the fundamental content of social relations, which in turn constitute the very foundation of any social order, combining both social and material elements. The aim of any revolutionary transformation, then, is 'structural solidarity'. Adamczak poignantly writes that the question what solidarity is cannot "be answered in a moral-philosophical way, but only in a social-transformative way. It is not a matter of attitude, but a matter of relationships. Not 'how am I supposed to conduct myself towards others' is the question, but 'in what relationship do we want to posit ourselves?'" (Adamczak 2017, 270, translation A.W.) Capitalism is understood as a social order based on relations of value as expressed in money and commodities. From a revolutionary perspective, the "decisive moment is when existing relationships not only change by becoming closer, friendlier and less instrumental, but when also new relationships are knitted and others are dissolved" (Adamczak 2017, 260; translation A.W.) This line of argument is especially pertinent to anarchists (but also Marx in his early *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*) and is worth revisiting. One well-known definition of the state, articulated by Landauer, highlights its essence as essentially „a relationship between humans, a way in which humans relate to each other" (1910). Less known is anarchist Pierre Ramus' work on councils in which he articulated the task of the revolution as one that would re-build relations: "Any group of human beings is, through life and necessity and already in the existing society, a whole microcosm of relationships. These relationships are to be put on a new basis." (Ramus (2005 [1923], 345; translation A.W.)[34] Likewise, Erich Mühsam

[34] "Jede Gruppe von Menschen ist durch Leben und Notwendigkeit schon in der heutigen Gesellschaft eine ganze Kleinwelt von Beziehungen für sich. Diese Beziehungen sind auf eine neue Grundlage zu stellen."

maintained that anarchists have to clarify "what kind of new political and economic relationships they want to engender as content of the new order of public life" (Mühsam 2007 [1930], 481, translation A.W.). For council thinker Ramus, the reshuffle of relationships and associations is the very content of social revolution: „When this process is simultaneously experienced by thousands of social formations, when old relationships dissolved, new ones were knitted thousandfold (…), precisely such a formative social and economic process will unfold that moves the whole society in its foundations – which precisely is the social revolution. (…) In this way the social revolution constitutes, by contrast to a political one, (…) a revolution of the social-economic relations of property and life" (Ramus (2005) [1923], 345; translation A.W.). Adamczak identifies solidarity as the vehicle for realizing such new relations of property and life. Bookchin likewise points to a social-material structure of "democratic and truly communitarian forms of interdependence" as a fundamental precondition for the functioning of a council society and of the emergence of "a generous sense of cooperation and a caring sense of interdependence" (Bookchin 2015, 74; 90). He argues that the society *as a whole* must be "oriented toward meeting human needs, responding to ecological imperatives, and developing a new ethics *based on* sharing and cooperation." (Bookchin 2015, 85; emphasis A.W.)

Adamczak tries to link the two aspects – ethics of solidarity and structural solidarity – in her conceptualization of revolutionary transformations as happening on three levels (2017, 262). First, on the level of subjects where humans develop agency; , second, on the level of new, prefigurative, collective institutions; third, on the level of relationships in every realm of society, where (just as Arendt mentioned it with regards to Hungary)forms of self-organization occur that re-relate humans: "Aus Rivalinnen werden Genossinnen, aus Vereinzelten Verbündete. Im selbst von Solidarisierungen hervorgebrachten und getragenen Kampf weiten sich solidarische Beziehungen auf Gebiete der materiellen Produktion und Reproduktion, der Zirkulation, Distribution und Kommunikation aus, die zuvor in privateigentümlicher Arbeitsteilung in getrennter, verdinglichter und herrschaftlicher Form organisiert waren." (Adamczak 2017, 263; see also 259) Obviously, councils (the level of institutions) and relationships (the third level) are reciprocally linked. Hence, councils are to be seen as the social matrix in which transforming relationships unfold, become manifest and are cultivated – the emergence of solidarity in revolution is not only a "desire for", but also "a manifestation of transformed relationships" (Adamczak 2017, 260). The desire for a transformation of capitalist production towards an alternative mode of production can then be deciphered as a desire for a transformation of capitalist *relationships* into relationships of structural solidarity (2017, 269).

While Adamczak's recurring evocation of councils/soviets, and of commons, points to how she envisions an institutional *form* of structural solidarity (2017, 269; 263), a more rigorous exploration is required to understand how and why these councils establish solidarity and cooperation within an institutional framework. Revolutions apparently deliver in a reliable way the emergence of habitual solidarity. This was no different in Syria where a sense of mutual care was tangible everywhere. However, solidarity in the sense of an ethics of interpersonal brotherhood and camaraderie is only half the battle, because new relationships (Lebensbeziehungen) cannot emerge solely from mere cooperative practices in councils as such, at least not in the long term. Rather, the cooperative ethics of councils must be rooted in, or at least connected with, cooperative modes of overall social reproduction. There must be *structural* solidarity instead of "structural hatred" in society at large (Habermann), not only cooperation in the councils as such, but in the socio-economic structures between and around councils (also Adamczak 2017, 269). The way in which Adamczak has suggested re-interpreting revolutions in terms of relationships in combination with the way

Omar Aziz has highlighted councils as spaces of cooperation bears a great source of inspiration for moving council theory forward.

7.4.3 Structural solidarity: The material preconditions of cooperation

> *To end the city's dependency on the regime, the revolutionary council began building an alternative circuit of wheat in the liberated regions by creating a geography of solidarity. (Munif 2020, 141)*

In the Syrian local council experience, the revolutionary ethics of councils strongly followed modes of cooperation, pluralism, trust and solidarity. However, large segments of everyday life remained structured along competitive and private concerns. Turkmani et al. (2015) point out that a possible and desirable "public mutuality" did develop in and around councils, but that it was hampered by an otherwise prevailing "private mutuality" (Tukrmani et al. 2015, 5). Judging from the examples that the authors give, the reason for this lies in the unchallenged market logic which enabled and encouraged actors to divert important resources (esp. foodstuff, crude/refined oil) away from the communities in the pursuit for profit. As a result, councils became more vulnerable to competing actors and less efficient in their service provision.

Although being marginal, forms of structural solidarity existed. The most coherent account of how councils attempted to develop a structural solidarity regarding foodstuff stems from Manbij whose location bore great potential in terms of agricultural infrastructure: "Manbij has one of the largest flour mills in Northern Syria, making the city vital and strategic for the entire region. The mills can process up to 450 tonnes of wheat a day, a quantity sufficient for 1 million inhabitants. After the liberation of the city, the regime kept providing Manbij with wheat to maintain the state assemblage in place. In addition, the director of the mills and approximately 100 employees were kept on the regime's payroll. The revolutionary council was initially unable to provide wheat at a low cost, or pay salaries, and as a result was forced to accept the regime's indirect presence in the city" (Munif 2020, 139f.) However, the council immediately tackled the provision of bread upon the city's liberation, prepared to run the mill independently, conducted needs assessments among the inhabitants and eventually aimed at building a more solid approach beyond immediacy and improvisation. "To end the city's dependency on the regime, the revolutionary council began building an alternative circuit of wheat in the liberated regions by creating a geography of solidarity. (…) This new geography required the liberated cities to share the benefits and burdens of dividing up the wheat equally among the different regions." (Munif 2020, 141) One major lever of this 'geography of solidarity' is precisely a structural one that includes planning. The councils did not tacitly abide the market logic as an unquestionable mechanism in which each council acts individually and as a competitor to other councils in the task of procuring raw materials for bread production.

The network of the medical offices from the local councils in the Ghouta region are a great example of how translocal, regional cooperation increased the councils' capacity and sustained communities' resilience: "they have (…) established networks of cooperation and communication between each other. Those networks have demonstrated their relevance particularly in crisis situations". This again strengthened "the links between and within the city councils" (Angelova 2014, 5). Such links between councils were of the utmost strategic importance: knowing that connectivity and mutuality between councils increased their resilience, the regime was determined to isolate

regions and hence councils from one another. Al-Kayial and Aziz viewed it as "essential to keep regions open and connected, so that experience, expertise and thoughts could circulate and be exchanged between the councils and regions", but that "it became increasingly difficult to keep connections given the barriers that were erected by the regime and armed groups" (interview, August 2020).

The sort of structural cooperation that the medical offices in Ghouta achieved is of no less importance in the agricultural sector. There is some anecdotal material about how councils contributed to building structures of cooperation. Again with respect to Ghouta, by 2015 "farmers (got) together to create bigger projects with the support of the LACs and (…) NGOs", because of large damage to agricultural infrastructure and because farming small plots became less profitable. This "helped farmers to grow wheat, which reduced the pressure of the siege" and people on the ground voiced great satisfaction over such approaches (Turkmani et al. 2015, 30). A detailed study on southern Syria identified a system of mutual support networks based on "agreements between local councils to bake for each other" in order "to mitigate some of the effects of larger bakeries being incapacitated or falling into disrepair." (RFSAN 2017, 19)

Whereas the councils attempted to manage the scarcity of resources and distribute aid, they apparently did not systematically bring resources, especially regarding food production, under their direct control. Two options for communities to gain control over local or regional food production would have been: first, expropriating and collectivizing agricultural production facilities or, second, at least, forging close cooperation with farmers and landowners to ensure that they would not sell the local produce to the regime, thereby increasing the councils' vulnerability to more affluent Islamist groups or to dependency on donors. Whereas the latter option – forging alliances with farmers – has hardly been reported in the literature, the takeover of state-owned land by local councils or of land that was abandoned did happen to a limited extent. In a few instances, councils made attempts to enact a sort of socialization and control aspects of agriculture and resources: "The local council in Rastan (…) has fertile agricultural land owned by Alawites who have fled the area. The council has put the land to use, and the proceeds go to the coffers of the local council." (HD 2014, 16) Similarly, the Douma local council invested "in agriculture, poultry and rabbits farms." (Turkmani et al. 2015, 36) Some councils "provide staff and equipment, build new sources, support and monitor the water pumping process as well as try to repair, maintain and expand the infrastructure" (Hajjar et al. 2017, 16). Apart from agriculture, the provincial council of Deir aEz-Zour is an example of how councils have established control over oil wells "proceeds from which go to supporting local councils and investment in the lucrative cotton trade" (HD 2014, 16).

The option of socializing agricultural production was not tackled systematically, although it was a real option: "According to the most recent estimates, more than fifty percent of the areas that produce wheat were under the control of the opposition in 2015." (Munif 2020, 142) Councils apparently rather confined themselves to "providing maintenance and repair(ing) services to local infrastructure, irrigation, agriculture, etc." instead of trying to bring these livelihood resources under the community's control in one way or the other (HD 2014, 15). As a result, councils had to compete with others to procure food either from donors or directly on the market. Not surprisingly, then, Angelova notes for the Ghouta region in 2013/14 that lack of resources especially also with regards to food caused "conflicts between civilians over the selling or withholding of resources" and has also created "tensions between certain city councils" (HD 2014, 7, 10). Both financial and food aid by donors that were intended to 'stabilize' councils in fact further undermined the option of bringing e.g. what under the community's control, because it alleviated the pressure for councils to confront the question of generating own income or – more fundamentally

speaking – of securing the very bases for ensuring livelihoods (see Hajjar et al. 2017, 20). Lastly, not to socialize also meant that agency was blocked from the field of securing livelihoods. The observation that in some cases of even rather participatory councils "(m)ost citizens are either not interested *or busy earning a living*" sounds banal, but is revealing (Hajjar et al. 2017, 17; italics A. W.). It points to the fact that a large part of immediate everyday life – everything that revolves around food – was not immersed in a revolutionary logic of self-governance, but remained under the logic of decision-making by private market actors in the character mask of owners/sellers and workers/consumers. Securing their livelihoods kept people *busy* individually, instead of making it a collective, democratically organized undertaking. Hence, the chance was largely missed to establish an alternative to the model of agricultural production based on private property and to create a setting in which the communities could secure their livelihoods democratically, in self-governance. An alternative to this structural competition over prices, supplies laid on the one hand in systematically seizing control over agricultural production – socialization – and on the other hand in building structural solidarity among all.

In recent theoretical debates about council democracy it was reaffirmed that the democratization of production – via expropriation – is the very "animating spirit of council democracy" (Wollner 2018, 79; also Hoffrogge 2019, 204). Expropriation of property was a point that was already central in the contemporary debates on the Paris Commune: "The Commune, they exclaim, intends to abolish property, the basis of all civilization! Yes, gentlemen, the Commune intended to abolish that class property (…). It wanted to make individual property a truth by transforming the means of production, land, and capital, now chiefly the means of enslaving and exploiting labor, into mere instruments of free and associated labor." (Marx 1871a) Subsequent council revolutions have essentially revolved also around that question: who really has access to and decides about the machines, the land, the physical spaces and material devices that are needed to secure people's livelihoods (e.g. Luxemburg 1918b, III). Private property was to be suspended in the form of socialization. Revising Marx's thoughts on the Paris Commune, Karl Korsch identifies the abolition of private property as the *conditio sine qua non* for a comprehensive liberation, for emancipation as such: "'*Without this last condition, the communal constitution was all impossibility and all illusion*', Marx says in this context with all desired distinctness." (Korsch 1929; emphasis in original). Otherwise, councils will not surpass the status of democratic add-ons to the supremacy of representative democracy. In Bookchin's vision of Libertarian Municipalism based on assemblies/councils, property is *principally* under the control of citizens via councils: "'(p)roperty' is integrated into the municipality as the material component of a civic framework" (Bookchin 1999, 185). Therefore, instead of limiting 'democratic' decision-making a) to specialists and b) to non-production issues, "the councils constitute an entirely new complexity in which public and private, political and social agency fuse" in a decentered way, by "extending the collective self-determination to the economic realm, to social labor in general, to the societal arrangement of economy and politics, of everyday reproductive labor and of societal decision-making, of private and public." (Demirović 2009, 195, 184; translation A.W.).

Bread supply is the area where councils rather systematically tried to play a central role. It is interesting to look at this example more closely to understand what is at stake in the question of socializing strategic resources or failing to do so. Wheat is an eminent foodstuff in Syria, accounting for forty percent of the caloric consumption of an average family (Munif 2020, 132). Whereas Syria's agriculture achieved self-sufficiency in wheat already in 1995, droughts in the pre-uprising years have weakened that self-sufficiency (Munif 2020, 132, 134). Nevertheless, agriculturally usable lands are available and even the damages due to bombing etc. did not destroy agricultural

infrastructure to an extent that would have made the socialization and self-management of agriculture meaningless. To the contrary, agriculture emerged as a vulnerability for the regime as it suffered the loss of crucial agricultural territories due to the uprising: "Since 2011, the Syrian government has lost most of Northern Syria, which represents the cereal belt of the country. This region is Syria's food basket and used to produce around 80 percent of the wheat" (Munif 2020, 136) in addition to the (north-)eastern regions of Deir al-Zor and Al-Raqqah (Munif 2020, 133). The former area largely fell under the control of the Kurdish self-administration which made efforts to collectivize land and steer prices for food. More often than not, in Syria proper the local councils took over and managed small parts of the wheat-to-bread chain, namely bakeries. The overall production chain comprises dams, irrigation networks, seeds, fertilizers, silos, transport logistics, mills and, only lastly, bakeries (Munif 2020, 138, and 134ff.). Economic liberalization notwithstanding (Munif 2020, 135), this infrastructure had been largely in control of the state before the uprising. "Before the conflict, the wheat market was largely controlled by the government, which set prices and volumes of wheat purchasing and silo storage. Since the conflict began, this role has been adopted primarily by the provincial councils of Dar'a and Quneitra in an attempt to maintain a regionally coordinated wheat supply." (RFSAN 21) A great number of bakeries, particularly the public bakeries that typically constitute the majority of bakeries in all regions, came under the control of local councils, who oversaw the production and distribution of bread. However, these councils had to purchase raw materials from the market. For instance, in the southern Deraa province, as of 2017, the "(f)ully public bakeries are owned by the community through the local council. All inputs such as fuel, flour, yeast, water, salt, etc. are procured by the local council. Local councils procure these inputs primarily in local markets. However, many villages' local councils also receive flour through humanitarian aid (which aim to meet up to 30% of need). Once the bakery receives the inputs and completes baking, the bread is collected by the local council and sold to households at subsidized prices" (RFSAN 2017, 13). Obviously, since the local councils did not dispose with the rest of the wheat production chain, they assumed the character of a market actor in several ways: by contracting privately owned bakeries and supplying them wheat that the council itself has to procure either on the market or through donors, or by selling raw materials to privately-owned bakeries that then bake the "bread both for distribution by the local council, as well as for sale in markets" (RFSAN 2017, 13). According to the respective region either public ownership prevailed – where the bakeries are owned and operated by the councils – of the latter models – private bakeries receiving ingredients from the councils and/or being contracted by the council – were salient (RFSAN 2017, 16). Either way, the local councils played a major role in owning, managing and supplying bakeries and they have been able to establish functioning mechanisms to provide localities with bread (RFSAN 2017, 19). Whereas the councils managed bakeries to a great extent, they had no grip on other parts of the production chain. The silos in the south that stored what remained in the hands of the Syrian Public Establishment for Grains (RFSAN 2017, 21), ostensibly a non-government affiliated body affiliated (ibid.), were not under the councils' control and disposition.

Furthermore, wheat production was not in their hands so that their role as purchaser of wheat on the market made them vulnerable to competition with the regime in buying wheat from the farmers. The experience of the city of Nawa in the agricultural region of Deraa is telling: "the major challenge to the silo operating at full capacity has stemmed from the provincial council struggling to purchase wheat from local farmers at competitive prices and paying on time over the past few years. This, coupled with higher prices offered in government-controlled areas, has led to a reduction in stores." (RFSAN 21) Lacking abundant financial resources, councils were left

standing, when the regime could offer higher prices, which was not rare at all, and hence subtracted agricultural products from opposition-held territories (Munif 2020, 142). Even as of 2020, "according to the most recent estimates, more than fifty percent of the areas that produce wheat were under the control of the opposition in 2015." However, farmers sell their crops either to the regime or to a middleman who then smuggles them to a neighboring country such as Iraq or Turkey." (Munif 2020, 142)

The disposition over resources or rather the lack thereof has been acknowledged as a "determining factor" for councils' success in the NGO literature in order to hold their ground vis à vis armed groups (HD 2014, 16). Heller's (2016, 11) analysis of the Idlib region is insightful, showing how other actors sought to bring resources under their control: "In many areas, rebels have seized the property of regime supporters and divided public property as 'spoils'. That can sometimes mean that rebels control the local sources of revenue that could help make the area council self-sustaining." Heller quotes a council member who explains the consequence of the councils' lacking control over water: "'For example, the local council doesn't control the water (…) so it can't collect a utility bill for water, so it can't [afford to] operate the water pump. So the local [armed] faction gets to keep selling the water" (Heller 2016, 11; insertions A.W.). This is analogous in the field of electricity: the "impact of the [councils]" in the field of electricity was "limited" when it was in the hands of private providers, because the councils' role was limited to negotiating better prices in the interest of the community. (Hajjar et al. 2017, 16)

Manbij again serves as a positive example of how a council fought for keeping more bread infrastructure under their control: "The revolutionary council wanted to prevent powerful military groups present in the city from controlling the mills and monopolizing the distribution of bread. The mills were difficult to guard as they were located on the outskirts of the city, making them vulnerable to attacks and as such, an easy target for belligerent military groups." Being confronted with an Islamist militia's attempt to seize the mills "(t)he council and several powerful groups in the city put all their differences aside and organized several protests until [the militia, A.W.] Ahrar al-Sham were forced to leave the mills." (Munif 2020, 140f). This example also shows how councils were not only faced with the challenging task of appropriating former state property and running it in self-management, but also with militias' attempts to seize property and use it for their own ends. In fact, wherever militias succeeded in establishing ownership over resources, they " emerged as the main economic actors" (Turkmani et al. 2015, 5) - thereby further eroding the councils' 'portfolio of tasks'.

In addition, NGOs' and donors' approaches to the matter of control over resources was not helpful, but had detrimental effects, because they affirmed the councils' role as a market actor. The NGO reports often manifest an absurd logic that is obsessed with generating monetary income instead of considering that the communities could bring food resources under their direct control in order to make direct use of it: authors point, for instance, to the widespread existence of subsistence farming, but deplore that it "generates calories not revenue." (Turkmani et al 2015, 17). Tragicomical situations occurred as a result of the communities' lack of control over land and agricultural produce. For instance, the fertility of Deraa province means that t "agricultural activity in this part (is) viable and profitable." Whereas people were suffering from a lack of food there and part of agricultural facilities were destroyed and looted (Turkmani et al. 2015, 17), "(p)art of the vegetable crop is sold to government areas" (Turkmani et al. 2015, 15). In that same region, livestock and factory parts were smuggled out (ibid., p. 25), some factories for cotton-related production were "disassembled and relocated to Turkey or Egypt" (ibid., 46). In the area around the northern city of Manbij, meanwhile, "(s)ome farmers s(old) their crops to a middleman who then

smuggles them to a neighboring country such as Iraq or Turkey." (Munif 2020, 142) In Ghouta, shelling and burning crops as well as cutting trees affected the agricultural production. Yet, the vegetables grown there "are exported for sale and vegetables for consumption by ordinary Syrians tend to be imported." (Turkmani et al. 2015, 45). Also in Ghouta, "some dairy factories continued to work", but sold the products to regime-held Damascus in government deals (Turkmani et al. 2015, 31). In light of a shortage of fuel which is needed for production of electricity through generators and hence important for agricultural production, it is only plausible from a monetary logic that crude oil arriving in the area is partly transported to Turkey (Turkmani et al. 2015, 51), whereas a use-value logic would put the oil to use in the community on the basis of need. That councils mostly contented themselves with being participants in a competitive food market pushed them further into a market actor role: they were forced to rely on food aid or to generate income through taxation in order to buy food on the market, but taxation was unpopular and hardly feasible given the impoverishment of the population (HD 2014, 14). The result was donor dependency: in three cases analyzed by Hajjar et al. (2017, 20, 16) "the [councils] produce and/or subsidize bread if they can access the necessary ingredients" but more often than not councils are dependent on resources provided by donors with regards to services and especially bread. Moreover, financial aid by donors had the effect that it prevented councils from confronting the question of generating their own income or – more fundamentally speaking – of securing livelihoods by bringing the means of production and means of subsistence under their control (see Hajjar et al. 2017, 20).

The positive examples of structural solidarity notwithstanding (medical networks in Ghouta, 'geography of solidarity' around bread in Manbij, small projects), the local councils or the Syrian uprising in general, missed the chance to challenge ownership structures so that a socio-material restructuring of relationships could not unfold. They – perhaps mostly unconsciously – followed an approach to councils that left the separation of spheres – politics as separated from economics – untouched so that councils were largely confined to acting as market participants and as politicized administrators of given material structures. Whereas they excelled in demonstrating that ethical solidarity reliably emerges in revolution, they ignored the point that councils must have something to decide about materially which affects people's lives outside the councils themselves: they must be the institutional *expression* of a mode of social-material reproduction that is itself cooperative. Hence, councils are a *necessary* condition to create such a social order based on structural cooperation, but they are not a *sufficient* condition.

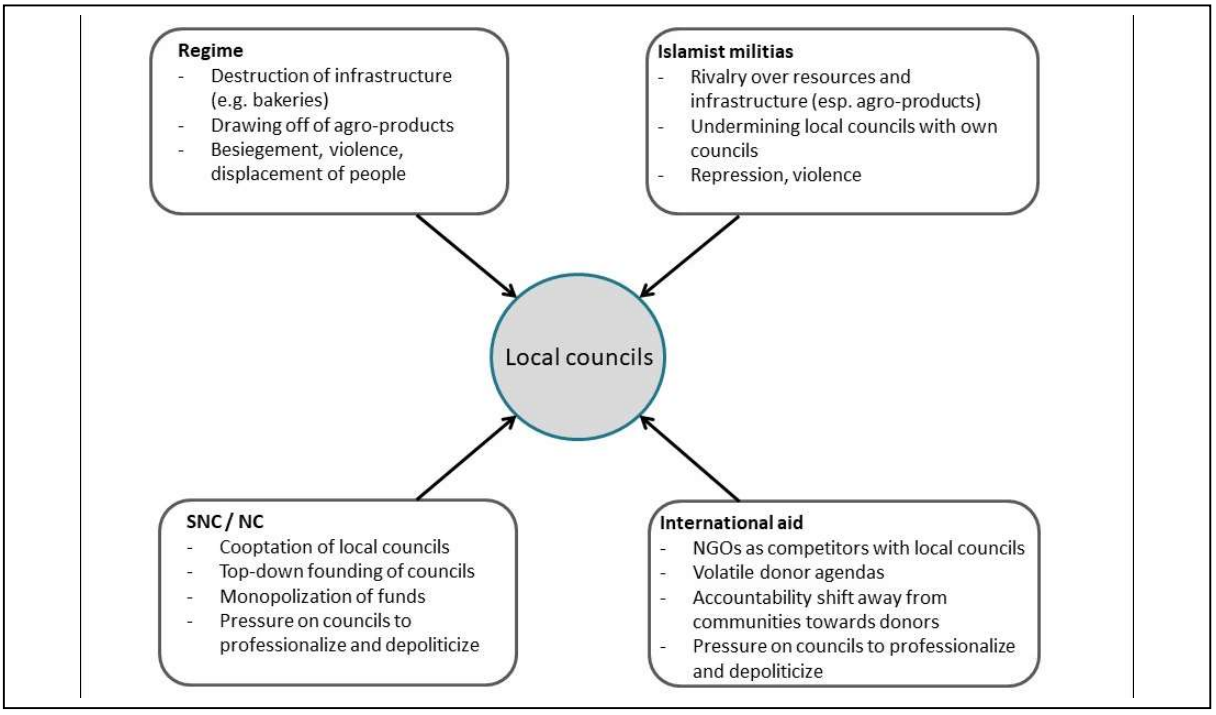
7.5 Pressure on councils through top-down control and international aid

> *The different military 'councils' and political 'organizations' of the opposition eliminated the councils and reshaped them and transformed what was left of them into bureaucratical entities that could be bought at the cheapest price. (Al-Kayial 2014; translation A.W.)*

The previous chapter suggested that the vulnerability and eventual demise of Syrian councils has to do with their neglect in tackling social-material structures. This following chapter will identify further factors that worked to weaken and undermine the councils and their more radical democratic potential.

If council thinkers are right that councils emerge again and again in revolutions, that they are an intuitive social formation for radical change (Arendt 1958b, 216; Arendt 1958a, 28) then the question is: why have revolutions so rarely succeeded in establishing a council-based alternative order? Certainly, "it is safe to say that no council system in Europe died a 'natural death'" (Popp-Madsen 2021, 77f) and "the attempts of council democracy have at no point in history had the opportunity to prove their innate emancipator potential" (Demirović 2009, 204).[35] That a revolution brings actors on the scene that aim at its repression by all means is a factor that we can take for granted and which needs no further discussion in detail – this also applies to the Syrian uprising, where the combination of repression by the regime and by Islamist militias certainly was the decisive factor to suffocate the councils and rob them of the time they would have needed to consolidate. It is important to keep in mind that this repression set the conditions under which the other sources of pressure could play out more easily, notably because it increased the councils' immediate need for material and financial resources for the continuation of life. However, I want to suggest that the obstacles to the flourishing of councils do not *exhaust* themselves in repression. The factors that I focus on in the following are, first, the attempt by the exile oppositional bodies to absorb the local councils into a top-down governance framework, pushing them to transform into de-politicized municipal administrations, and, second, the effects of international aid (professionalization, depoliticization). The figure below visualizes the councils as being antagonized by these four factors of counter-revolution that repressed, undermined and pacified the more radical potential of councils as democratic alternatives.

Figure 45: Four sources of pressure on local councils



Note: Source: A.W. based on studies and interviews cited in this chapter.

[35] This is not difficult to grasp from the history of council revolutions: The Paris Commune, for instance, was bloodily crushed by the French state in alliance with the German army; the Spanish Revolution was bloodily repressed mainly by fascists under Franco's command (again in alliance with the German army); the German revolution of 1918ff. for its part was bloodily repressed by the emerging fascist troops under the command of the German Social Democrats; the Turkish government persistently assaults the council-based cantons in North East Syria, and so forth. Currently, the North East Syria and the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico have been defying such assaults for over a decade and even 30 years respectively.

7.5.1 From councils to municipal administrations: Reversing the bottom-up logic of councils into a top-down governance structure

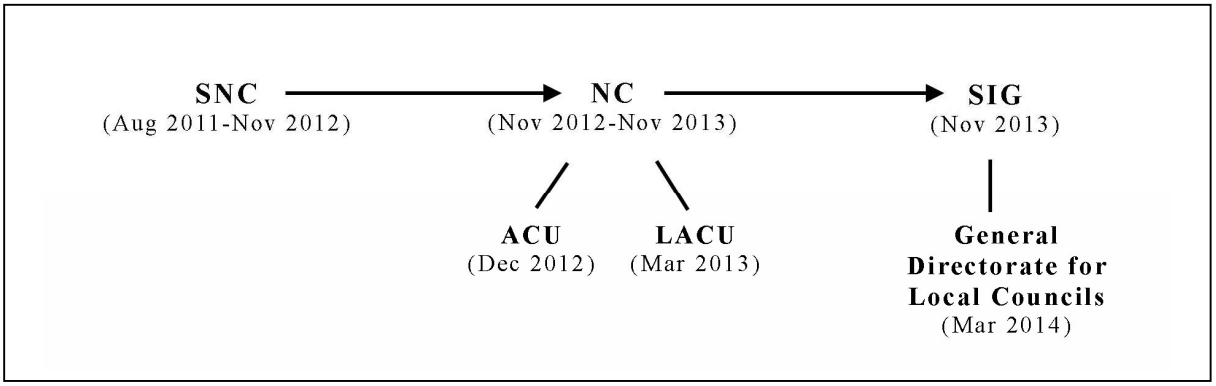
With growing numbers of local councils, the potential to establish connections increased: horizontal, between neighborhood councils, and vertical, between neighborhood councils and city, provincial, or regional councils, and eventually on a national level. However, this potential was unfortunately hampered by the regime's strategy to isolate regions from each other. Nevertheless, some bottom-up formations of provincial councils occurred. In Yabroud, a city north of Damascus, the local council on the city level managed the work of surrounding local councils on the village level under its mandate. It had been established independently from the SNC and deliberately kept a distance to the latter (Aljundi 2014, 21). Similarly, in the northern part of Syria in 2014, "small Local Councils started to get together (…), forming bigger governorate councils such as the Governorate Council of Aleppo or Idlib." (Enab Baladi 2019 [2014], 181) The towns of Ma'aret al-Numan and Kafr Takharim are mentioned as examples for local councils that have incorporated smaller village councils (Hajjar et al. 2017, 6). Accounts on horizontal linkages between councils of the same level are scarce, apart from the ones discussed above with regards to bread (Manbij) and medical aid (Ghouta) etc. One instance is the town of Marea that helped a town situated on the same power line restore its electricity supply (Kirkpatrick 2013).

At the same time, and parallel to these bottom-up efforts for translocal coordination, the exiled opposition was keen on building coordination among councils in their own way, prioritizing top-down control over local councils. This was to be achieved through integrating councils into a ministerial hierarchy associated with the opposition shadow government in exile. Both the opportunities and risks of having a higher opposition body representing the councils were apprehended by the local councils and observers. The main opportunity, from the perspective of revolutionary self-organization, was certainly the possibility of receiving financial support. This was acutely needed in order to rebuild community infrastructure and secure livelihoods. However, the risk of becoming attached to the SNC lay in the fact that the SNC had never been created by the councils themselves. Instead it was founded in exile and always remained quite detached from the councils on the ground and to a certain degree accountable to and dependent on foreign states rather than to the community. This in itself posed a risk of inverting the bottom-up design of the local councils and it had already alienated numerous LCCs from the SNC before the era of the councils (O'Bagy 2013). From the perspective of the National Coalition, the integration of local councils was important in order to "overcome the lack of legitimacy of the previous political body" (i.e. the SNC) in the eyes of foreign governments, based on the argument that local councils were usually established through elections – which is a rather flimsy argument (Faviér 2016, 10f.). By the end of 2012, the National Coalition created two bodies to achieve the embedding of existing councils and to channel support to them. The Assistance Coordinating Unit (ACU) was created in December 2012, and the Local Administration Council Unit (LACU) was created in March 2013. The figure on the next page visualizes the opposition government bodies and the attached institutions dealing with local councils.

Whereas the ACU was tasked with delivering humanitarian aid through or alongside local councils, LACU's aim "was to build state institutions by providing local councils with consultancy and with the basics of the electoral process." (Khalaf 2015, 52) Whereas the ACU was directly attached to the NC, the LACU was formally an NGO cooperating with other international NGOs (see LACU's studies in cooperation with NGOs: LACU & NPA 2015 and Hajjar et al. 2017). When the Syrian Interim Government succeeded in November 2013, it founded the General Directorate

for Local Councils in March 2014. These different units "mostly worked in competition with each other" and the conflicts among them "delayed efforts to consolidate the local councils under a standardized administrative structure" (Faviér 2016, 11).[36]

Figure 46: The three subsequent oppositional shadow-governments and their 'ministerial' bodies relating to local councils



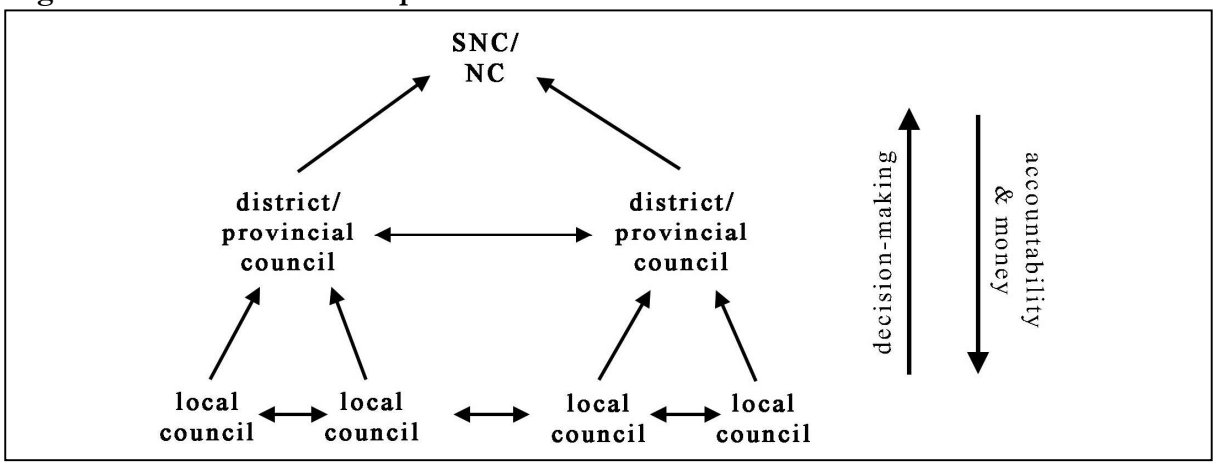
Note: SNC=Syrian National Councils; NC=National Coalition; SIG=Syrian Interim Government. ACU=Assistance Coordinating Unit; LACU=Local Administration Council Unit. Source: A.W. based on Faviér 2016; Hajjar et al. 2017).

From December 2013 onwards, the Syrian Interim Government and its Ministry of Local Affairs made further attempts to regulate the local councils and integrate them into a national oppositional framework by explicitly adopting and amending the above-mentioned Decree 107 (see background chapter). They relied especially on provincial councils that the SNC/NC had already tried to establish earlier, in order "to disseminate the norms and rules" (Hajjar et al. 2017, 12) by which councils were to be co-opted. The way in which provincial councils were established left no doubt that a top-down approach would prevail: "Most of these (...) councils were not founded following a bottom-up approach (...), and in some cases they did not even have any presence in the field at the time. Nevertheless, the [NC] chose to channel its funds to the local councils through these provincial councils, which has generated much tension between provincial and local councils in many areas" (Faviér 2016, 11). For the formation of the first provincial councils, representatives of fourteen provincial councils met in Istanbul in February 2013 under the auspices of the NC to discuss an internal regulations charter and to set standards on the expenditure of donations (Khoury 2013, 4f.). The reversion of the councils' bottom-up approach can be well illustrated with the example of how the Dera'a provincial council was established under the framework of the Syrian Interim Government: It was elected in Cairo in June 2013 for a six-month period and identified with the NC, whereas only few of the elected members actually lived in Dera'a and the council's staff was based in Jordan. Clearly, the SIG felt and was accountable more to its funders than to the councils on the ground: "The election was held in Cairo because the U.S.-based funders advised the organizers to do that" (Aljundi 2014, 25). The grassroots level put some resistance against this process: Locals from Dera'a reacted by forming a committee and eventually an own council. The provincial councils' representatives within the NC simply remained in their position despite elections that had taken place. Similarly, the provincial council of the Idlib region in the north-east "was established in 2013, but for several years it remained based in Turkey and only semi-functional." (Heller 2016, 12)

[36] The conflicts revolved around different agendas backed by rival regional sponsors, especially Saudi-Arabia versus Qatar (Faviér 2016, 11).

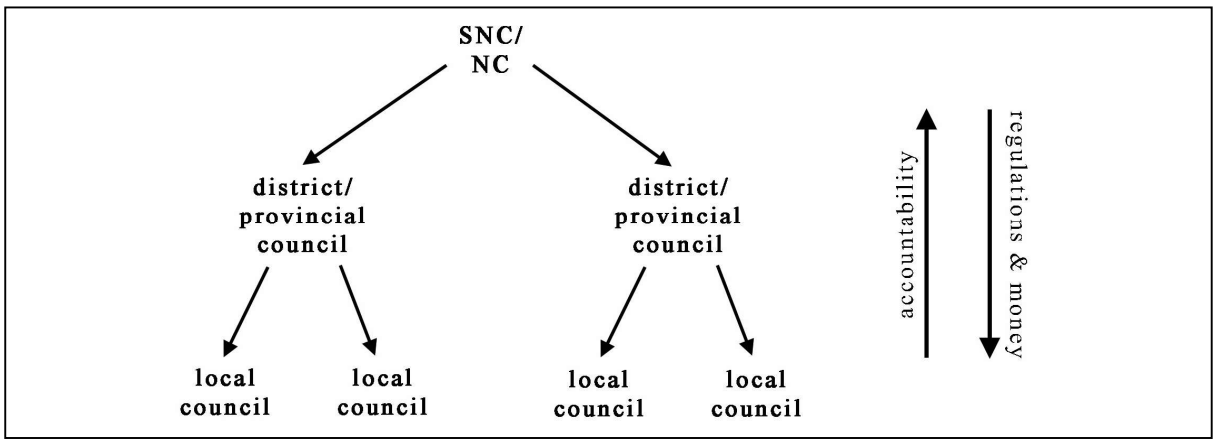
The two conflicting dynamics that were at work are visualized in the figure below: a potential bottom-up design in which councils would incite regional coordination as opposed to a top-down architecture. The decisive difference between the two models is the reversal of the flows of accountability and decision-making as well as the existence or lack of horizontal connections, as indicated in the direction of arrows. The two different approaches to local councils are also reflected in a shift in terminology, which reveals how local councils were pushed to become depoliticized municipal administrations within a hierarchical, statist governance framework. When observers described for the first time the emergence of local councils, they were referred to by the Syrians themselves as either local councils ('majlis mahalliy') or revolutionary councils ('majlis thawar') (O'Bagy 2012, 22; Hajjar et al 2017, 7). The envisioned integration of the councils into the top-down design of the SNC/NC came with a new wording: from local councils to Local *Administration* Councils (LACs). This is reflected in the name of the above described LACU – 'Local Administration Councils Unit'. The term 'administrative' as supplement to 'local councils' appears inconspicuous at first sight, but it indicates the transformation of the functioning logic of the local councils: from 'majlis' to 'baladiyya', from 'Räte' to 'Kommunalverwaltung'. By 2017, authors contentedly observed that the councils retained an authentic revolutionary ethos while assuming *predominantly* an administrative function (Hajjar et al. 2017, 7). Ignoring the prefigurative character of councils pointing towards a different form of social order, authors unanimously saw them as "steppingstone through the transition period" (Favier 2016, 7).

Figure 47: Possible bottom-up architecture of councils



Note: Source: A.W. based on e.g. Al-Jundi 2014; Khalaf 2015; Al-Kayial 2014; Aziz 2011/2012.

Figure 48: Top-down architecture of councils as envisioned by the exile opposition



Note: Source: A.W. based on e.g. Al-Jundi 2014; Hajjar et al. 2017; Khalaf 2015.

Interestingly, local councils often ignored or selectively appropriated the top-down-regulations – much to the despair of policy advisors and NGOs. Whereas the Interim Government and the local councils "are in theory connected through the ministries (...) and governate (sic) or provincial councils", these latter are "in practice (...) hardly able to provide any support" (Hajjar et al. 2017, 22). As of 2017, authors had to admit that "(o)nly 15% of the Syrian local councils implement legal regulations of the Ministry (…). 65% of councils took the initiative to build their own legal regulations, while the remaining 20% of the local councils did not adopt any legal regulations" (Hajjar et al. 2017, 16). Some authors conclude that the de-facto limited influence on the local councils reflects a persistent overall lack of credibility that people displayed towards the oppositional government bodies (Hajjar et al. 2017, 22; Heller 2016, 12f.). The resistance of local councils against top-down integration suggests that they were not easily subdued. However, in the long run, the financially backed oppositional institutions had more influence over the process.

7.5.2 Strengthening civil society against local councils through international aid

Unlike past experiments in council democracy throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Syria, as a country of the Global South, encountered a global power architecture that further challenged the radical potential of council based self-government. The top-down integration of councils pursued by the opposition government bodies has been accompanied by the attempt of international aid actors to address local councils as partners for humanitarian aid and civil society projects and as addressees of funding.

In the early phase, the Syrian councils could draw on the populations' readiness to donate money and on grants from Syrians abroad, especially Lebanon (Aljundi 2014, 21f.; Kirkpatrick 2013). Funding by the SNC was often irregular at that time (Aljundi 2014, 21f.). As of 2014, Aljundy (2014, 11) assessed for the three cities of Yabroud, Dera'a and Al-Raqqah that the councils "have been effective in the midst of a devastating war, despite their lack of funding". However, since councils were essentially dedicated to managing and ensuring livelihoods while still not having brought agricultural production under their control (as discussed above), they depended on generating either money or material supplies. This made them prone to slipping into either donor dependency or dependency on the higher oppositional bodies. It was in late 2012 that the SNC gained access to foreign funding which it channeled rather directly to some local councils (Faviér 2016, 8), for instance by France in October 2012, but the larger grants supported the higher oppositional bodies. For instance, Qatar's donation of $8 million was distributed to the fourteen provincial local councils that had been built in a top-down manner (Khoury 2013, 6). From the perspective of foreign governments that intended to support the opposition, local councils appeared to be an appropriate recipient of funding and influence. Foreign NGOs, donors and policy advisors did realize the potential of the local councils and actually lobbied with governments to support them, because they rightly analyzed the councils as both an authentic expression of the grassroots opposition and as a remarkably efficient service provider. Foreign governments, especially the US and France, were ardently interested in getting a grip on the local councils as partners on the ground who would be able to deliver aid in fairly accountable ways. Such direct funding by Western donors flowed for a very short period of time and in a haphazard manner (Favier 2016, 8). Whereas the local councils have only slowly and inconsistently received support by Western governments, "regional actors, like Qatar and Saudi Arabia, have channeled funding to specific armed groups in Syria, particularly the ones with Salafi or Jihadi orientation" (Khoury 2013, 8). From the perspective of a German government affiliated think-tank, Khoury's recommendation as of 2013 was to give

more funding to the NC that would channel it to the LCCs and to the local councils (ibid.). After initially providing direct funding to some local councils in late 2012, donors shifted to supporting the National Coalition from late 2012 onwards in their efforts to integrate local councils under their umbrella. This was done so that donors could eventually channel their funds centrally through the NC, in the hope that the funding would reach local councils more effectively. Then, however, by the beginning of 2013 donors preferred to fund capacity-building programmes to train staff instead of giving councils the necessary money. Thus, direct foreign aid to the councils declined substantially. One year later at the end of 2013, again, "when donor countries started to realize the shortcomings of the [NC] and its units in delivering basic services through local councils inside Syria, they started once more to support the local councils directly (...)" (Faviér 2016, 8). Then, yet another turn in donor policy occurred with the rise of ISIS since mid-2014 when donors prioritized "fighting terrorism rather than maintaining strong support for the local opposition actors" (ibid.). The promotion of civil society through financial aid flows towards the Global South has become a hegemonic paradigm in aid policy since the 1980s: instead of assisting governments directly, funding was increasingly channeled to NGOs on terms that were defined by the donors (Hearn & Dallal 2019). As Khalaf notes, civil society is a key focus of international governance, generally perceived as the central actor for change and the main recipient of foreign funding (Khalaf 2015, 41). Critics have underlined that international development and humanitarian agencies are far from being neutral actors whose interference and 'help' would have no consequences for the political development in contexts of revolution, resistance and opposition. To the contrary, both developmental and humanitarian aid have been shown to potentially pacify political dissent, to transform political struggles into the administration of civil society issues and to push political actors especially from the grassroots to professionalize and to become alienated from more radical endeavors. These dynamics have been termed as 'NGOization' (Hearn & Dallal 2019). Even if such 'help' is meant well, especially by the professionals who have no malign intentions, it easily turns into "a threat" (Schäfer 2013). In his discussion of the concept of civil society in international law, Rajagopal has highlighted that efforts to strengthen civil societies as part of developmental aid "have been ideologically biased by their formalistic definition of democracy that has tended to emphasize voting rights, and western-style representative institutions – in short the normative and institutional framework for the existence of classic western liberal rights." (Rajagopal 2003, 259) The problem with this setting arises on two levels. One is the level of funding, which concerns the relationship between donors (international agencies and their intermediaries) and recipients (local actors).Here, the problem is mainly how money flows are altering the way in which grassroots actor set priorities: "NGOs move closer to aid agencies through a reliance on foreign funding, they become more bureaucratic and experience a fall off in flexibility and ability to innovate." (Rajagopal 2003, 261f.) In that regard, Rajagopal observes that "civil society is (…) a terrain of struggle that is often bedeviled by undemocratic power struggles and exclusionary practices. NGOs are often formed by English-language-speaking, cosmopolitan local activists who know how to relate to western donors (who provide most of the NGO funding) and write fundraising proposals, while social movement activists do not often have this power." (Rajagopal 2003, 259f.) These dynamics are not unique to countries of the Global South. For example, in the Arab world, international aid flows that were intended to democratize the region have often had the opposite effect, strengthening authoritarian regimes and disempowering progressive actors and marginalized groups (e.g. Carapico 2002; Wiktorowicz 2000; Brynen 2000). Rather, researchers have shown in numerous contexts how NGOs have tended to professionalize and domesticate dissent, how activists are transformed into professional NGO-workers, how community members are transformed into clients and recipients,

and how flows of accountability have been reversed in different parts of the world (e.g. Choudry & Shragge 2011, 503ff.). The second level on which the international power setting plays out has to do with a more fundamental problem of the concept of civil society in the sense that it affirms both the existence of given spheres and their separation. How are international donor agencies supposed to deal with local councils who precisely elude the scheme of economic versus political versus civil society? Whereas many authors motivated by an emancipatory, community-empowering perspective, seek to remedy the problems by enlarging the understanding of what civil society is (Rajagopal 2003; Lauth 2003), I suggest, by contrast, that the potential threat for councils is obvious: international donors have the money that the councils would need in order to cater to their communities' needs. Because of the power asymmetry, councils are pushed to accept donors' conditions, especially depoliticization. As a result, councils are either NGOized or find themselves competing with civil-society-focused NGOs.

Detrimental effects of aid on these two levels can well be traced in the Syrian case. First, with regards to agenda-setting by donors that curbed the councils' agency and sovereignty: "The availability and agenda of external funding have been a major influence on the direction of the [local councils]. Donor priorities, rather than community needs, have often driven the direction of the LACs' work." Especially, the conditions for funding are reported to be "challenging, complicating and, in the worst case, interrupting the work of the [local councils]." (Hajjar et al. 2017, 22) Moreover, the restriction of aid on short project terms forces the councils (and all other recipients) to work "project-to-project rather than according to longer-term or integrated community-wide plans." (Hajjar et al. 2017, 0; 20). The relationship between local councils and relief NGOs was not always one of hostile competition (Hajjar et al. 2017, 13; Waters 2017) and later on, donors have recognized the necessity to re-associate the different local NGOs and stimulate cooperation (Faviér 2016, 12f.). However, this should not belie the thoroughly counterproductive mechanisms of foreign funding on the local councils in particular and on revolutionary movements that function in a bottom-up approach in general. Firstly, whereas the delivery of aid by others may certainly have been a relief for the councils in stressful contexts on the one hand, the organization and flow of aid in a detached manner from the local councils, shrinked the realm of sovereignty of the councils. The community centers established by UNHCR are a good example. Their number amounted to thirty in 2015 with a further fifty planned (UNHCR 2015, 22). Certainly, the training, services and activities they offered were valuable: "counseling, education programme, livelihood and vocational training, start-up business grant, material assistance distribution, awareness raising and psychosocial support activities". But all this had also been undertaken by the local councils before or in parallel. Now, the UNHCR praised their community centers for having managed to "access beneficiaries in the most challenging contexts as well as assisting persons with specific needs while promoting peaceful coexistence, social cohesion and community participation", but this was precisely what the local councils worked for - by the community, for the community. Secondly, as Khalaf notes, "when implementers raise concerns of potentially harmful impacts, by the time their voice reaches decision-makers in Western Capitals, agendas would have already been established." (Khalaf 2015, 52). By 2017, six years after the start of the revolution, international donors had still not found a framework to support local councils in a way that did not undermine their independence and effectiveness. As a result, it was still necessary to explain to donors that "it is vital to allow Syrian civil society and governance organizations to set their own programs and projects that fit local needs and priorities" (Haid 2017, 19). Notably, international aid also affected the newly cultivated agency because, quite simply, donors looked for target groups as appropriate beneficiaries and not for revolutionary activists. As expressed by one activist in 2013, "we realized that aid was turning

the people into consumers." (quoted in Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami 2016, 72). Hearn & Dallal (2019) note that overall, "the NGO practice of "remote management" disempowered Syrians by taking away decision-making power from those on the ground and handing it to expatriate bosses in distant capitals, outsiders outside of the country, just at the point where Syrians had discovered their autonomy." On the micro-level this works by setting the agenda and defining the content of training. In principle, training could have been useful in a variety of areas, such as how to enlarge cooperative farming, how to repair and maintain infrastructure, or in other fields that were prioritized by the local community. Instead, one major focus of funding was on 'good governance trainings' and capacity-building in the realm of finance and accounting. The absurdity of this was widely apprehended. Syrians themselves bitterly mocked the NGOized procedures and clearly rejected the mechanisms early, as for example activists in a town in the Idlib region proclaiming: "My name is Kafranbel, and I don't need trainings in needs assessments" (Mansour 2013). But also NGOs and the opposition bodies detected the councils' persistent discontent with trainings (LACU & NPA 2015, 10; 24). Nevertheless, NGOs and the ministerial institutions dealing with the councils clung to training in management as "the biggest priority need" (LACU & NPA 2015, 32).

On the second level, local councils had to be situated within the prevailing paradigm of international aid, which focuses on civil society. This meant that they could either be considered part of civil society or outside: "Western donors chose to fund non-governmental organizations rather than the embryonic government structure of the Opposition because they wanted to avoid accusations of supporting terrorists or of being 'political'." (Hearn & Dallal 2019) If local councils are not within civil society,two possibilities remain: they are understood either as political bodies - such as a party - or as administrative entities. In this respect, the conclusion of a Danish government-associated NGO report from 2014 on the councils is very telling. From their perspective, "the main issue and challenge is to depoliticize the councils, in order to facilitate the return of technical capacities and then support horizontal and vertical accountability, also relying on local constituencies and external donor structures. This would allow local civil society groups to maintain a space for political activism in opposition-held areas, but it would also restrict local administration to service provision and civil administration." (HD 2014, 6). Councils were pushed to neutral local administrations whereas the 'political' part of the councils was demerged from the councils and pushed into the civil society sphere where NGOs were positioned "in competition with and undermining the revolutionary councils." (Hearn & Dallal 2019) In that process of demerging parts of councils' tasks and moving it into civil society a relationship of competition evolved between councils and NGOs: "[Local councils], NGOs, CSOs, and armed factions sometimes engage in the same field and thus compete over certain service delivery functions. They thereby jostle for authority to coordinate, allocate and deliver services, for the control of resources and positions related to service delivery and for legitimacy that is associated with it." (Hajjar et al. 2017, 13)[37] Khalaf similarly describes the competitive dynamic between NGOs and councils: local organizations are subcontracted as implementers by the International NGOSs (INGOs) that were operating from Gaziantep in Turkey. "At first, these local NGOs were competing with each other to act as implementers of INGO and UN agency programmes inside Syria. They then gradually succeeded in becoming the direct beneficiaries of some pooled funds, such as the Humanitarian Pooled Fund (...), which is available to Syrian NGOs but not to the local councils, which are perceived by the UN agencies as

[37] Heller (2016) describes in detail how the two dominant Islamist groups in the Idblid region have established their own service administration structures: The Public Service Administration by Fateh al-Sham Front and the Service Administration Commission by Ahrar al-Sham. The two groups compete with each other as well as with local councils and with the provincial council over service provision.

a 'political structure of the opposition'. As a result, most of the local NGOs have imposed themselves as the de facto actors in humanitarian aid distribution and field hospital management while the local councils have concentrated more on maintaining and repairing local infrastructure." (Khalaf 2015, 12)

It is evident from the discussion of obstacles that the councils were squeezed by a combination of factual constraints (lack of resources), competing interests of actors (exile opposition, international actors), and repression (regime, Islamist militias, unfavorable states). These constraints made them vulnerable to dynamics and agendas that had not been their own and strongly undermined the empowering experiences of agency. The suffocating environment in which local councils operated prevented them from developing their own agendas and placed them under constant pressure to react to events with limited time and resources. Al-Kayial points to this aspect, which is otherwise hardly reflected in the literature but is, I suggest, a decisive point: "(…) we ran out of time. The reality in Syria became very difficult and the councils were not able to become stable and due to the interests of foreign states with regards to the councils, they could not develop by themselves. Omar viewed that the councils would be able to deal with all these actors, even with the Islamists, in their own way without losing their independence, simply because they were so strongly rooted with the people. (…) Maybe, if the war hadn't unfolded to that level, they councils would have been able to continue developing their potential." (Al-Kayial, interview, August 2020) The following chapter sheds light on the more radical potential of the councils by reconstructing the particular way in which Omar Aziz conceptualized them.

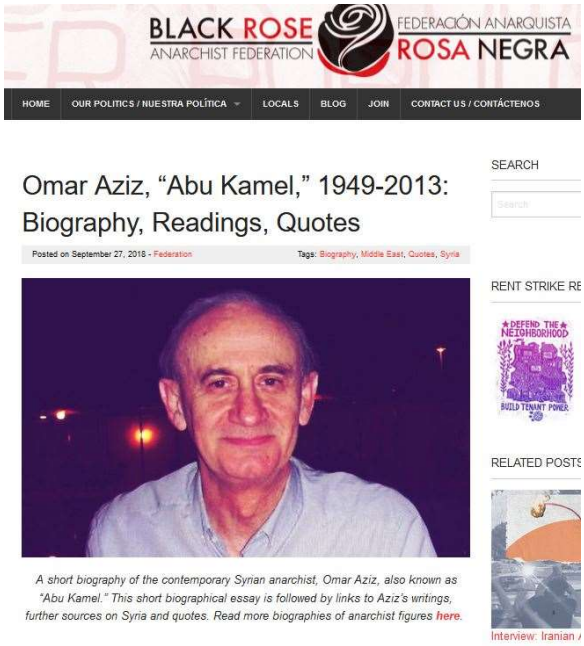
What conclusions can we draw from the analysis of the councils with regards to how the local councils have been claimed by memory workers? The detailed exploration of the four dimensions of councils complicated the content of claiming strategies especially with respect to the anti-state character of councils. The latter has been emphatically asserted by memory workers, but they hardly explored what this anti-state character consisted of beyond the fact that councils functioned autonomously from the state. The analysis of the councils found that the anti-state character results not automatically from agency, but manifests itself in the re-separation of powers with a tendency towards privileging the executive over the legislative. Indeed, assemblies (which are an expression of legislative) were systematically institutionalized and were used in highly heterogeneous ways and for different purposes. Secondly, the ways in which the councils practically challenged the separation of social spheres is an issue that is underemphasized by memory workers, but also in council theory. Given the tremendous impact of 'NGOization' on councils, the concept of civil society and the notion of social spheres deserve more critical attention when discussing councils, both empirically in Syria and with regards to council theory. By contrast, agency and the councils' success in that regard is certainly the theme that was very adequately reflected by memory workers. Memory workers' rightly highlighted that it was the merit of councils as particular social spaces to enhance capacity, creativity, skill. Apart from that, the closer look at the councils could also sharpen the analysis of the prefigurative capacity of councils: yes, through practical tasks and agency people prefigured alternatives in the here and now, as was argued by memory workers. But the capacity to institutionalize the alternatives was obviously curbed due to the lack of control over resources, land and means of production, and also because of exclusionary electoral and constituting procedures that, over time, increasingly curbed the constituent moment rather than preserving its openness – which has been highlighted by council theory as important. The positive examples though, such as Darayya and Barzah, showed that self-government based on councils is not an idealistic illusion.

8. Omar Aziz and council theory

Omar Aziz (…) cannot easily be put into a theoretical box. He (…) exited the traditional models of political thinking and he was concerned with finding a new, truly alternative culture. (Km Al-Maz 2014, translation A.W.)

The memory project "100 Faces of the Syrian Revolution" has portrayed Omar Aziz as "an economist, intellectual and anarchist dissident." ("Omar Aziz" 2020) He was born in 1949 and grew up in a bourgeois Damascene family in al-Amara neighborhood before leaving the country to study economics at Grenoble University in France (ibid.). He mostly lived in the USA and in Saudi-Arabia where he worked as an engineer (Hassan 2013, Jan 9; Sethness 2018), but has continued to be perceived as "a guy from the hood" (Arabic 'ibn al-balad') by Syrians (Al-Kayial, interview, 2019). In his thinking and writing, he was concerned with understanding mechanisms of domination (particularly in Syria), as well as the possibilities and modes of resistance. A few articles by him appeared in newspapers in Arabic under the alias Kamal Jum'a (e.g. in Lebanese daily Al-Safir, Aziz 2007 and 2011). When the uprising began in 2011, Aziz returned to Damascus. His daughter Joana is quoted as follows: "seeing the youth galvanized, during the early stages of the revolution, is what motivated him to move back to Syria. (…) Ever since I can remember, my father talked about this collective dream of liberation from domination. It is a desire that cannot be killed militarily or otherwise." ("Omar Aziz" 2020) Aziz' intellectual quest was to figure out ways for a revolutionary transformation that would overcome authoritarian structures in Syrian society and gradually establish a new political and social culture based on self-organization and without reliance on the state.

Figure 49: Snippet of a biographic article on Omar Aziz in digital media



Note: Source: Sethness (2018).

The aim of this chapter is to sketch Aziz' intellectual horizon, which informed his thinking about how the Syrian revolution could unfold, why and towards what. Omar Aziz' discussion papers (Aziz 2011/12) were written in a very pragmatic style, focusing on what appeared necessary in the particular revolutionary situation that he witnessed. While implicitly reflecting Aziz' vision of the councils as organs of a stateless or anti-state order, they present themselves more as a manual for the councils rather than a

comprehensive theoretical discourse. However, in fact, they bear both a pragmatic and a theoretical dimension. Since the latter has only been explored tentatively (by BbS 2017), this chapter seeks to enhance this understanding significantly thanks to interviews conducted with Samy Al-Kayial. In a first step, Aziz' intellectual background will be sketched, and in a second, the papers will be discussed. Lastly Aziz' contribution to council theory is discussed by positioning him among different approaches to councils.

8.1 Omar Aziz' intellectual background

Memory workers have relied significantly on framing Aziz as an anarchist in their claiming strategies, as the analysis of remembrance has shown. In many texts, Aziz' thinking and his concept of local councils has been closely associated with anarchism on the one hand (Hassan 2013, Al-Shami 2013, Sethness 2018, Faviér 2016) and Rosa Luxemburg on the other (Sethness 2018, Hassan 2013; Galiàn 2019b, 2020). Al-Kayial (interview, February 2019) explains that "Luxemburg was one of Omar's sources of inspiration, but not the most important one." What strongly mattered to Aziz was Luxemburg's insistence on self-organization and spontaneity that she articulated, for example, in her analysis of the Russian Revolution 1905 and a year later in her famous essay "The mass strike, the party, and the trade unions" (Luxemburg 1906). There, she strongly highlighted the priority of self-organization and spontaneity of the workers' movement as opposed to the idea that a party should lead the proletariat.[38] Imprisoned during the German Revolution in 1918, she wrote a critique of Lenin and Bolshevism in the 1917 Russian Revolution (Luxemburg 1918d). The latter had given birth to a Soviet Union ('soviet' means 'council') which became increasingly dominated by and subsumed under the nascent Bolshevik party that eventually installed an ultra-centralized state (Rosenberg 1966, 135ff.). As opposed to Lenin, Luxemburg vehemently emphasized that the working class should *self*-organize *autonomously* and that a revolution was essentially a series of creative, experimental acts, whereas Lenin believed that class consciousness and thus the willingness and capacity to act had to be brought to the proletariat *from without* by a *party* (Wallat 2012, 17ff. and 99f; Luxemburg 1906). Luxemburg warned against the substitutive dynamics which would later indeed occur as a result of Lenin and Trotzky's ultra-centralism in which - as Al-Kayial (interview, August 2020) poignantly phrased it – "the working class would be substituted by the revolutionary party, the revolutionary party would be substituted by the central committee, the latter by the chairman, and finally the chairman by Stalin." In line with this Luxemburgian critique, "Omar opposed Lenin's thinking that the necessary consciousness would come to the working class from without, by the help of the party." (Al-Kayial, interview, February 2019). Interestingly, Aziz has not dealt further with the experience of council republics in Germany from 1918 onwards (which have been the point of departure for recent debates on councils, e.g. Kets & Muldoon 2019).[39] Neither did he appear interested in the theoretical writings of council communism in Central Europe from 1920 onwards, nor does he refer to other anarchist experiments apart from his invocation of the Paris Commune. Perhaps this was due to a lack of interest, or maybe it was his French academic and political socialization that guided his focus in other directions. Be that as it may, this leads to the question about his relationship with anarchism. Al-Kayial is skeptical about labeling Aziz an anarchist: "More than once I wrote that he was an anarchist, but it feels a little bit like

[38] She did not propose local committees (Galiàn 2020, 144). Rather, she analyzed what had happened in the Russian Revolution of 1905, and this was notably the formation of councils. This became all the more notorious and as such again discussed by Luxemburg later in the context of the Russian Revolution 1917.

[39] Aziz does mention the German Revolution as a term very briefly in his 2007 article. Luxemburg herself was involved in the German Revolution and engaged in the strategic debates, especially in the discussion of whether to endorse a parliamentary trajectory or a council-based alternative to parliamentarism (Luxemburg 2007 [1918]).

doing him injustice because he refused to put himself into categories."[40] He further explains that "whereas indeed Omar thought of himself as communist anarchist", he "never told anyone, e.g. in Barzeh, 'I am an anarcho-communist'. (...) Actually, it was not important to us to think of ourselves as anarchists or communists or so. (...) Of course, among his friends he explained what he was influenced by." (Al-Kayial, interview, February 2019). Although the papers are not explicit in that matter, it is beyond doubt that he viewed the local councils as a potential vehicle for a social transformation according to anarchist principles: "Aziz stood for a complete break with the existing state, the achievement of collective liberation without waiting for regime change, or for one ruling power to replace another. He believed that communities are capable of producing their own freedoms regardless of political vicissitudes." (Barkil-Oteo 2017) The local councils were clearly viewed by Aziz "as a form of local governance and to decentralize the Syrian state completely." (Assaad Al-Achi quoted in Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami 2016, 68). However, Aziz "avoided to talk about that, because he did not want to appear to suggest a project that would rival with the vision of the larger opposition." (Al-Kayial, interview, February 2019) Hence, the anti-statist dimension of his idea of councils was largely not recognized: "The difference between Omar and the others was: he viewed that the local councils were a categorical critique of any future state, the others viewed the councils as part of a new state to come. (...) Whereas they demanded the fall of the regime and the establishment of a new government, we wanted the fall of the regime, but we were not interested in a new government."

The prefigurative notion that "the revolution had to succeed right here and right now, among the people" instead of "wait(ing) for a new state that would make the revolution victorious" (Al-Kayial, interview, August 2020) is a prominent line of thought in anarchism, from syndicalists to insurrectionary currents. However, Aziz' rejection of the state and parties in favor of self-organization and collective autonomy drew less from classical anarchist thinkers than from modern philosophy, notably Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben. Aziz' article *The State of Exception, The Law, and the Desire for Life* (2007) deals with the concept of the State of Exception put forward by Agamben (1998; 2005). To put it in a nutshell, Agamben's thesis maintains that all sovereignty - including the one in liberal, democratic states – is essentially based on violence and on the potential suspension of law in any given moment. Violence hides in the heart of political sovereignty and it is in the state of exception that this fact reveals itself. Whereas the first part of that thesis is a widely shared perspective including in liberal thought, Agamben's emphasis is that the suspension of law has become the rule rather than an exception.[41] Ever since, Agamben argues, the state has included in its laws the possibility to protect itself from any threat to its existence through the concept of emergency rule by which states suspend the rule of law at their will. And, more precisely, the state of exception is not an error in the system or an alien to the Law - rather it is a consequence of sovereignty and law themselves. This claim is, of course, contrary to the commonsensical assumption that the state's task is to protect society and that the state of exception is an evil that has to be combated in order to *return* to the rule of law (Aziz 2007). With regards to the Arab region, where emergency laws sometimes have been rather the rule than an exception over decades[42],

[40] Al-Kayial raises the point that the term anarchism is not a useful reference term for the Syrian context, since the country had not witnessed anything like an anarchist movement as in other countries. He proposes to use 'la-sultawiy' in an Arabic-language context.

[41] Striking contemporary illustrations for this are the refugee camps in the border regions of the European Union since 2015 where international rights are de facto suspended, as well as the EU's policy to illegally return asylum-seekers in the Mediterranean Sea to Turkey or Libya or to even let them drown. Agamben himself dealt extensively with the concept of camps that are seen as a spatial manifestation of the state of exception par excellence (Agamben 1998, 181; and Agamben 2000).

[42] Think of Egypt under Mubarak's rule. In Syria, president Al-Assad reacted to the uprising in summer 2011 by eventually terminating the emergency law after decades - only to pass a counter-terrorism law shortly afterwards which practically amounted to the status quo ante (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami 2016, 45ff.).

Aziz writes: "The state of exception in Arab countries produces the absolute surrender of bare life" – 'naked life' in Agamben's terms. "Life is worthless in these countries and at the complete disposal of the rulers." (quotes of Aziz 2007 always translated by A.W.) However, Aziz refutes the invocation of the rule of law as a rescue and aligns himself with Agamben's analysis. He links this also to democratic states of the West: "The state", he writes, is in constant "fears that the ones who rise up (from slaves in Rome, to the workers in Germany in 1919, to modern uprisings such as the one in Argentina) will realize their desire to widen the spaces of their lives as well as their intellectual, psychological and physical capacities." (Aziz 2007) The Agambian topic of emergency rule echoes Walter Benjamin's famous *Theses on the Concept of History* written in 1940 – and Aziz mentions Benjamin briefly in his article from 2007. In thesis number VIII Benjamin states that "(t)he tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'emergency situation' in which we live is the rule."[43] More than half a century after Benjamin's *Theses* – well before the suspension of the right to asylum in the EU – Agamben diagnosed the state of exception not as a vestige of overcome dictatorships or totalitarian states, but rather as a "paradigm (...) that has not only remained current but has today reached its full development" (Agamben 2005, 32). Not due to a *decay* of the state, but as a *consequence* of the state. Thus, for Aziz, "the crux of the matter is (...) not how we return to or arrive at a state of the rule of law" (Aziz 2007), but to overcome the state.

Criticizing the state fundamentally consequentially entails a renunciation of all politics that seeks to take over the state or to get a share in state power. This is no different in Aziz' thinking. Importantly, however, he also rejects the classical Marxist/anarchist paradigm of class struggle with its focus on labor: "We have witnessed a change of the character of struggles in our countries and in the world: Movements [for change; A.W.] are not concentrated anymore around the workplaces or the universities." (Aziz 2007) Consequently, Aziz proposes a shift of perspective towards life in general and to everyday life as sites of a revolutionary transformation.[44] He concludes that "we have to look at the struggle from the angle of a desire for life to begin with, in order to reach a different perspective, one that focuses on the micro techniques [of humans; A.W.] and not on the macro structures [of institutions, the state; A.W.] (Deleuze and Guattari); a perspective that looks at the precedence of life and the precedence of the struggle in order to empower the selves ['al-dhaatiyaat', A.W.] and to activate their mental, physical and psychological capacities; a perspective that focuses on the affects as a basis and foundation for the relationships between humans." (Aziz 2007) This quote condenses three main theoretical fields that inspired Aziz and that served him to later justify the local councils: first, French post-structuralism represented by Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, whom he explicitly mentions, second, post-workerism represented by Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri with their flipped causality of struggle and domination, and third, Medieval philosopher Baruch de Spinoza's idea of joy as the supreme emotion and goal of all beings. I will unravel this in the following. Sami Al-Kayial (interview, February 2019), who during the uprising turned his back on his rather orthodox Marxist political socialization in trade union politics, explains these basic principles of Aziz' thinking: "In this thinking it is not about classes or social strata, but it is about creating free spaces. His central theme is the desire for life ('al-tawq ila al-hayat'). Desire ('mahabba') is the basis of all this, as well as humans' striving to persist that Spinoza has termed 'conatus' ('al-istimrariyya') – on the level of neighborly, free connections, not on the basis of parties and organizations. People should organize themselves to self-manage their lives – everything from marriage, divorce, work – and not to persuade each other of abstract political programs. Not at work, but in the spaces of everyday life."

[43] Note that Benjamin wrote these words during the rise of fascism in Europe, but well before the beginning of World War II. Back then Benjamin derided "(t)he astonishment that the things we are experiencing in the 20th century are 'still' possible", because in his view this astonishment stems from an "[untenable] conception of history" which imagines a stable line of progress and development whereas in fact mankind's history is a pile of rubble and deaths (Benjamin, Thesis 8).
[44] Hence, he did not aim at a "cross-class alliance" (Sethness 2018), but rather at a post-class alliance.

This background allows us to understand that Aziz' advocacy for free social spaces derives from two distinct sources. First, it stems from a critique of the state based on thinkers like Agamben, and, second, it draws from a kind of 'vitalist' anthropology concentrating on 'the human', a human that is acting and sensing, creative and striving. Many communist and anarchist council thinkers considered the realm of labor as an eminent site of councils. From here, workers would transform and re-create society, autonomously, collectively, in a self-organized way (see upcoming final subchapter). However, Aziz was convinced by Antonio Negri's & Michael Hardt's proposition that substantial struggles do not revolve around the narrow framework of capital anymore, but instead potentially take place in all realms of society (Babiak 1996, 290). As Al-Kayial explains, a new commonality of people was not to be derived from their work or their identity as workers, but from "the daily, common life ('al-hayat al-'aamm') (Al-Kayial, interview, February 2019). Negri shifted the perspective from the productive labor of the factory worker to human activity in all of its forms so that eventually each and every person is considered a 'worker'. The 'operaio sociale', the social worker that *everyone is*, supersedes the industrial worker, and material labor is increasingly superseded by immaterial labor or, in yet more modern terms Care Work. Thus, revolutionary struggles are not confined to the factory as the place of labor, but the *fabbrica diffusa* (the 'diffused factory'), which society has become: "If the whole of society is a factory, then every conflict in it is a class struggle" (Metzger 2013). Consequently, 'labor' is not dismissed as a fundamental category. Instead, "Hardt and Negri salvage the pivotal concept of labor by lifting it out of its narrow industrial context and refiguring it as a poeticized 'Dionysian' activity that "produces life and constitutes society (...) in both the realm of work and that of non-work." (Babiak 1996, 285) On this view, labor produces material wealth, but most importantly it also produces sociality: subjective and radically autonomous ways of collective thinking and acting. Aziz was especially influenced by Hardt and Negri's first co-authored book, The Labor of Dionysus – A Critique of the State Form (1994), in which the authors refer to Dionysus, the Greek god of fertility and festivity, of vegetation and wine, of insanity and religious ecstasy. Whereas, according to Hardt & Negri, labor as such actually has to be considered the basis for all life, it has become, in the modern state, a means of capitalist discipline, exploitation, and domination. The metaphor of the 'Labor of Dionysus' is a counter-paradigm to that imprisonment of human vitality in the form of capitalist production in the modern state. Hence, the supreme goal of resistance is to smash the capitalist and the state's apparatuses and all the confinements that are put upon the human (Babiak 1996). The figure of Dionysus evokes the vision of a worker who crushes these mechanisms and then enjoys life in an orgy of joy. Al-Kayial (interview, August 2020) explains: "We related this thinking of Negri's to the matter of the local councils: We destroyed the regime's domination and we now wanted the people to be full with love and joy in a way. We were very happy to witness all the dancing that took place all the time in the demonstrations. This appeared to us as the launching of people's vitality and spiritedness in their confrontation against the regime." (On the role of dancing in the uprising: Al-Kayial 2019). Moreover, the Dionysian powers of humans' labor are neither merely destructive ('smashing the regime'), nor are they a defensive strategy against the capitalist state. Rather, the Dionysian capacity amounts to "the critical and constructive powers which we use to produce autonomous ways of collective thinking and acting" (Babiak 1996, 290). Omar Aziz strongly insisted that free social spaces and resistance in general should not be considered as a *defense* of people against the state. Whereas Marxist traditions usually view the actions of the state or Capital as the cause and workers' struggles as the resulting effect, Hardt & Negri reverse this causality and maintain that any policy shift was a result of what the state and Capital were confronted with. Aligned with the controversial concept of reversed causality that Hardt & Negri and the post-workerist (post-operaist) tradition stand for, Aziz asserts that it is the state that is continuously forced to adapt in order to preserve its domination over individuals: "the heart of the matter is 'life' itself in the first place (...). And here I do not mean the defense of life (...). The term 'defense' is dubious,

because it pretends as if the behavior of individuals in their liberation was a reaction to the rule of the authority, and thus also their desire to be free. [To the contrary; A.W.] their striving to widen their possibilities and their intellectual capacities is the driving motor for the machinery of the authority and the ideological apparatus. (…) It is the struggle of the individuals to create independent and joyful spaces that provokes an effort of the authorities' machineries. It is the struggle that pushes these machineries to create new regimes and techniques of control and discipline." (Aziz 2007)

The notion of a 'precedence of life before domination' is one that had earlier been developed by French philosopher **Gilles Deleuze** as a critique of French structuralism. Whereas the latter views the human as a product of domination and structural preconditions, Deleuze flipped the causality to say that human vitality comes before the fact of domination and that the latter attempts to guide and dominate vitality. If the individual was only the result of domination and its structures, no revolution could emerge - which led the 1968 revolutionaries in France to sarcastically ask whether it was the structures that took to the streets or the people. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the major driving force of all life in the universe is *desire*, the articulations of human life are essentially shaped by desire. "Desire is a key concept in Deleuzian philosophy. Deleuze's desire is quite different from that of other thinkers. Both in the West and in China, in the past as well as in the present, desire is usually understood as something abnormal, avaricious and excessive, the opposite of rationality, to be controlled and suppressed in man." (Gao 2013, 406) Against that, they maintain that desire drives connections, desire produces reality, desire is the vehicle for changing things from the virtual to the actual. Importantly, Deleuze & Guattari view desire not as a mere psychological operation within individuals, but as a true *social* force (Gao 2013). Thereby, they fundamentally criticize the discipline of psychoanalysis as articulated both by Freud and (later) Lacan, who explained neurosis as a result of an individual's unfulfilled desire. Conversely, they insist that the individual is not shaped by a lack of desire, but, to the contrary, by the positive wish. Moreover, desire "is not a psychic existence, (...) but an active and positive reality, an affirmative vital force." (Gao 2013) Thus, Deleuze and Guattari framed their magnum opus *Anti-Oedipus* as an attempt to destroy the suppression and misrepresentation of desire, for which they hold psychoanalysis accountable. Why does that critique of psychoanalysis matter so much? To them, the oedipal view, which emphasizes desire based on lack and was promoted by psychoanalysis, is problematic due to its significant effect on societies.[45] Desire has been turned inward towards the family, including the couple, where desire is absorbed. As a result, only the little remaining excess desire is then able to spill over into society where it could work as a motor for change. On top of that, the remaining desire is subject to the limitations of capitalist forces, especially consumerism. One further thought about desire now brings us all the way back to the local councils: "Desire has neither object, nor fixed subject. It is like labor in essence, productive and actualizable *only through practice*." (Gao 2013, 406, italics A.W.). If it is true that desire - so central to humans and their lives, a revolutionary force - can only unfold in practice, then revolutionary activity is all about creating spaces in which people can liberate and excavate their desire and can be inspired through a common practice.

Aziz' fascination with both Deleuze and Hardt & Negri's vitalist philosophy goes back to a shared reference point among all of them: **Spinoza's** theory of the affects, which deals with the origin of emotions and their role in the life of humans (and living beings in general). Deleuze, in the 1960s, rediscovered the late medieval philosopher Spinoza for radical political philosophy, and later Negri drew much on Spinoza when thinking about alternatives to or even an exit from the "theoretically exhausted Hegelian

[45] More recently, Eva Illouz has also described the massive influence of psychoanalysis on several realms in Western of societies. She maintains that Psychoanalysis started its literal triumph from 1910 onwards and has fundamentally restructured organization of production e.g. in factories as well as personal relationships (Illouz 2007).

Marxism" (Reitter 2005, translation A.W.). Thinking about the possibilities of liberation, of a revolutionary process in the Arab region, Aziz reasons that the crucial independent social spaces "can only function for a humanist project if they are filled with love, if they are pluralist, open-minded and joyful." Why are love and joy such important categories when thinking about revolution? Al-Kayial (interview, August 2020) explains how Spinoza made sense for them in the Syrian context: "It is human vitality that makes revolutions possible and which is able to stand up to domination and to destroy it. This idea comes from Spinoza, it's the idea of the so-called *conatus*. The conatus is the expression of this energy." Conatus is a term that Spinoza introduced to understand what keeps living beings alive. It is the most fundamental characteristic of humans, a sort of force that holds things together, that drives humans to continue to exist, to hold on to their lives even when their existence is threatened or miserable: "Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being." ("Spinoza's Psychological Theory" 2020) Human existence is always faced with the possibility of its ending or its destruction. However, it is also faced with the possibility of more fullness of life and more agency (Renz 2008, 321). Spinoza did not only aim at explaining why humans strive to remain alive (what he explains by the conatus), but also at figuring out how humans can live a *fulfilled* life. How is a fulfilled life possible? The answer has to do with emotions: The affects, notably joy, sadness and desire (cupiditas), influence the conatus by either increasing or decreasing the capacities of the body and of the mind. The significance of this lies in the exploration of the conditions and circumstances under which the capacities of the body and mind are increased or decreased. Such investigation is a recurring theme in the Ethics (Reitter 2005). Some affects, notably joy or pleasure, lead to a "greater capacity for action" ("Spinoza's Psychological Theory" 2020). Thus, creating moments of joy potentially empowers people by reinforcing their agency. Al-Kayial explains: "And this was concisely the idea of the councils: That the conatus as the force that enables people to remain alive in the face of revolution and war, could be a revolutionary force. The 'tawq ila al-hayat', the desire for life, was Omar's other expression for Spinoza's conatus." (Interview, August 2020) By creating spaces for friendly cooperation and a joyful, empowering practice the humans' "strive to widen their possibilities and their intellectual capacities" would be strengthened (Aziz 2007). Conversely, as long as humans are moved predominantly by negative affects, such as hatred or fear, they are strongly limited in their capacities and are unable to think in a reasonable way. The positive emotions on the other hand, especially love, joy and happiness, bear the potential to enable the human to think more clearly, with less stress and with an open mind. As Spinoza had it: "Whatsoever increases or diminishes, helps or hinders the power of activity in our body, the idea thereof increases or diminishes, helps or hinders the power of thought in our mind." ("Spinoza's Psychological Theory" 2020) This made perfect sense to Al-Kayial in an environment of sectarian mistrust: "You become able to think with less pressure, and thus you become more capable to get in good contact with other humans." (Interview, August 2020) While the mental and physical capacities are enhanced within the individual, Aziz views their enhancement as well as the experience of love and joy not as *individualist* striving. Instead, he conceives of the "desire for life" as a collectivist approach, in which love and joy are political categories aiming at *collective* liberation. This is not an esoteric idea, rather, "love (...) is from a Spinozistic perspective an indispensable precondition to constitute a free society." (Reitter 2005; translation A.W.) Reconsidering 'love' as a political category, Hardt argues that love is "the force that animates the multitude" (Hardt 201, min. 18:00-20:00), i.e. a force that enables the association and cooperation of an otherwise fragmented collection of individuals with particularistic interests. Thus, love is seen as foundational for the connection of postmodern subjectivities, a connection in pluralism, without having to return to a homogenous 'class of workers' or other homogenized imagined communities. Tracing how love has been dismissed over several centuries as a political category (min. 21:00 ff.), Hardt pleads for its renewal in modern terms as a central category for a revolutionary project, specifying four aspects (min. 38:20 ff.). First, rather than enclosed in the couple or family, love has to be

an open social concept. Second, rather than being reduced to a personal experience, love must be both personal and political. Third, rather than merging in unity, love must tolerate and even encourage differences. And, fourth, rather than being a passion and sensation, love has to be conceived of as active and productive.[46] How did Aziz relate to this in terms of thinking about the possibilities of struggles in Syria? Deleuze's diagnosis that desire is, alas, channeled inwards to the family, and, respectively, Hardt's insistence that love should be freed from a fixation on the private and on the most similar are relevant in Syrian society: against the background of a permanent state of exception in Syria in which "society is rendered voiceless and humans are rendered worthless" (Aziz 2007), people are forced to develop a coping strategy: "The individuals' strategy to deal with this situation is to gather up the remains of their existence as humans and to create alternative spaces in which they try to find a meaning for their existence". This could be a starting point from which to think about strategies of liberation from the state. Sadly, however, "what we have in the Arab societies are formations that reflect family[47] structures or religious arrangements, they are hardly joyful because they are based on authoritarian habits of different kinds." (Aziz 2007) Aziz criticizes the practices of constructing homogenous sectarian or kinship in-groups that he deems deeply authoritarian and patriarchal (Aziz 2007). Thus, in search of possibilities of liberation and revolution, Aziz strove to find a social formation that would empower people in the context of a state that disposed of its subjects at will. Such truly alternative social formations would have to address people not as 'the people' ('al-sha'b'), but as humans whose desire as a productive social force is to be unlocked in joyful association that empowers individuals.

After the outbreak of the revolution, Aziz soon realized that the local councils would have to meet a further requirement: to restructure time. In the introduction to his papers (first version, October 2011) he explains that "the revolutionary movement has remained separate from day-to-day activities", since people continued to go to work during the week, whereas revolutionary activities were confined to the evenings and the weekend, especially Fridays (Aziz 2011/12, 4). Thus, there is a sort of "division of labo" and a parallel division of time into "authority's time, which continues to structure everyday activities, and revolutionary time, in which people take action to overthrow the regime" (ibid.). He emphasized that, instead, the revolutionary movement must permeate daily life and snatch away the basic livelihood activities from the state's grip in order to integrate it into its own time. Rather than relying on the state and its services to ensure the daily concerns of livelihood, the emphasis would be on self-organization as a means to address these issues. Aziz' knowledge of Walter Benjamin served him in articulating this analysis. Aziz didn't refer to Benjamin explicitly in his papers (in fact, he referred to no theoretical literature there) and mentioned him only briefly in his article on the state of emergency (Aziz 2007). However, his image of a disruption and re-creation of time perfectly echoes passages of Benjamin's theses on history (as Sethness has noted, 2018): Here, Benjamin's thinking totally refutes the notion of a political revolution in which we would only have to take over power and institutions and fill them with new staff and a new political program. To the contrary, revolution breaks with the idea of perpetual 'progress' and continuity in history, and thus it breaks with the idea of a "homogenous and empty time" (Benjamin 2005 [1940]): "Revolution is not upheaval and elevation on to a new level, but radical forced suspension of the empty, homogenous time. (...) The new is not won out of the continuation of time, but out of its disruption, its radical suspension." (Behrens 2016; translation A.W.)[48]

[46] Note how Hardt's perspective on love echoes and sometimes parallels Deleuze's perspective on desire: the critique of the fixation of love/desire on the family; the idea that both desire and love (shall) function as a social and not as a psychological force; the postmodern preference of difference over homogeneity, thus not the love of the closest or most alike (such as in nationalism), but love of the different.

[47] Here in the meaning of 'kin' or even tribe; not in the sense of small nuclear family.

[48] Benjamin in that context evokes the anecdote that revolutionaries in France (1830) went so far as to shoot on the clocks (Benjamin 2005 [1940].

By recognizing the impact of these influential concepts on Aziz's thinking, we can gain a much deeper understanding of why he conceptualized the local councils in the manner he did. This understanding allows us to delineate and appreciate Aziz's unique contributions to council theory.

8.2 Publication, translation and reception of the Discussion Papers

8.2.1 Contexts of the two versions of Aziz' Discussion Papers

Omar Aziz wrote two versions of his text *Discussion Papers on the Local Councils in Syria* (ورقة نقاش حول المجالس المحلية في سورية): one in October 2011 and another one in February 2012. The first one was written against the following background: by fall 2011, seven months after the uprising had started, there were high hopes that this uprising was about to bring down the regime and incite a fundamental political and social transformation in Syria. This was based on at least three factors: first, the establishment of the SNC and hence the hopes for international support on a state-level. Second, the establishment and achievements of the FSA: whereas the formation of the FSA reflected an increasing militarization of the conflict, it is important to note that in these months the situation in Syria was far from a civil war. In hindsight, the number of deaths was still comparatively low with roughly 5,000 killed by October 2011. Lastly, the achievements of self-organization were encouraging and promising. Looking back on the preceding months, Aziz maintained in an article written in August 2011 that the demonstrations "have broken the regime's monopoly over space that had lasted for half a century." (Aziz 2011) The way people adapted to the changing security situations and the regime's tactics of repressing protest, reflected to Aziz an unexpected level of creativity and skill (Aziz 2011). However, revolutionary activity largely concentrated at that time on organizing demonstrations, including preparing them, mediating them and also dealing with their aftermath regarding arrests and injuries. Unless people devoted their entire time to the uprising, this was focused on certain days of the week (mostly Fridays) and on certain times (mostly evenings) so that the technical and organizational dimension of living one's life – going to work, registering births and marriages, interacting with the state's institutions - was still largely unaffected by the revolution, or in Aziz' terms, it was not yet uprooted from 'authority's time'.

In February 2012, Aziz revised his paper - at a time when the "revolution ha(d) made it through its first year" (Aziz 2011/12, 5). Whereas the overall structure and content of the main part of the paper remained as it was, some changes in the introduction reflect the change of the situation in Syria: first, the clear increase of militarization reflected by a rising death toll among civilians on the one hand and by increasing numbers of refugees. One landmark was the military assault and subsequent besiegement of Homs in early February with tanks, helicopters and artillery (Yacoubian 2019). Second, things seemed to move forward diplomatically to the advantage of the opposition. In conjunction with the recognition of the SNC by important international actors, Western nations not only committed to providing financial support but also intensified their rhetoric against Al-Assad, vowing to "put further pressure on those who are responsible for the ruthless campaign of repression in Syria" (Catherine Ashton, EU foreign policy chief, quoted by Vaccarello et al. 2012). While the prospect of military escalation was undoubtedly bleak, it also spurred people's self-organization to new heights. In the initial months, revolutionary activity was primarily focused on sustaining protests. However, with the escalation, they faced the dual challenge of establishing emergency and resilience structures while also managing daily life in areas where the regime had withdrawn. When revising his paper, Aziz concentrated all the more on how self-organization had developed in the months between October 2011 and February 2012 and how it could be refined for the coming period instead of focusing on either the course of military battles or on diplomatic tactics.

8.2.2 Publication of Aziz' Discussion Paper, translations, versions

Aziz' Papers circulated via e-mail among his companions and friends in Syria. Al-Kayial published both versions in one single post on his Facebook page after Aziz' death in prison was confirmed (Al-Kayial 2013). The very first translation of the texts appeared in the same month: an individual or a group posted a Greek translation of the Papers on a blog (rioter 2013, February 28). In the same year in September, the first English translation of only the first version was published by a US-based blogger on her personal blog under the title *A Discussion Paper on Local Councils in Syria* (Mobayed 2013[49]). In November 2013, a first comprehensive French translation was made by a Paris-based collective (Éditions Antisociales 2013). The translators chose to translate both the first and the second introductions by Aziz, but only the second version (February 2012) of the main text. I agree with the author's judgment that the first English translation is not satisfactory (Éditions Antisociales 2013, 2), because it fails to really reflect the intellectual theoretical concepts that had informed Aziz' original text.[50] The French translation was influential for the second, and so far final, English translation made by the collective Bordered by Silence (in the following abbreviated as BbS), probably in 2017 (BbS 2017, 27). They indicate the Arabic original as found on Al-Kayial's Facebook page as the main basis for their translation, as well as Mobayed's first translation of the first version, and it follows the choice by Éditions Antisociales to translate both introductions, but only the second version of the main text under the title "To live in Revolutionary Time. The Formation of Local Councils by Omar Aziz and notes on his participation as an anarchist in the Syrian Revolution". A German translation does not yet exist. In an edited volume on the uprisings in Syria (2011-2013) and Sudan (1990s), which was published 2018, the editors (Gamblin et al. 2018) reproduced only two texts by Budour Hassan and Leila Al-Shami on the local councils, but not the original text by Aziz. Unless I indicate the opposite, I quote from the translation by Bordered by Silence in the following when referring to (Aziz 2011/12), except in a few cases (see aspects of translation in appendix 5).[51]

Overall, the second version from February 2012 is slightly longer than the first version. It is also a little bit more structured using numbers for enumerations and systematic subheadings for chapters. One chapter is integrated into another and one further chapter is added. Apart from that, the versions are very similar. The most relevant changes were made in the introduction. The systematic comparison of both versions was done for the sake of academic thoroughness and in order not to miss relevant changes. However, since that comparison will be of interest only to those dealing in more detail with Aziz and his papers, the table and relevant remarks are placed in appendix 5.

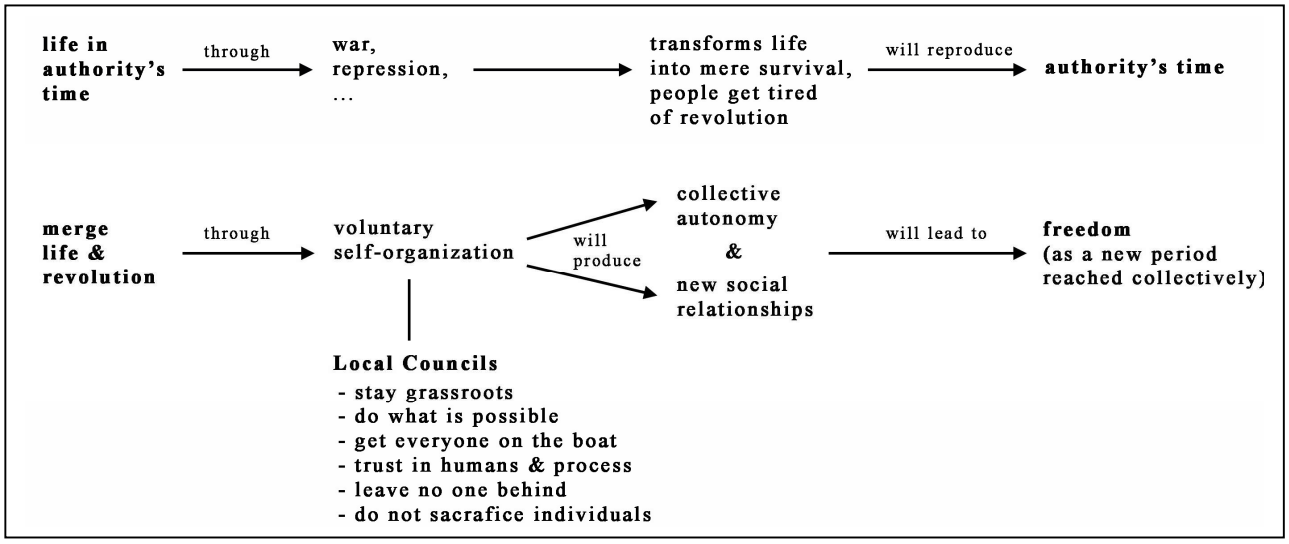
8.3 Main themes of the Discussion Papers

Eight thematic points can be differentiated within the papers. They partly coincide with the paragraph header and correspond largely to the respective paragraph. These are: the councils' relationship with armed groups; the formation of local councils and their structure; the role of the National Council. One category primarily refers to the introduction of the text, namely the one dealing with the theme of

[49] The Blog is no longer available since 2016.
[50] However, I do not want to minify Mobayed's efforts. Without Mobayed's translation Aziz' text may not have been translated into other languages.
[51] The PDF is available in a pamphlet version. None of the two documents has page numbers. When indicating page numbers, I refer to the pamphlet version to which I attribute page numbers by considering the beginning of the running text as page 1 (the headline is "Translator's Introduction"). Aziz' text starts from page 3 and ends on page 14. The authors' afterword (starting from p. 15) and their two-page translators' introduction will be cited as (BbS 2017, p. xy) whereas Aziz' text is referred to as (Aziz 2011/12, p.xy).

authority's time and revolutionary time. The remaining four categories cut through the whole text and cover the practical tasks of the councils: new social spaces; agency, skill and creativity; solidarity and care. It would be a misunderstanding to view the discussion papers as a proposition of "the theoretical principles of a new society" (Galiàn 2019b, 726). Rather, their primary object is the mode of revolutionary organizing that prefigures a stateless democratic society. The figure below sums up the main line of argumentation: the continuation of life during the revolution under the rule of authority – 'in authority's time' – will necessarily reproduce authority's time (top line in the figure). As opposed to that (bottom line in the figure), the revolution can only succeed if life and revolution are merged by enlarging revolutionary time at the cost of authority's time. This will only work through self-organization on a voluntary basis and on the basis of popular initiative. Local councils, highlighted as social spaces, are the adequate form for that. In essence, the core principles of self-organization within local councils can be summarized as: maintain a grassroots approach. Do what is possible. Ensure that everyone is onboard. Trust in humans' capacities and in the process. Do not sacrifice individuals and their concerns for the common cause. In this way, new social relationships will emerge and collective autonomy will develop. This is the basis on which freedom in a broader sense can be reached.

Figure 50: Overview of Aziz argument: Two possible trajectories of the revolution



Note: Source: A.W. based on Aziz 2011/12.

8.3.1 Tasks of the councils on a practical level

The practical tasks of the local councils can be collected from several passages throughout the papers. However, interestingly, least concrete tasks are given in the three chapters on the FSA, the role of the National Council and on the procedures of forming the councils. This means that the vast majority of the concrete tasks are specified throughout the two chapters on "Human interdependence and civil solidarity" (p. 7ff) and respectively "On relationships between individuals" (p. 10ff.). One might expect that the rather technical questions - how to organize with the armed groups? How to structure the relationship in a greater council structure? How to set up local councils? - would trigger much more 'to do'-points. However, Aziz was more interested in developing 'to do's' with regards to the social relationships of humans, because, in his view, this is where the relevant processes happened and where it mattered how things were put to work. The technical tasks of the councils that I collect here are gathered mainly from the first two chapters and only minimally from the chapter on the FSA.

One main objective of the council's work is to enable life to continue in the context of violence. The other main objective of the council's work is to "provide a caring environment" in order "to alleviate the misery created by the authorities" and to "provide physical, emotional, and logistical support to afflicted families" (p. 8f.). The main addressees of help and support are arriving displaced people, arrestees and their families, and "especially women and children" and "those who need the most attention" (p. 9). Importantly, this focus does not mean that the local councils were supposed to function as a relief NGO. Rather, it was in this realm that the revolutionary qualities of solidarity, cooperation and agency could unfold and come into practical effect. To this end, Aziz identified a range of concrete tasks for the councils, indicating that they should deal with the following aspects "at a minimum level" (all emphases A.W.):

- Local councils should support **medical** practitioners by providing infrastructure, e.g. by setting up field hospitals, which includes finding suitable houses and negotiating with the owner (Aziz 2011/12, 7, 9).
- They should ensure that **educational** services continue, e.g. by identifying requirements (for both space and staff), by administering educational activities, by coordinating with educational (p. 7, 9) institutions.
- They should help people to find **safe housing**, e.g. after residents' houses were destroyed or when displaced people arrive (p. 7, 8, 9).
- They should also **help people to leave**, e.g. by coordinating with other local councils in the area of arrival (p. 8).
- They should **identify, store, manage and distribute supplies**, regarding anything that people need. To that end, they should coordinate also with relief organizations for material and financial aid (note that they are supposed to coordinate and not to completely hand over that task) (p. 8, 9).
- They should **create administrative records**, especially for those who went underground. In strongholds this would include registering births, marriages, deaths, divorces etc. (p. 9).
- They should **document and organize information** about **arrestees** in order to support their families, e.g. by connecting them to legal experts (p. 7, 8, 9).
- They should **document abuses** by all branches of the regime (army, informal, intelligence agencies) such as murder, rape, arrest, property destruction, theft (p. 8).
- They should seek **cooperation** and coordination with individuals or groups with **legal expertise** (p. 8).
- They should **defend the land from being expropriated** by the state by creating an inventory of the lands affected by expropriation, by supporting the local residents; "do what you can" to support them and to meet needs (p. 11).
- They should create and manage **solidarity funds**, both locally and regionally in order to meet the needs of people (p. 8).
- They should **follow-up on emergencies**, especially those coming from **outside the area** (p. 9).
- Coordinate with and support the **FSA** (p. 12).
- They should "build **horizontal relationships of interdependence** between local councils" (p. 10).

These aspects clearly echo the actual work of councils in Syria in general as described in the previous chapter, which is not surprising since Aziz wrote his papers while grappling with the dynamics and challenges faced by the councils. However, one aspect that he particularly stressed as one of the three supreme goals of the councils stands out from the usual observations regarding their functioning:

- Local councils should "**create spaces** for discussion of human concerns and of solutions to problems of daily life." (Aziz 2011/12, 7)

This explicitly includes "local concerns, infrastructural concerns, social harmony, regional fundraising" and "all issues relating to people's livelihoods and their expectations for life and work" (p. 11). The significance of the councils lies not only in their ability to fulfill defined tasks, but also, on a meta-level, in providing a temporal and spatial framework for people to engage with one another. They hold meaning

as a platform where individuals come together in order to solve practical problems. By doing this, they start cooperating. By way of this process, they experience their agency and gradually "increase the capacity for action and initiative" (p. 10). Hence, the relevance of the councils' work is not only derived from their practical achievements and outputs (continuing education, bettering people's lives), but first and foremost from the processes that they initiate. With Spinoza in mind, Aziz pleaded for seizing even small possibilities to push self-organization forward in order to enlarge agency gradually and despite repression. This is why he stresses that "these above tasks are not impossible, whatever the environment may be" (p. 9). Instead he argues that "it's possible to carry out plans specific to an area that take into account what's possible there" (p. 12). With regards to different points, he urges to "*do what you can* to preserve good relationships" (p. 12), "*seek* a solution" (p. 12), "keep the *delicate balance* between continuation [of protests, A.W.] and protection" (p. 11). He acknowledges that "it will not be easy, *but* (...)" (p. 13) and he urges to "develop *appropriate* solutions" (p. 11), "even if this autonomy is not complete" (p. 7) (all emphases A.W.).

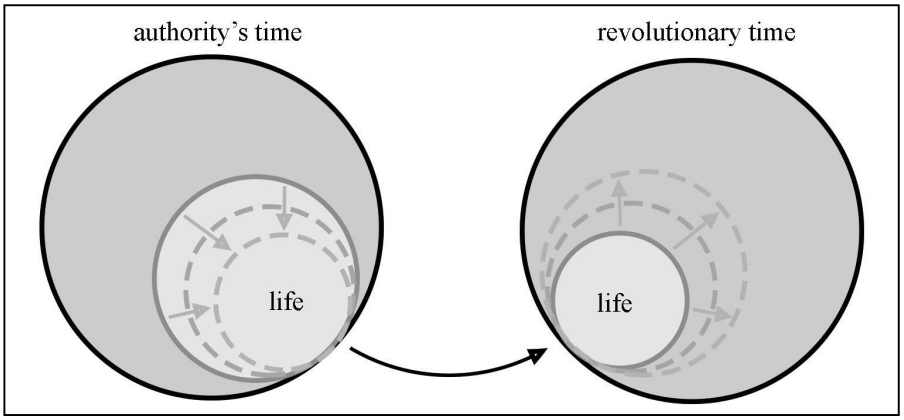
8.3.2 Authority's time versus revolutionary time

"Authority's time and revolutionary time" is the title of the introduction of the papers' first version from October 2011. Aziz introduces it right away in the first sentence and it runs like a golden thread throughout the introduction, ultimately resulting in the practical invitation to build local councils. The reflections on the two 'times' are an important part of the theoretical justification of the proposal. It is important to understand the councils' purpose on this meta-level in order to understand the practical, technical suggestions about what councils should actually do in the subchapters of the papers. Aziz begins with this statement: "A revolution is an exceptional event that alters the history of a society while also transforming each human being." (p. 4) The connection to Walter Benjamin's ideas on history and revolution is evident here and reinforced in the subsequent evocation of revolution as disrupting time: "It [the revolution] is a rupture in time and space, during which humans live two experiences of time simultaneously: authority's time and revolutionary time." (p. 4) The usual experience is inter*rupted* through and during the revolution and if this rupture is patched, i.e. if the revolution is pacified, the revolution was a temporary *inter*ruption. As long as the revolution continues, the possibility of a greater *rupture* is upheld. From this perspective, the more the revolution succeeds, the more it constitutes a passage, a transition from one time into another, so that potentially people could "collectively move into a new period" (p. 4). Importantly, Aziz understands 'time' in the sense of how people's life practice is structured, and not of two different historical periods, one of which would follow upon the other one once the revolution is accomplished, as has been suggested probably based on the first English translation which was misleading in that regard (Galiàn 2019b, 727). The central problem that Aziz seeks to resolve concerns the position of *everyday-life* vis-à-vis both revolutionary time and authority's time. It is not enough that "continuous demonstrations were able to break the absolute control of authority over space" (p. 4), rather this break of absolute control is the starting point. The decisive shift occurs insofar as the revolution pulls out everyday-life from authority's time and transfers it to its own time. Despite his enthusiasm for the achievement of self-organization, Aziz critically assessed in October 2011 that so far "the revolutionary movement has remained separate from day-to-day activities" and thus it has not yet been able "to enter into everyday-life" (p. 4). Rather than a cohesive experience, people found themselves in a schizophrenic situation, attempting to continue their everyday lives as before while simultaneously being immersed in the revolution. This immersion only occurred in limited time slots: people went to work, sent their children to school and obeyed the daily routine during the first half of the day or during the week, and they organized protests in the afternoon or on Fridays. This appeared as "a 'daily division of work' between the basic life activities and revolutionary activities." (p. 4). In fact, Aziz emphasizes that this is a rather typical situation in a

revolution and that the threat lies not in the initial co-existence of those two time logics. Rather this is the point of departure for local councils. The specific problem that they have to solve is "the lack of conjunction of the [private; A.W.] life sphere and the collective revolutionary sphere." (p. 4; amended translation A.W., see appendix 5). People remained dependent on the state and its services, whereas revolutionary time has not yet sufficiently permeated everyday life so that people could manage their lives autonomously. The solution to this problem is twofold: first, it lies in making any conceivable effort to merge life and revolution as much as possible: "Merging life and revolution is the key element for continuing the revolution and winning." (p. 5) Whereas this process had already begun, Aziz insisted that "we must now urgently deepen these projects in order to take in broader spheres of life." (p. 5). In the second introduction a few months later, Aziz recapitulated the progress in that regard and thus rephrased that topic: "In the beginning, the revolutionary movement was separate from basic human activity and didn't enter into daily life (...). But popular solidarity developed (...). These practices spread throughout the areas where revolutionary activity was most intense, *which made the link between revolution and life evident*." (p. 6, emphasis A.W.). Second, the solution of the 'time-problem' is linked to the preservation of the independence of revolutionary time: "Accordingly, the more the social formations become/are independent from authority based on the efforts of humans to preserve the separation of authority's time from revolutionary time, the more the revolution is able to spread the atmosphere of victory." (p. 5, amended translation A.W., see appendix 5). The matter of independence is picked up in the second introduction from February in a way that underlines the importance of autonomy from authority's time: "It's clear then that the more the social formations become/are independent from authority, the more" will people be able to defend themselves both against the regime and against the rising threat of militarization (p. 6).

While Aziz argues that the councils have effectively integrated everyday life into revolutionary time in certain aspects, the significant challenge posed by military repression has hindered this process. Once people were struck by either destruction of their homes or the arrest of family members (or both) their life was consumed by tasks that authorities created for them: "this war (...) has transformed the time they would have spent living into time spent looking for safer shelter (...). It has transformed their daily work into an endless search for information about their loved ones (...), to figure out where they are being held (...)." (p. 8) Next to the risk that the "increasing use of weapons will make the revolution a hostage of the gun" (p. 4 and 6), Aziz notably feared "that human beings will get tired of the revolution and its impact on their material needs and family life" (p. 4). This is one of the reasons why he insisted that medical aid and relief work were so important: this sort of solidarity was a social practice that could integrate the necessary alleviation of misery into a revolutionary framework and thus transform suffering into agency – hence the insistence that the councils should organize relief "through actions arising *solely* from *popular* initiatives" (p. 8; emphasis A.W.).

Figure 51: The concept of authority's time and revolutionary time



Note: The more life is integrated into revolutionary time, the more life is detached from authority's time. Source: A.W. based on Aziz 2011/12.

8.3.3 New social spaces

The question 'What is a revolution (about)?' is answered by Aziz on two levels. First, on a meta-level, a revolution is about creating a new time and integrating life into revolution, and second, on a more practical level, it means "to topple the regime and open up new spaces for life". The latter aspect surfaces again and again in the papers. This manifests the anarchist perspective on the twofold character of a revolution as comprising both a destructive moment – toppling the regime, dismantling authority's time - and a constructive moment – restructuring life and creating new spaces and practices. The local councils are the social formations that provide the social space in which such constructive processes can take place. Consequently, the creation of "space for collective expression that can reinforce cooperation among individuals" is one of the three main, overall objectives placed at the beginning of the main text (p. 7). It is reiterated in the second chapter "On the relationship between individuals", where Aziz stresses that councils must be careful to function as "comfortable" spaces for learning and experiencing a new sense of collectivity "by creating open space for free dialogue" (p. 11). One can easily draw the line here to Spinoza's thought that the more comfortable humans feel, the more openly can such a dialogue unfold – and vice versa. This point makes clear that the councils are designed not as government entities or institutions in the first line, but as social spaces in which people cultivate agency, individually as well as collectively. Al-Kayial points out that this aspect of the councils – social spaces for cooperation – was fundamentally misrecognized by large parts of the Syrian opposition including the SNC/NC: "The vast majority of the opposition did not understand that difference. (…) They think that he wanted to create some organizations that would belong to the NC and would overall help to overthrow the regime - this is wrong, Omar never strove in that direction." (Al-Kayial, interview, February 2019). Indeed, the whole point of the local councils is to erode the underlying foundation of a statist order: as holistic social spaces that deal with anything that concerns people's lives and their work - at least on a local level - councils necessarily erode the separation of powers. Moreover, by aiming at "merging life and revolution" the division of spheres is radically questioned: securing livelihoods and transforming society are separated neither logically nor with regards to the timeslots during the day in which these tasks are dealt with.

8.3.4 Agency, skill and creativity

Whereas the theme of 'time' is the clear focus of the first introduction from October 2011, it only serves as the frame in the first and the last paragraph in the version from February 2012. The priority in the later version is the theme of agency. It had already been central to the main text since the beginning, but Aziz now emphatically highlights the topic in the introduction. Striking keywords and strong phrases pop up in a dense chain in the four middle paragraphs: courage, desire, skill, creativity, sacrifices, colorful diversity. This mirrors his enthusiasm that things actually worked out as he hoped: during the previous months, "Syrians changed the course of their society while also transforming themselves" (p. 5). Indeed, they displayed "unprecedented courage and close cooperation" (p. 5). Indeed, the way in which they dealt with violence, destruction and death manifested a "spirit of resistance (that) rises up with incredible skill and creativity, in an epic act of love that allows life to continue." (p. 5) And it was indeed based on medical and emergency relief that people developed "cooperation and mutual aid" and thereby "contribute(d) to rich human relations" (p. 5). Instead of passively enduring violence, people took action "drawing on an unprecedented courage" which "show(ed) their desire for freedom and their commitment to collectively restructuring their lives." (p. 5) This experience of agency and capacity is so central to the introduction and the first two chapters because it is the basis for the experience that humans actually *can* "take autonomous control over their own lives" (p. 6). Agency is the subliminal *modus operandi* of the councils.

Using a computer metaphor, one could think of the councils as the material device which runs a certain software. Councils could be programmed with different software, depending on what purpose they are intended to serve, e.g. a new statist architecture, a party dictatorship, or autonomy and popular self-organization. Aiming, naturally, at the last of these, the software that Aziz advocated for is agency. Generally speaking, the role of the local councils is to create *spaces* and thus *situations* in which people can become active and experience agency - which will again increase their capacity for further action based on an increasing self-confidence. Accordingly, one of the main objectives placed at the beginning of the chapter on relationships between individuals is the demand to "increase the capacity for action and initiative by individuals in the social body" (p. 10). Evidently, the theme of agency reflects how Aziz made use of Spinoza's theory of the affects and the conatus for the revolutionary context. Since Aziz wants the experience of agency to spread in the hope that this would further empower people and sustain the revolution, he stresses a radical openness of the councils: for example, "anyone who is able and willing to teach" shall take over tasks (p. 9). Instead of waiting for a party, a relief NGO or a state institution to deliver help, the councils are supposed to support the community based on "actions arising solely from popular initiatives" (p. 8). Therefore, actually every practice or task of the local council helps raise the level of agency as long as it is able to integrate and activate people. "Providing emergency medicine, turning houses into field hospitals, preparing food baskets, and finding creative ways to spread information" are practices that Aziz invokes, but also his demand that the FSA should "empower people (...) to take charge of security and administration" (p. 12) refers to this.

As a consequence of the emphasis on agency as an unfolding process, the 'how' of the councils is more emphasized than the 'what'. Aziz views the enlargement of agency as a result of learning processes: "Note: Such work requires organization and knowledge of the arts of administration, but these above tasks are not impossible, whatever the environment may be. This revolution has produced many people skilled at the organization of demonstrations, strikes, sit-ins, and so it can also push to create experts in the fields in which people have already engaged spontaneously." (p. 9f.) The insistence on learning processes recurs several times, e.g. when Aziz stresses that the revolution "has transformed individual humans", or that "humans (...) will need time and practice to integrate themselves into a broader social sphere (...)", when he writes that people "discovered" the value of mutual aid, and when he emphasizes that people developed "new ways of defining themselves rich with innovative, inventive power" (p. 10). Such learning processes are not taken for granted and they may fail: creating councils will be "hard (...) also because it involves trying new and unconventional ways of living and relating to one another." (p. 13) Aziz' emphasis on agency stems not least from his strong trust in people's creativity, spontaneity, adaptability - as well as their innovative power and their conatus generally speaking. In a context of violence, "the revolution has demonstrated in every region that mechanisms to resist these killings give rise to adaptability and creativity. They [these mechanisms] also contribute to new practices (...) that are able to react appropriately to the shifting balance of power on the ground." (p. 13) Both aspects - trust in humans' skill and the learning process – evidently echo Aziz' appreciation of Luxemburg's emphasis on spontaneity and creativity. From this perspective, struggle has to evolve organically from within the community so that the role of intellectuals such as Aziz is not to define the content of decisions or to shortcut the decision-making processes by proposing the 'right' solutions. Al-Kayial remembers that they took great care in that matter: "We never talked to the people around us about this theoretical background. We wanted things to evolve gradually and organically and not by the way presenting an ideology to the people" (Al-Kayial, interview, August 2020).

8.3.5 Solidarity and care

The fourth central theme is one of solidarity. It figures prominently alongside 'agency' in the four middle paragraphs of the introduction, where keywords such as "commitment", "cooperation", "solidarity", communal "spirit", "epic act of love"[52] (p. 5) allude to relationships based on solidarity.

The two large chapters on "human interdependence and civil solidarity" and "on relationships between individuals" define, on a practical level, the tasks of the councils that aim at cultivating mutual care. Aziz saw it as essential to "provide a caring environment that allows for less psychological and material stress for displaced families, especially for women and children." (p. 9) To that end, he called for coordination "with skilled providers to ensure support for physical and psychological health, especially for those who need the most attention." (p. 9) Addressees of acts of solidarity are "families impacted by death, injuries, arrests, or disappearances or who have suffered other physical or psychological harm" (p. 7) in addition to "displaced individuals and their families" (p. 8) as well as people "who have gone underground" (p. 9). The overall motto here is: let people feel that they are cared for. In fact, this is the motivation behind all the specific tasks related to aid and relief, be it medical treatment or legal support for the families of detainees. This emphasis is informed not by altruism or charity, but rather by the way in which Aziz relates Spinoza's notion of affects to the situation in Syria: alleviating mental and physical stress will help to increase or at least maintain people's capacities to act. To uphold and restore individual agency is a condition for enhancing a person's conatus and thus for making life (and revolution) continue. Importantly, saving lives and taking care of people does not aim first and foremost at saving *bare* life, but rather at enabling a *humane*, *good* life to continue which prefigures the qualities of the desired post-revolutionary society. Hence, beyond perspectives that have tended to view solidarity as a spontaneous effect of struggle, Aziz emphasizes solidarity in a different way: for him, it assumes a core function within the revolution as a practical hinge between the latter and life: "(...) popular solidarity developed, when people began choosing to share food and housing and to help one another in whatever way was needed. These practices spread throughout the areas where revolutionary activity was most intense, which made the link between revolution and life evident." (p. 6). "Mutual aid" is not a sort of categorical imperative that should be promoted as a revolutionary morale, but rather a *practice* that has made greater alternatives tangible. Hence, rather than *demanding* only an *attitude* of friendliness and collectivity from revolutionaries, Aziz seeks to create social *spaces* that aim at "achieving ongoing friendly relations" (p. 11). Whether people could experience "the revolution as a collective project" (p. 11) is seen as a result of collaborative practices when people "find collective solutions wherever possible" or "delve into all issues relating to people's livelihoods and their expectations for life and work" (p. 11). Hence, cooperation and solidarity are not (only) modes of struggle that are best suited to make the revolution victorious; the sense and purpose of the revolution is also to forge and nourish "deep social bonds" (p. 6) as the very basis for collective autonomy. Such an emphasis on the unity of means-ends including the prefigurative idea behind it manifests the deeply inscribed anarchist qualities of this council conceptualization.

8.3.6 The individual and the collective: new social relationships and collective autonomy

The local councils constitute the social spaces where new social relationships can develop and can be experienced and trained. This process is based on the concerns of the communities in their given locality:

[52] This may sound cheesy, but please bring to your inner eye what tremendous experiences people made. Pearlman's collection of interviews with Syrians cannot but move the reader and convey the enthusiasm that people felt despite death and fear (Pearlman 2020).

"local concerns, infrastructural concerns, social harmony, regional fundraising, (...) all issues related to people's livelihoods and their expectations for life and works." (p. 11) However, the issue itself is not decisive, rather it is a common experience of the possibility of articulating and solving problems. Thus, people are not consumers or beneficiaries of decisions that people make for them as in a representative system, but rather they take responsibility themselves and take "control over their own lives" (p. 6). Aziz emphasizes that finding such "new and unconventional ways of living and relating to one another" is demanding and that it needs a mentality shift away from relying, for example, on patriarchal, clientelist and extended family structures for help and for effective solutions of problems: "But let's also remember that projects like these [coordination, organization, civil administration, solidarity, relief work etc.] are not meant to replace family and friendship bonds (at least not at first) (...). Humans who have begun learning to live without services provided by the state and who have found temporary replacements for them through family relationships will need time and practice to integrate themselves into a broader social sphere that's more effective and elaborate." (p. 10) Aziz notes that the transformation of social bonds is not an immediate process, stressing that it requires a long-term (un)learning process. However, he also points out that the envisioned social and cultural change strives to establish new ways of relating among individuals that transcend rigid identity categories based on religious sects (Sunni, Shia, Alawi, etc.), of nationalities (Syrian, Arab, non-Arab, non-Syrian), or of tribes ('families'). This finds its expression in his use of the word 'the human', Arabic 'al-bashar', which sounds as strange in English as it does in Arabic. It also manifests itself in Aziz' avoidance of the term 'the people', 'al-sha'b' in Arabic, with its legacy of homogenizing humans in the service of nationalism, where Aziz hailed pluralism and difference ("exciting and colourful social richness", p. 10). This can be well associated with Adamczak's (2017, 263) insistence that revolutionary transformation is a "process of synaptic construction that dissolves ties of domination in order to weave new ones." (translation A.W.) in the sense that "is is not enough that 'the strikers and their families' build new relationships, but new relationships would have to emerge also between 'the strikers' and 'their families'. Then, it would neither be 'their' families nor perhaps even 'families' at all." (ibid.)

That Aziz did not have the isolated individual in mind as a positive reference point, but the human being positioned within a relational web, is underlined in his sharp denunciation of "the smothering individualism of a half-century of authoritarian rule" (p. 10). This alludes to a politics of socio-geographical engineering under Bashar Al-Assad, which employed the 'modernization' of poor urban neighborhoods as a strategy to enhance control over the population. This was carried out by deliberately expropriating land and houses, and then destroying the existing infrastructure in order to eventually build up new residential complexes that cater especially to the interests of the middle and upper classes and the security apparatus (Haugbolle 2018). Throughout this process, communities have experienced fragmentation, leading individuals to become increasingly reliant on the state's welfare payments. It is against this background that Aziz also devoted a paragraph on the issue of "defending land" (presented as a chapter of its own in the first version). He urges councils to"(d)efend the land in the region from being expropriated by the state, because such expropriations of land in Syria's cities and countryside and the consequent displacement of their inhabitants are one of the core pillars of the politics of domination and social exclusion on which the regime relies." (Aziz 2011/12, 11)[53] Whereas the regime in Aziz's view stands for fragmenting communities and creating a destructive, anti-social form of individualism, Aziz strove to overcome that individualism without sacrificing the individual, not even for the common cause of the revolution – an emphasis that anarchism has held up high. For example, houses suited to function as

[53] This was, indeed, an anticipation of the government's intensifying strategy of expropriation, notably under the infamous Law No. 10 from 2011 onwards (see Haugbolle 2018).

field hospitals are not simply to be seized, but consensus with their owners is to be reached in order to "organize their defense *alongside* their owners" (p. 9). In line with that, solutions are to be sought "that meet() the needs of *all* parties" (p. 12). And according to the same logic, every individual and his or her initiative is appreciated: "*anyone* who is able and willing to teach" (p. 9) shall be able to do so and the local councils are radically open to everyone's participation on a *voluntary* basis: "*under no circumstances* should there be any coercion to participate" (p. 10; all emphases A.W.). At the same time, individual freedom is not to be opposed to the collective. The title of chapter two should be read mindfully: "On *relationships between* individuals: Creating new *common* interests" (italics A.W.). It is about negotiating two poles – the individual and the collective – in a way that acknowledges their relatedness instead of presenting them as antagonistic. The dual aim is to allow new subjectivities to develop and to build community solidarity. These two interlinked poles are found throughout the papers as the table below shows:

Table 8: Quotes referring to aspect of 'individual' and 'collective'

Individual(ity) and pluralism	Collective
a revolution as an event "transforming *each* human being" (p. 4, 10)	"so that people can *collectively* move into a new period" (p. 4)
"self-organizing, in a colorful *diversity* of initiatives and expressions that spans *different regions and social groups*" (p. 6)	"commitment to *collectively* restructuring their lives" (p. 5)
"invitation to form local councils composed of people from *different cultures and from different segments* of society"	"these are all actions that (...) contribute to rich human relations based on *cooperation and mutual aid*" (p. 5)
"increase the capacity for action and initiative by *individuals*"	"They discovered that *mutual aid* pushes open the doors to exciting and colourful *social richness*."
	"while also securing the future of the revolution as a *collective* project"
	"find *collective* solutions wherever possible"
	"people's *collective* dreams for freedom"

Note: All emphases A.W. Source: A.W. based on Aziz 2011/12.

The negotiation of the relation between individual and collective is the basis for new relationships between people. The latter do not emerge out of the blue or as a result of a common agreement (i.e. idealistically), but from a shared practice (i.e. socio-materialistically): "This collaboration made new relationships possible that could break with the regime's control over time and space" (p. 6). The experience of "deep social bonds" and "exciting and colorful social richness" through a common practice then constitutes a new ground from which rigid identity categories can be dissolved. This would lead to both new forms of commonness and to the emergence of new subjectivities: "By developing new ways of defining themselves rich with innovative, inventive power, they were able to overcome the smothering individualism of a half-century of authoritarian rule." (p. 10) It is the synthesis of these two poles that eventually aims at the synthesis of freedom and interdependence – of collective autonomy which is viewed by Aziz as the essence of "what freedom is made of." (p. 6)

8.3.7 The councils' relationship with armed groups

Aziz was not at all enthusiastic about the armament of the revolution. Whereas he does acknowledge the necessity "to protect communities" using weapons, he is clearly in favor of continuing the revolution

through peaceful means (p. 12). Indeed, in his view the increasing role of weapons was one of the two major threats that the revolution faces: "In the coming period, the movement will face two different threats: that human beings will get tired of the revolution and its impact on their material needs and family life, or that an increasing use of weapons will make the revolution a hostage of the gun." (p. 4). He repeats this warning even more sharply in the amended introduction of February 2012 pointing out that not only the revolution but "society as a whole" will become "hostages of the gun." (p. 6) The short chapter on "the relationship with the FSA" argues for the coherence of protecting and defending society on the one hand and continuing and stabilizing the revolution on the other hand. Mutual support is suggested, e.g. by providing housing and supplies to the armed groups, while there should be "coordination" and "consensus" in finding a common strategy (p. 12). The aim of armed defense is not to conquer territory, but to "make people around us safer and protect demonstrations so that they can expand on to new areas". To that end, armed groups should "protect(…) the movement of people" which could be threatened e.g. by regime snipers, by raids, by arrests on streets outside the residential areas etc. Clearly, armed groups are not an external security provider for councils and the community, but they are part of the effort to expand agency and learning. Hence, they are supposed to "*empower* people in the area to take charge of security and administration" (p. 12, emphasis A.W.). In that way, a detachment of the armed forces from the civilians was supposed to be prevented, because the interaction between fighters and civilians would lead to a common and more organic working relationship.

8.3.8 The formation of local councils and their organizational structure

The chapter "On the formation of local councils and their organizational structure" starts by illustrating the conditions under which councils are formed and the obstacles they face (p. 12f.): in addition to "deadly violence" mobility is curbed and "areas are cut off from each other". Nevertheless, the various mechanisms of resilience are highlighted that reflect creative adaptations and "new practices". Based on these observations, Aziz defines how councils have been formed. Notably, the formation is characterized by dynamism and improvisation according "to the needs of the situation and how people engage with it" (p. 13). Aziz views an interdependence of councils in both their success and failure – the increase of agency and capacity in one place will "contribute to the efforts of others and will increase the determination of all their members" (p. 13). Aziz did not suggest an organizational blueprint for councils such as 'build six committees, vote two heads, write down internal rules' etc. Instead, he puts all responsibility into the hands of the communities on the ground. The only advice is that the council should "organize on a practical basis, starting small and developing further according to the needs of the community." (p. 14) The motto is very pragmatic: do what is possible, create the space for agency and expand that space. This stance does not reflect a thoughtless preference of whateverism, nor a glorification of spontaneity, rather it stems from a deliberate acknowledgement of the various obstacles (especially repression) and challenges (complex learning processes). Accordingly, elections are considered of secondary relevance: "In light of the difficulties (...) councils will consist of those whose social engagement has earned them wide respect, on the basis of their social and technical skills and their organizing experience" (p. 13). However, volunteerism is emphasized as a fundamental principle, in two directions: first in the meaning of 'voluntary' as opposed to 'professional', and, second, in the meaning of 'voluntary' as opposed to 'compulsory'. In the first sense, councils were supposed to be open "(f)rom the beginning" to involve not only the members of the council, but also "engaged people from the region" as well as "(w)illing people participating outside the region with expertise in the questions at hand" (p. 14). People should preferably work on a voluntary basis and not as professionals (p. 13). In the second sense, Aziz explicitly mentions that "under no circumstances should there be any coercion to participate" (p. 10) – indeed, the

papers and the whole concept are proposed as an 'invitation' and not as a final program: "This introduction and what follows are an invitation to form local councils (…)." (p. 7)

The mentioned isolation of areas weighed heavily on the potential of councils. Aziz places the regional interlinking of councils prominently at the beginning of the main text as one of the core objectives of the councils. On the one hand, in a rather pragmatic way: "Incite social revolutionary activities on a regional level while unifying supporting structures" (p. 7); and on the other hand emphasizing the aspect of independence of councils: "Build horizontal relationships of interdependence between local councils in a given region and broaden these to include other geographic areas" (p. 10). In different chapters he included remarks specifically addressing how one locality can offer support to another (p. 9ff.). However, a more coherent structure is not suggested, which is a gap in the papers. Sami Al-Kayial explains that, of course, "the councils were not supposed to remain isolated. Omar expected the regime to close regions. Thus he viewed it as essential to keep regions open and connected so that experience, expertise and ideas could circulate and be exchanged between the councils and regions. The idea was to create groups that would link the councils on a local level and then on higher levels, for example all councils in the Rif Dimashq province would be represented in a higher council, this way up to a council on national level." (Interview, August 2020) Although Aziz's preference was clearly to overcome the state altogether, he realistically assumed that a new state of some sort would be established after the fall of the regime. Al-Kayial explains how they thought of the possible constellation: "the councils were supposed to become more formalized. But not in a state-like, authoritarian [sultawiyy] way. (...) We imagined that after the fall of the regime, the society, locally, would be able to organize elections and that the local councils would be rooted in society, independently from any higher body." Councils would exist in parallel to a government, albeit in an antagonistic way: "Our vision was that there would be a central government, but that this government would not be able to impose its will on the local councils. The latter would organize daily life independently from the government." Ideally, the local councils on the other hand "would gradually evolve from personal-social relations between the humans based on trust into a form of democratically elected organization that would remain based on social relations instead of bureaucratic ones." The basis would be an increasing level of organization by the means of elections and on the basis of the growing capacity of not only the revolutionary activists, and with a clear and immediate accountability towards the people. This concept resonates with Bookchin's conceptualization of councils, in which he "foresaw a scenario in which a myriad of local-level popular assemblies could flourish and proliferate, and even come to be knit together in a confederation sufficient in scope to constitute an effective 'dual power', one that could pose a serious challenge to the authority and jurisdiction of the state." (Hammy & Miley 2022, 4) Although Al-Kayial emphasized his distance towards the Kurdish model of democratic autonomy, I suggest that their idea ultimately comes down to something quite similar: a parallel existence of autonomous councils based on neighborhoods, aggregating on regional and above-regional levels, next to the presumed existence of representative democratic structures that, alas, appear inevitable in the given power constellations. Aziz and Al-Kayial themselves related their situation in Syria not to Bookchin's perspective, but to the situation of such a dual power in the Russian Revolution 1917 where soviets existed in parallel to the provisional government and parliament. "The slogan was then 'All power to the soviets', but in our context we did not opt to raise this claim of 'all power to the councils'. We thought of Syria in terms of a continuous double, parallel power [in Arabic 'izdiwajiyyat al-sulta'; A.W.]. In this vision, the central state would always face resistance when it would try to impose laws on the councils and when people disapproved of these laws."

8.3.9 The role of the National Council

There is a misunderstanding that Aziz appreciated the SNC and the NC as a structure that would unite the councils under its umbrella and coordinate their work on both a regional and national level (Galiàn 2019b, 728). Whereas the name National *Council* indeed suggests a coherence with Aziz' idea of the local councils, it has been shown that the Syrian National Council did not emerge as a result of the initiative by local councils. Whereas there were good reasons to build a working relationship between the SNC and the councils from the latter's perspective, Aziz was not at all enthusiastic about the SNC. Although not (yet) explicitly warning against the threat of cooptation by the SNC in the papers, he very clearly defines the SNC's mission as dealing with other states and not as establishing authority inside Syria: "It was tasked with being a legitimate alternative authority among Arab states and internationally that could incite the necessary action to protect the Syrian people from the (...) regime". (Aziz 2011/12, 4) And that's it! Unlike the other chapters, there are no written bullet points outlining the specific tasks of local councils in this matter. Such an absence is intentional because, in Aziz' view, the local councils should entirely focus on their tasks on the ground. To this end, Aziz identified three aspects in which the SNC may have been helpful for the local councils. First, there is a mutual benefit for both levels: whereas the local councils enhanced the legitimacy of the SNC, the SNC's rhetoric and material support for the local councils contributed to the acceptance of these new social formations on the ground. If people trusted the SNC, they would have confidence in the local councils. Secondly and quite simply, the local councils would have better access to money and material support through the SNC, which would "allow() for greater flexibility in launching local councils by covering initial costs as well as later expenses (...)". (p. 14) Certainly, the hope was to get support with no strings attached. Third, the SNC was seen by Aziz as helpful for the task of regional and provincial-level coordination between councils - a task that was overwhelming for those councils that were operating in an emergency mode due to regime attacks. At this point, Aziz clearly insists on the autonomy and independence of the local level and makes sure to limit the SNC's function to a supportive one for "strengthening collaboration between different areas." The SNC "can *facilitate* organizing (...)", he writes, "while each region and locality continues to engage in projects in line with their idea of the movement. This *independence* has clearly given the movement its tremendous adaptability, even though it was often affected by the lack of supportive spaces to protect it." (p. 14; emphasis A.W.). Very certainly, the way in which the SNC/the NC would found the roughly fourteen provincial councils later in 2013 was not 'facilitating' the organization, but rather *supplanting* it. It is very likely that Aziz already had a clue that this was a potential danger to the bottom-up grassroots character of the local councils. However, as Al-Kayial explains (interview, August 2020), Aziz was in contact with people from the SNC and had no interest in causing friction that would harm either the SNC or the local councils. In a later article from October 2012, written shortly before his arrest, Aziz critically assesses the development of the SNC and attests it a "complete failure" in its attempt to represent the opposition and take action to the benefit of the revolution, especially criticizing it for "founding civilian or local councils 'from above'" (Aziz 2012).

8.4 Paradigms in council theory and Aziz' contribution

Throughout the history of modern revolutions and across the whole leftist spectrum in the broadest sense, councils have been seen as a central concept when it comes to revolutionary transformation and to alternatives for actually-existing democracy. Popp-Madsen (2021, 56) states that "(d)uring the last 100 years, the council system has been a focal point for critics of liberal democracy, parliamentarianism,

representation, state communism, and bureaucracy and has repeatedly been interpreted as the democratic kernel of socialism".[54] I think it is not an exaggeration to say that councils are the only conceivable democratic alternative to "the impoverished understanding of democracy within liberalism" – an understanding which remains hegemonic in the political imagination around the globe (Popp-Madsen 2021, 59; also Arendt 1958a, 29f.). Against this backdrop, it is all the more surprising that councils have so far hardly been theorized systematically, although they repeatedly "surfaced in revolts throughout the 20th and 21st centuries" (Azzellini 2018, 23). Moreover, it is a pity that anarchism's contributions are simply brushed under the carpet in all recent publications without exception, which extends to the somewhat odd ignorance of Murray Bookchin (especially striking with Popp-Madsen & Kets 2021, 163).

Interestingly, though, whereas "councils!" appears to be the universal answer, the very question that it is supposed to answer varies considerably depending on the perspective. I suggest that it is possible to group these diverse perspectives on councils into three paradigms. The first one is instrumentalist in the way that it sees councils merely as suitable tools for destroying the given order. This paradigm is represented by Wladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks in the setting of the Russian Revolution 1917. The second paradigm displays a holistic vision of councils in which councils are seen as the harbingers and as the pillars of an alternative social order. This embraces both the Marxist and anarchist traditions – Marxist meaning, here, the non-social democratic, non-bolshevist currents, as represented for instance by Marx himself, Rosa Luxemburg, and the council communists, and anarchist meaning the two dominant currents of syndicalism and anarcho-communism represented by numerous authors. The third paradigm is more or less identified with Hannah Arendt and is distinctly characterized by its politicist outlook on councils which limits them to the political sphere. Lastly, there are authors that either oscillate between the Arendtian and the holistic paradigm or attempt to synthesize aspects of the two (these include Murray Bookchin and Cornelius Castoriadis). The table below gives an overview of the paradigms of councils. The selection of authors that the following discussion draws from is justified by the fact that they are recognized as the most influential thinkers on councils and/or by the fact that councils are a central concept in their thinking about revolution and alternative orders.

Table 9: Overview of paradigms of council democracy

Paradigm	Councils as…	Paradigmatic Authors
Instrumentalist	Tools to destroy given order	Lenin
Holistic	Basis of alternative social order	Various: Marxists, Anarchists, Syndicalists
Politicist	Institutions of a truly democratic political sphere	Arendt
Synthetical and overlapping	Basis of alternative order and as space of the 'Political'	Bookchin, Castoriadis

Note: All emphases A.W. Source: A.W. based on Aziz 2011/12.

8.4.1 Paradigm One: instrumentalist approach – councils as tools to destroy the given order

Lenin's conception of councils serves as a valuable starting point and effectively serves as a contrasting model when juxtaposed with the other two paradigms. According to Lenin's perspective, the central

[54] Socialism is synonymous here with communist or whatever one wants to call a post-capitalist alternative social order.

question that is addressed by the concept of councils is: How can we dismantle the existing order? Councils are reduced to being tools within a revolutionary period and are explicitly not conceived of as prefigurative bodies that would last once the revolution has successfully overthrown the government (Popp-Madsen & Kets 2021, 161). As early as 1905, long before the October Revolution in 1917, Lenin made no bones about this perspective: "The Soviet of Workers' Deputies is not a labour parliament and not an organ of proletarian self-government, nor an organ of self-government at all, but a fighting organization for the achievement of definite aims." (Lenin 1905). Among scholars as well as communists of all stripes (except for Leninists, of course), there is hardly any doubt that Lenin's slogan "All power to the Soviets!" and the naming of the "Soviet Republic" were a perversion of the whole idea of councils and their protagonists' ambitions. Soviets were "corrupted by the Bolshevik party's interference as early as 1918" (Popp-Madsen & Kets 2021, 165) and "progressively transformed into nothing more than the communication channel of the omnipresent party" in combination with a "militarisation of the workplace" (Dubigeon 2019, 270). Because of that limited view on councils as "primarily destructive and temporary organs" (Popp-Madsen & Kets 2021, 166) it is of little use to discuss the Leninist notion of councils in more depth, but it is helpful to keep this conceptualization in mind in order to better grasp the other paradigms' focus on the prefigurative and anti-authoritarian, agency-focused character that they ascribe to the councils.

8.4.2 Paradigm two: holistic approach – councils as basis of alternative order

Starting in the interwar period, Council Communists have developed their understanding of councils and an alternative social order in the sharpest demarcation from the Bolsheviks (Klopotek 2021). Early and clear examples are Gorter's *Open Letter to Comrade Lenin* (1920a) and Rühle's *The Revolution is not a Party Affair!* and *Moscow and Ourselves* (1920b), but also a great deal of the theoretical debates within council communism in the subsequent decades devoted great effort to understanding and coming to terms with the Bolsheviks' authoritarianism (e.g. GIK 2020 [1930], 39ff.; Klopotek 2021, 76ff.): "The soviets that came about in public elections based on party lists and after outrageous government terror are not councils. They are council backdrops (…). They are a political deception. A hoax" (Rühle 2007 [1921], 479; translation A.W.)[55]. While acknowledging that council communists put great emphasis on agency and learning experience as opposed to bureaucracy, on cultural renewal and on the unfolding of each human being's potential as opposed to leadership and passivity (e.g. Pannekoek 2008 [1946], 73), I suggest that their core narrative of councils is a very sober one. The main question is: how can production and distribution – social reproduction at large - be technically regulated by the producers themselves in the absence of private property and centralization, the aim being an association of free and equal producers (GIK 2020 [1930], 5; 195)? The answer is plain and simple: "The proletarian self-government, however, and the socialist economy require the council system! (All produce for the general needs and all take part in the administration.)" (Rühle 2007 [1921], 474; translation A.W.). The way in which production and distribution are mediated is a matter of accounting (GIK 2020 [1930], 147), however, a sort of accounting that does not reside in a centralized bureau of statistics, but instead which allows the producers per industry ('Branche') to coordinate their production in accordance with the demands of consumer cooperatives (e.g. GIK 2020 [1930], 120, 147).[56] Although the council communists are not clear about the

[55] "Die in öffentlichen Wahlen, nach Parteilisten und unerhörtem Regierungsterror zustande gekommenen Sowjets sind keine Räte (…). Sie sind Rätekulissen. Sie sind eine politische Täuschung. Ein Weltbetrug."

[56] Although the realm of (in modern terms:) Care Work and of cultural work are not considered as „immediately productive", they are supposed to be organized in the form of councils as well and on the principle of these workers' autonomy in their respective realm (e.g. Pannekoek 2008 [1964], 72).

exact functioning or institutional design of councils and the precise relation between producers' and consumers' cooperatives, they tend to privilege the realm of the producers as the locus of decision-making (Pannekoek 2008 [1946], 71f.; Rühle 2007 [1921], 480; GIK 2020 [1930], 18; 235) What I want to foreground here is that council communists make their case for councils because they are the *technically* correct answer to the problem of how to organize social reproduction, the embodiment of how social reproduction unfolds theoretically and practically (GIK 2020 [1930], 120). The pragmatism with which the council communists conceive of councils as conduits that facilitate production and connect production and consumption stands in stark contrast to their emphatic, often rhetorically impressive and thrilling critique of the parties and authoritarianism. Pannekoek's elaborations on the necessity of a shift in mentality, of even spiritual transformation, is notorious, but it is seldom linked to the councils (Pannekoek 1946, I.7) in the way that Omar Aziz has done. For the most part, councils serve as the efficient engine room of management whereas cultural renewal takes place as a result and as a function of what has been previously arranged in the councils. Omar Aziz' notion of councils as social spaces in which relevant 'affective', psychological and socio-psychological processes unfold is an important counterbalance to the tendency to reduce councils to technical institutions.

Anarchist currents have been developing their perspectives about councils before and in parallel to the council communists. From an anarchist perspective, that includes syndicalism and anarcho-communism councils, which seek to answer the question: how can the tyranny of the State and the domination of Capital be overcome and a bottom-up democracy be created? Councils are seen as the adequate institutional form to realize a radical democratic social order while at the same time ending the regime of wage labor. The anarcho-syndicalist approach clearly privileges the workplace as the site and space from which a revolutionary transformation can emerge: "It was understood that the reorganization of society according to a socialist vision had to be carried out in the factories and industries, and the idea of councils was born from this realization." (Rocker 1921a, VI; translation A.W.) Sometimes, the councils are attached and, we could say, even identified with the syndicalist union (Barwich 2007 [1920], 447). Rocker (1921a) goes as far as to claim that anarcho-syndicalism has a certain supremacy over the council movement. Even though one may refute the absoluteness in which Rocker claims a syndicalist supremacy over councils, his argument that councils have been a kind of common sense within the labor movement and within the First International (at least in its strong libertarian wing associated with Bakunin as opposed to Marx) is very important against the backdrop of Marxists' and also Hannah Arendt's erasure of anarchism (see also Mühsam who backs Rocker's account (2007) [1930], 486; Kellermann 2011 in detail on Demirović's and Arendt's erasure of anarchism regarding councils).[57] Mühsam, whom we could take as representative of an anarchist-communist current, confers with Rocker's account on the origin of the idea of councils in their modern meaning: "The naming of these entities (…) as 'councils' was first heard at the Basel Congress of the First International (1869)" (Mühsam 2007 [1930], 486; translation A.W.). Against the privileging of the workplace and the workers as an anchor space for councils, Bakunin also stresses territory and community (streets and neighborhoods that make up the commune) (Bakunin 1972 [1870], 743, translation A.W.) Nettlau has identified the idea of simultaneously existing councils of workers and neighborhood councils as predominant in Spanish anarchism since the second half of the 19th century. In a congress report from 1869 it is said that "the future municipality is made up of the grouped

[57] Socialist Ernst Däumig claims that the council idea "for the first time developed in 1905" (Däumig 2007[1918], 288f.). With regards to contemporary discussions of councils, anarchist erasure continues. For instance Popp-Madsen & Kets brush anarchism both past and present under the carpet when they "argue that throughout the twentieth century, council democracy gradually loses its exclusive location within Marxism and Marxist interpretations of democracy." (2021, 163). This is also noteworthy with James Muldoon who revises the eminent Marxist figures in his recent books and edited volumes, but hardly evokes anarchists (only Landauer; Muldoon 2021, 131).

'corporations' on the one hand of the city and on the other hand of the realm of labor. The councils emerging from this would replace the government.[58] This acknowledgement notwithstanding, anarcho-communists such as Mühsam, Bakunin, Kropotkin and even Landauer, agree that the place and the subject of councils are first and foremost the workers at their workplace (Mühsam (2007) [1930], 485f.; 491f.). The most elaborated (but little-known) anarchist sketch of a society based on councils is Pierre Ramus' Neuschöpfung der Gesellschaft (2005) [1923], which also deals primarily with how to realize social-material reproduction in a post-capitalist, post-state society. Hence, there is an almost complete congruence between the council communists' and anarchists' conceptualizations of councils. Both views perceive councils as ideal tools for managing the production and distribution of what society needs in a conscious and reasonable manner, free from the control of capital and the state. The preoccupation with the workplace and labor is not a big surprise, since anarchism of the 19th and early 20th century was inseparably linked to the labor movement and its concerns. Omar Aziz also proposed his conceptualization of councils with an underlying anarchist motivation. His emphasis on the geographically rooted neighborhoods as gravitational point of councils can be read as further shifting the focus of councils away from matters of social-material reproduction. That this has its merits, but also its pitfalls, has been discussed one the one hand in terms of agency (merits) and on the other hand in terms of lacking structural solidarity (pitfalls).

8.4.3 Paradigm three: politicist approach – councils as radical democratic restructuring of the political system

In contrast to the holistic paradigm, Arendt reduces councils to institutions of a given political sphere whose existence she does not question. As a philosopher interested in the possibilities of (liberal?) freedom and of (collective) agency, her general question is: what can an institutional setting look like that guarantees freedom and agency in (political) decision-making? And more precisely, as an enthusiastic philosopher of revolutions, she asks: how can the direct democratic experience of revolutions, the moment of freedom which emerges in revolutions, be sustained and guaranteed in a post-revolutionary setting? For her, the wit of councils lies in the fact that they are the adequate institutional form for realizing a direct democracy that allows all participants to manage their public affairs and thus to ultimately realize freedom through common practice. Central to her reasoning is the motive of the constant re-emergence of the idea of councils in the history of modern revolutions. Arendt describes councils as a natural and instinctive form of organizing, but reserves this to modern revolutions (Popp-Madsen & Kets 2021, 173; Arendt 1958b, 216) Councils have been emerging "whenever the people have been permitted for a few days, or a few weeks or months, to follow their own political devices without a government (or a party program) imposed from above." (Arendt 1958a, 28) Arendt is then primarily concerned with how to convert the direct democratic experience of revolutions into an institutional framework which instead of stifling the democratic moment, sustains it: "The question was (…) how to institutionalize a freedom which was already an accomplished fact." (Arendt 1958a, 26). Arendt's conceptualization of the councils unfolds in her sharp demarcation of the councils from the party system: "Under modern conditions, the councils are the only democratic alternative we know to the party system, and the principles on which they are based stand in sharp opposition to the principles of the party system" (1958a, 30). Consequently, "wherever they appeared they were met with utmost hostility from the party-bureaucracies and their

[58] "Die Gruppierung der Korporationen der Stadt bildet die Gemeinde der Zukunft und die andere Gruppierung bildet die Vertretung der Arbeit (…). Die Regierung wird ersetzt durch die Räte (…) und durch ein Komitee ihrer Delegierten, welche die Arbeitsbeziehungen regeln, die die Politik ersetzen" (Bericht der Kongreßkommission Sept 1869, cited from Nettlau 1996 [1931]b, 60).

leaders from right to left and with the unanimous neglect of political theorists and political scientists." (1958a, 30f.)[59] Furthermore, Arendt's conceptualization of councils unfolds in sharp demarcation from the labor movement in general and Marxism in particular. She not only roundly dismisses the contributions of Marxists to council theory but also belittles the significance of anarchism's contributions to it. Furthermore, she completely disregards the perspective of council communism (Arendt 1963, 261, critically discussed by Kellermann 2011, 155f.). Although she explicitly and even emphatically concedes to the labor movement a certain lead role in the history and the idea of councils in the period between 1848 and 1956 (Arendt 2016 [1958], 273; Arendt 1958b, 215), she categorically rejects the idea that councils are supposed to deal with social-material reproduction, i.e. with the question what a society should produce why and how. The decisive disagreement between her and anarchists/communists is therefore twofold. Firstly, it revolves around the composition, scope, and purpose of councils (who, where, what). Instead of envisioning workers who consciously and reasonably plan, produce and distribute what is needed for social reproduction, she envisions citizens who gather and deliberate about *political* matters. Secondly, as a result of her reducing councils to mere political bodies, she affirms the existence of an economic sphere where private property of the means of production remains untouched, and matters of social reproduction are not addressed (critical of Arendt in that regard: Muldoon 2018, 2021; Azzellini 2018; Popp-Madsen 2021; Wollner 2018). Councils, for Arendt, have to reside within a political sphere only so that they can eventually function as the basis for a new "*political system* that guarantees civil and political rights" (Muldoon 2011, 396, emphasis A. W.). Her paradigmatic model, then, is not the Paris Commune, but notably the town hall meetings from the times of the American Revolution especially in Thomas Jefferson's vision (Arendt 1963, 248f.; Popp-Madsen & Kets 2021, 174; Wollmann 1973 on Jefferson's vision, 322ff.). Arendt performs some remarkable contortions in order to argue that councils have actually always been institutions of political deliberation and have rather been forced and pushed against their will and nature to deal with non-political, economic issues (Auernheimer 2007, 705; Popp-Madsen & Kets (2021, 174). Cohen & Arato (1997, 199) call her argument "entirely fictitious". Muldoon (2018, 14) regrets the "misunderstandings and lost opportunities" that Arendt's suggestions have entailed. As a consequence of her affirmation of private property and the separation of spheres – political versus economic sphere – she is led to reduce the principles of councils to trivial matters of electoral procedures (1958a, 30), a move which stands in stark contrast to her emphatic hailing of councils and her explicit disapproval of parliamentary democracy. On that basis, Demirović has concluded that while Arendt deserves credit for reviving the memory of council democracy and exploring the significance of councils in terms of democratic theory, she eventually undermines the council tradition's decisive emancipatory potential (Demirović 2009, 184).

8.4.4 Between paradigm two and three – synthetical approaches

Quite curiously, Murray Bookchin receives little to no attention in the recent resurgence of literature on councils (authors in Muldoon 2018; Muldoon 2021; Kets & Muldoon 2019; Popp-Madsen & Kets 2021; Popp-Madsen 2021). This is strange not only because Bookchin is a remarkable intellectual well-versed in anarchism, Marxism and historical research both in breadth and at depth, but also because his concept of Libertarian Municipalism has had a major impact on council democracy in North East Syria. Bookchin articulates this program by distancing himself from an individualist anarchism that rejects all forms of

[59] The fact that the newly founded KPD under the leadership of Rosa Luxemburg pushed for the substitution of parliamentarism in favor of councils in 1918 does not disprove Arendt's argument (as Auernheimer maintains 2007, 705), because it is an absolute exception.

government and binding institutions and also from syndicalism. If the council communists used the Bolsheviks and the Russian Revolution as a main negative reference point from which to carve out their own position, Bookchin chafes at the decisions of the anarcho-syndicalist revolutionaries in Spain in the 1930s. He analyzes the way in which anarchists falsely identify government with the state as such, and how their position on governing has often been unclear: „The real question that every revolutionary movement faces is not whether power has been eliminated, but where it is located: in institutions that serve the interests of oppressive classes and strata, or in those that serve the oppressed." (Bookchin 2008, 67) Hence, Bookchin addresses the question of councils as a question of institutionalizing the (anthropological) fact of power in an emancipatory way. The locus of such institutions, Bookchin (2008, 44) argues, must be the neighborhood rather than the workplace: "Under a more political coloration, so to speak, a neighborhood may well include those vital spaces where people congregate to discuss political as well as social issues. Indeed, it is the extent to which public issues are openly discussed in a city or town that truly defines the neighborhood as an important political and power space." It is in the form of assemblies that a political realm is animated by congregating citizens, and these assemblies are inseparably linked to councils. The democratic alternative he envisions „would be based on a network of policy-making popular assemblies with recallable deputies to local and regional confederated councils – councils whose sole function, I must emphasize, would be to adjudicate differences and undertake strictly administrative tasks." (Bookchin 2008, 24) Hence, in the Bookchinian approach, councils are the necessary complement (the executive side) of a direct democratic institutional framework animated by assemblies (the legislative side).

Alongside Murray Bookchin, it is Cornelius Castoriadis who has centered his vision of an alternative social order around councils, but this does not fit completely into the second paradigm. Central to his approach on councils is the concept of autonomy, which for him is a synonymous term for an alternative, non-capitalist social order. In his view, our actually-existing democracies, just as previous social orders, are heteronomous, because they do not allow for challenging the very foundations of that order – the given order is ultimately justified either by God or by the law, which includes the law of private property (Holman 2018, 141). An autonomous society preserves the "socially effective possibility of questioning the law and its foundation." (Castoriadis 1993a [1961-1979], 329, emphasis in original). Councils are precisely the tool that potentially allows for this kind of conscious self-institution, because everyone is *directly* and *continuously* involved in this self-institution by equally participating in the management and decision-making of the issues of public concern instead of losing his agency to representatives (Castoriadis 1993b [1961-1979], 257; Holman 2018 143f.).

Castoriadis' insistence on workers and labor (Castoriadis 1988b [1955-1960], 137, emphasis A. W.) underwent significant revision following the Hungarian Revolution in 1958. However, he did not desituate councils from production and transferred them in an Arendtian move to non-productive realms (Castoriadis 1993b [1961-1979], 264; also Holman 2018, 142). Rather he arrives at extending the council as universal institution for all localities and social spaces – not least by problematizing as such the separation of realm of labor from a 'life world' of sorts in these same writings: "The separation and antagonism of these two spheres is an essential expression of separation and alienation in present-day society. (…) What is entailed by the demands of the Hungarian workers' councils is the overcoming of this separation and opposition: that people manage the concrete collectivities to which they belong - and not only in "factories," but "in all sectors of national life," *and* that they participate in political power *not* under another guise, as "citizens" who vote, etc., *but* through the very organs of management that were their direct expression, namely, the councils." (Castoriadis 1993b [1961-1979], 262)

8.4.5 Between Arendt, Bookchin and anarchism: councils as geographically anchored social spaces

The overview of these paradigms allows us to situate Omar Aziz' conceptualization of councils in the following way: with its strong notion of undermining the state and statist democracy, it caters to the holistic paradigm. This is clearly countered though by its lack of addressing matters of material reproduction which moves it closer to the politicist paradigm represented by Arendt with its focus on councils as civil institutions or to the synthetical paradigm with its emphasis of geographical anchoring of councils. Omar Aziz placed all his faith on councils as social spaces in the realm of neighborhoods and deliberately not in the realm of labor. The reasons for that are understandable. The Syrian left, similar to the orthodox left worldwide, which continues to prioritize parties and seizing state power, has been irremediably discredited. To be sure, Omar Aziz would have argued that a turning away from the topics and sites of the working class movement was decisive for the success of the councils. Insofar as they functioned outside the organizational and programmatic frameworks of the (discredited) leftist opposition and the working-class movement they were perceived as social spaces open to anyone's initiative. Can Aziz' conceptualization of councils therefore be interpreted as yet another paradigmatic separation (Herauslösung) of the council idea from the working class movement towards fixing it to the civic realm? Does Aziz follow a Bookchinian or even an Arendtian approach?

The spatial anchoring of councils is an important problem that has been treated controversially in council theory. Whereas one side claims "the sphere of professional activities" as a main anchor for councils, the other side stresses the "living space – neighborhood, district, village, commune" (Dubigeon 2019, 260). In fact, the different council revolutions have tended to foreground either one of these two as a central site where councils would be rooted. Interestingly, the pendulum started off from the neighborhood space in the "archetype" of modern council revolutions, the Paris Commune (Azzellini 2018), only to swing somewhat towards a mix of factory and neighborhood soviets in Russia in 1905, and then more vigorously to the realm of the workers (and soldiers) during the Russian and German revolutions (the role of soldiers was central in the light of the context of the World War). Demirović points to that paradigmatic shift: "While Marx anchored the councils on the level of the commune, the prevalence of councils in the context of the German revolution was initially with workers' and soldiers' councils and in the course of 1919 solely with workers' councils." (Demirović 2009, 196; see also Popp-Madsen & Kets 2021, 171) Council revolutions then increasingly unfolded under the aegis of workers' movements, with the Paris Commune serving as a pivotal moment in European capitalist development. This marked a key shift, as the focus moved from workers as citizens, as seen during the revolutionary events of 1789, 1792 and 1848, to workers as workers asserting their power - not as workers-in-factories, but as workers-in-neighborhoods. This is not so surprising if one keeps in mind that France was hardly industrialized, especially in Paris (Hartmann & Wimmer 2021). The pendulum subsequently swung to the side of the factory, leading council communists in the 1930s and 1940s to view the sphere of production as the new universal focal point. As opposed to that trajectory, more recent revolutions in Rojava and Chiapas have witnessed a swing once again to the site of the neighborhood. This shift aligns very closely to the ideas of Bookchin, particularly in Rojava, where the PKK deliberately embraced his concept of Libertarian Municipalism, and also in Chiapas (though this was probably a non-deliberate, *de facto* translation).

While it may seem appropriate to sideline the notion of workers as the central agents of revolutionary transformation and bearers of councils, in line with Aziz's proposition to consider all humans as central actors, it is important not to dismiss the holistic paradigm outright. Simply reasoning that all council communists, anarchists and Marxists have erred by focusing on the wrong aspects would be too

simplistic. In Syria, food, security, and material issues were central factors.[60] Actually, Aziz's emphasis that councils must by any means overcome the 'daily division of work between basic life activities and revolutionary activities' can be used quite well to reconcile the ideas of civic councils comprising humans and the concept of holistic councils. His insistence on 'merging life and revolution' offers a bridge to integrate matters of social-material reproduction more explicitly into his vision. Perhaps Aziz simply wanted to avoid prioritizing this issue in order to avoid any misunderstanding. Why not take his notion of merging life and revolution, of overcoming the daily division of work as a re-articulation of holistic councils in less orthodox terms? Apart from this point, the value of his perspective for council theory cannot be overestimated. The main innovation that should inspire council theorists is the way in which he grasped agency as a transformative experience both within the individual psyche and the collective. His emphasis on creativity, association and solidarity learning processes that he derived from very unusual sources regarding council theory - Espinoza, Hardt & Negri, Deleuze – can introduce fresh ways of understanding why the concrete experience of individual and collective agency is so central. This nourishes an undercurrent in revolutionary thinking which highlights the subjective, affective dimension of revolutions (Davis 2019, 53; Milstein 2010, 63). Moreover, his notion of shrinking authority's time in favor of a newly emerging revolutionary time backs the recently emphasized thought (Adamczak 2017) that councils cannot simply precipitate a breach, but – through common practical tasks – gradually transfer life from a statist framework into a post-statist one. His insistence on 'merging life and revolution' not only prevents the evolution from losing meaning and reverting to authority's time but also offers a valuable bridge for linking the different paradigms.

[60] I believe that the notion of commons would be a fruitful entry point for fruitfully reconsidering questions of property versus socialization outside of the 'oldschool' paradigms of workers' councils. The conference "Utopie und Praxis des antiautoritären Kommunismus- Rätekommunismus, Commonismus, Chiapas & Rojava" has recently attempted to understand both theoretical paradigms and empirical examples more in interrelation (Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung 2023).

9. Conclusion

This dissertation aimed to reconstruct how the Syrian uprising, with a particular emphasis on the local councils, has been commemorated and interpreted from a leftist, specifically anarchist, perspective through digital media. Based on a discussion of the available theoretical concepts from the field of digital media, memory and social movement studies, I suggested understanding the remembrance of the Syrian uprising as a constellation of three theoretical dimensions: actors, practices and technology. This provided a coherent matrix for exploring the mnemonic field in both breadth and depth. The empirical analysis relied on a variety of instruments that were intended to do justice to the different technologies (web, Facebook, Twitter) and to the three distinct practices (archiving, circulating, claiming). This involved manual data collection and coding (for the construction of the corpuses), a backlink analysis (to measure the circulation of content from blogs), and a limited qualitative content analysis. The particular challenge was to grasp how different platforms served different practices at different points in time and in their interaction with each other.

One conceptual refinement of previous research has been achieved in terms of actors. Whereas the analysis supports previous findings (Zamponi 2020) that committed actors are a small minority, it also deepened the understanding of actors' roles by differentiating memory workers according to their relation to the content (creators vs. replicators and brokers), to their degree of dedication (committed vs. one-time authors; occasional brokerage or replication, especially on Twitter; systematic or engaged brokerage, especially on Facebook). Commitment (invested time for researching and writing), but also authorship skills and pre-existing networks were found to shape actors' capacities to present narratives that would be deemed worthy for further circulation and hence fed the creation of memory.

Through the lens of technology, the analysis carved out in how far platforms afforded or limited the creation of memory. The analysis backed the suggestion that affordances are not merely technically determined, but are highly dependent on actors' choices to use affordances based on their skill, which is a major precondition for realizing blogs' affordances in terms of claiming with all its complexities ('basic' and 'emergent' affordances, Hopkins 2015). I concluded that blogging offered both persistence and flexibility, but above all control over content. Facebook and Twitter's affordance structure, characterized by its 'scalability', compensated for the limited capacity of blogs to renew the circulation of content. Similar to blogs, archives afforded persistence and they shaped the practice of claiming memory through selecting and curating memory. The analysis shed light on the interactions of these technologies: it identified two steps in memory creation, differentiating between initial mnemonic acts and secondary ones – the latter mainly serving to circulate the content produced in the former. It showed that Facebook and Twitter played a prime role as 'circulatory hubs' in close dependency to blogs, whereby the latter set the agenda in terms of the specific content of memory. Moreover, with regards to temporal dynamics, Facebook and Twitter served for the necessary renewal of circulation by re-posting links to important articles on blogs or in archives. Blogs, by contrast, functioned ambiguously: as temporal archives or resting points and as spaces for content creation. The notorious notion that memory needs to travel was qualified by pointing out that it also needs the possibility to rest and stabilize. Blogs functioned as 'bridge'

archives before 'proper' archiving sites assumed this function. It was precisely the combination of both affordances of persistence and replicability that made blogs function well in service of memory creation. The findings add more substance to the argument proposed by previous research that mnemonic acts within one platform can assume "a dual purpose" (Smit 2020, 101) and that practices interrelate across platforms and are dependent on each other (Özhan-Kocak 2017, 63).

The consideration of temporal dynamics of the analyzed decade, moreover, revealed how the significance of the three different practices may change over time: archiving has become the predominant practice in the later years, whereas claiming continued on a low but stable level and circulation functioned as the rhythmic 'pacemaker'. The renewal of circulation around the anniversary of Aziz' death resonates with other authors' insistence that rhythms matter for constructing and sustaining of memory and more specifically commemoration (Merrill & Lindgren 2020). However, that the Paris Commune assumed such a significant role was not an intrinsic factor of the mnemonic field, but was largely influenced by coincidence. Aziz' quote that Syrians were "no less than the Paris Commune Workers" in combination with the 150th anniversary of the Paris Commune – an iconic struggle for anarchists – that fell in the year 2021 was an important boost for attention to the topic in the ninth year of memory construction. This coincidence prompted the use of 'mnemonic chains' that further strengthened the linkage between Syria and the history of struggles that are relevant for anarchism.

The more detailed analysis of the practice of claiming relied on the previously defined four principles of anarchism. Following the shift in analysis from the 'how of remembrance' to the 'what', these four principles were utilized to empirically reconstruct the local councils, engaging in a dialogue with council theory. This research provided an empirical analysis with a view to advancing council theory. I identified different paradigms within council 'theory' and provided a four-fold heuristic as a way to better grasp what councils are actually about and how they work. This moreover contributes to research on anarchism, not least through backing and substantiating the claim that councils are rightfully appropriated by an anarchist 'tradition'. Through an anarchist lens, three pillars were interrogated in terms of how councils functioned and what they achieved (or not). The findings both support and complicate the manner in which memory activists have negotiated the 'anarchist credentials' of the uprising. Based on their simple structure, they initially provided a social space to absorb and encourage the soaring agency among ordinary people. No agreement on programmatic issues was needed for participation because it essentially meant accomplishing tasks that concerned everyone and were necessary for survival and the continuity of everyday life as far as possible. In that way, councils guaranteed that the revolution would not remain confined to a framework of political activism, but that it would instead overcome the 'daily division of work' that Aziz problematized. By necessity, but also through creativity, empowerment and terrific learning processes, ordinary people became experts of their affairs, thereby deprofessionalizing 'politics'. Since the councils' structure was so indeterminate – basically people taking over responsibility in different fields – agency could effortlessly flow into the councils. This functioned in complete independence from leaders, parties and organizations: councils spread rapidly all over Syria and independently from each other, because they were the right thing to do at the right time, an intuitive revolutionary social, political matrix. It was shown that memory actors argued for the anarchist credentials of the Syrian uprising by highlighting this outburst of agency (self-organization, the grassroots character etc.) in particular, alongside insisting that the local councils aimed at eroding the state. On the ground, though, the councils' antithetical or erosive character vis-à-vis the state played a role only for a minority of actors, such as Omar Aziz. Therefore, the self-understanding of councils was more often than not that of formations-in-waiting for a new, more democratic state

to come. Despite this entrapment in statist democratic ideology they *de facto* levered out statist democracy. Heterogeneity notwithstanding, councils did so by establishing a separation of powers that strongly gravitated around the executive and by uplifting the characteristic division of spheres (notably between the political sphere and civil society, but less so regarding the economic sphere which remained mostly untouched). Although it is remarkable how ordinary people created functional structures from scratch and with neither leadership nor a clear program, councils muddled along in many regards: diffuse electoral procedures and a rather exclusive handling of assemblies tended to curb agency and erode the constituent moment in many instances. Against this background, the necessity for council theory to clarify the meaning of assemblies and the relation between legislative and executive was pointed to, as well as the question of who decides and who executes, how and why, and how delegation, as an alternative to representation, is supposed to function. As much as the councils had the potential to become the nuclei of an anti-state or post-state social order, they also functioned as nuclei of a statist order wherever they became easily integrated into the governance architecture that was expedited by the exile opposition. Hence, councils apparently do not automatically prefigure an anti-state order. This raises the problem for council theory (and revolutions) that councils apparently can well tilt towards a state-based paradigm and by no means prefigure alternatives *per se*. Moreover, councils were necessarily preoccupied with keeping order, organizing security and preserving infrastructure to a degree that may have pushed the notion of rupture aside. The councils did not definitively move towards a complete rupture nor were they effortlessly integrated into the governance framework envisioned by the exiled opposition, but instead existed in a space somewhere in between. I argued that it may have been a mistake that the councils did not prioritize the collective ownership and management of resources, especially food supplies. Whereas the councils did make major accomplishments for cultivating an atmosphere of cooperation, such an ethic of solidarity is somewhat pointless in the long-run if solidarity does not become structural. Except for instances or episodes of 'structural solidarity' (notably regarding bread infrastructure and medical networks), councils did not challenge the independence of an 'economic sphere'. The lack of control over material preconditions for survival and normalcy made them particularly vulnerable to militias that were sometimes accepted by the communities for their ability to provide food, especially flour and bread. Although I am not particularly eager to draw a rather old-school materialist conclusion, it is important to state that without socialization of the major sources of livelihood, councils were, in the mid and long-term, constrained to functioning as local democratic add-ons within a socio-political order where decisions over material reproduction remained in the hands of a private market. The decision to ignore the material realm is understandable as a conscious departure from the traditional, orthodox orientations of the Syrian left, particularly the prevailing Marxism-Leninism that has historically dominated the Arab Left and which has failed not only in Syria. However, dismissing the Marxist and anarchist insight that a post-state order must reside also on material grounds whose organization must not be excluded from democratic malleability, produces a significant flaw within any council approach.

In fact, Aziz' conceptualization left the door open for rethinking 'socialization' in a more modern vocabulary: 'merging life and revolution' and overcoming the 'daily division of work between basic life activities and the revolution' were identified by him as key factors for the success of councils. Indeed, "The formation of local councils" is an eminent re-articulation of the council idea whose value cannot be overestimated for council theory. It highlighted agency in a way that for the first time explores a sort of causal or circular relationship between agency, enhanced individual and collective capacities and increasing cooperation. It moreover raised attention to

revolution as a transformational process in which life is supposed to be demerged from the state gradually (rather than through sudden rupture) and in an attempt to increase independence from 'authority's time' as far as possible. The research situated Aziz' approach to councils in between existing paradigms and carved out a distinct reasoning for councils. The central ideas of authority's time/revolutionary time, merging life and revolution, the 'desire for life' and councils as social spaces are indeed deserving of recognition within council theory.

The fact that Aziz' vision did not materialize can be attributed to several sources of pressure that local councils faced. The analysis sought to raise awareness of pressure factors beyond the typical repression that councils meet which stems from the government on the one hand and fascist (in Syria: Islamist) militias on the other. Alongside the trivial fact of a lack of time, I identified two sources of pressure: first, the commitment of the exiled opposition to integrate the local councils into a governance structure where the flow of accountability is reversed from a bottom-top to a top-down direction. Second, this was combined with the power dynamics of international aid which tended to subvert agency through agenda-setting by donors. Most important here was the unquestioned ground assumption of international aid, with its dogma of an 'apolitical' civil society that reaffirmed the separation of social spheres. As a result, the process of NGOization extracted fields of competency from the councils in favor of civil society organizations, which weakened councils and tended to reduce them to apolitical administrative bodies. The innovative holistic character of councils was thereby significantly eroded. It was argued that council theory should recognize the liberal notion of 'civil society' as an obstacle to council democracy.

Against this background, remembrance can be reassessed. Memory workers' full emphasis on the councils' achievements flattens the raised problems. The rather superficial treatment of the councils is understandable given that their primary concern was to raise awareness among anarchists towards Syria in the first place. Indeed, the way in which they established connections between the Syrian uprising and anarchism *per se* served the cause well. Memory workers deserve credit for generating awareness about the accomplishments of councils and the growing momentum of anarchism in Syria. Whereas this dissertation cannot conclude about the impact or the effects of that memory work, it suggests that digital media appear to have been much more of an affordance structure than anything else. Creating memory within a transnationally dispersed, loosely connected, heterogeneous and rather marginal 'community' obviously depends on mediation to a great extent. Dedicated memory workers could draw on blogs to push their narrative based on editorial freedom. Social media platforms were helpful in supporting blogs by spreading the word and by renewing circulation of remembrance over the years. The major constraint that crossed the identified affordances was the lack of binding connective spaces related to anarchism in digital media. This was compensated by the blog collective Tahrir-ICN, which was the densest space of memory creation for a period of two years. Especially sites that assumed archival functions – blogs, Wikis and 'proper' archival sites run by anarchists – can make anarchist memory of the Syrian uprising accessible for future engagement and learning processes among (Western) leftists. The way in which the dedicated memory workers have engaged in the remembrance of anarchism in the Syrian uprising through digital media has also enabled my own learning processes. It is my wish that the achievements and failures of the Syrian uprising, its anarchist momentum and Omar Aziz' vision of local councils will serve as inspiration for Western leftists in particular as they explore the possibilities of future transformations towards democracy beyond capitalism and the state.

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Appendix 1: Coding guidelines for Facebook, Web and Twitter

Coding guideline for Facebook					
Theoretical dimensions (deductive)		**Main category (deductive/inductive)**	**Characteristics (inductive)**	**Description of characteristics**
Actors		Authors	Profile name	Name of Facebook user or of group who initiated the post
			Referred author	Authors who are referred via links to their texts [names in brackets in column]
			Referred site	Sites that are referred to via outbound links.
Practices	Archiving	-	-	-
	Circulating	Language	English, French, Arabic, German	The language of the post and/or of the referred/linked text.
		Circulatory acts	Number of reactions, shares, comments	Number of reactions (" likes") to post, shares of posts and comments to post.
			Reference to other Facebook users	Name of the users' profile who is linked and/or reposted; " x" for " no reference"
			Referred authors and sites	Name of referred author, of site, and of platform type
	Claiming		-	-
Technology		Post characteristics (combinations possible)	Outbound link	A post that contains/consists of embedded links that lead to external destination
			Internal link	Links that lead to content within Facebook.
			Repost	A post that consists of reposting an original post.
			Text and/or embedded picture/video	A post that consists of text and/or embedded pictures/videos.
		Type of referred platform	Blog, news portal, archive, Facebook etc.	In analogy to coding guideline for Web corpus.
Overall/across dimensions		Title and date	-	Title or first five words of post and date of post.

Coding guideline for Web				
Theoretical dimensions (deductive)		**Main category (deductive/inductive)**	**Characteristics (inductive)**	**Description of characteristics**
Actors		Authors	Author	A person or group that is responsible for authoring and publishing a text.
			Replicated/original author	A person or a group whose text is reproduced/copied/submitted to an archive by a different author.
		Site/source	-	Name of the site/platform where a text was published
Practices	Archiving	Archive	Archive (library)	Entries in " The Anarchist Library"
			Archive (Wiki)	Entry in the Wiki " Anarchy in Action"
			Archive (Wikipdedia)	Entry in " Wikipedia"
	Circulating	Backlinks	-	-
		Language	English, French, Arabic, German, others	The language of the text/podcast etc. " Others" : Spanish, Greek, Italian, Portuguese.
	Claiming	Genre	Original text and translations	All publications of Aziz' original text in Arabic and all translations thereof
			Obituary	All texts dealing predominantly with Omar Aziz in the style of a biography or obituary
			Archive	All articles, obituaries, podcasts, etc. that re-appeared in library and in Wikis
			Interview	All interviews
			Article	All articles (journalistic, activist) that are not predominantly obituary/biography. Including articles that are (re)published in printed books
			Book	All printed books (including e-books) and translations thereof
			Podcast and transcript of podcast	All podcasts and transcriptions thereof
			Other	Very brief text pieces such (book description, short blog post, announcement)
Technology		Type of platform	Blog	All platforms that are predominantly blogs (featuring at least one of the following characteristics: tags, commentary, or identifiable blog content management system).
			News portal	All platforms that predominantly publish content in a regular periodic manner and aim at up-to-date-information
			Archive	All platforms that deliberately aim at saving content
			Wiki	All platforms using a wiki software as content management system
			Web portal	Websites with complex possibilities of content management (e.g. inclusion of blog within the website, a forum)
			Book	All printed books (including those with e-versions)
			Podcast and transcripts	All audio files and all transcriptions thereof
Overall/across dimensions		Title and date	-	Title and date of text. " Text" includes podcasts.

Coding guideline for Twitter				
Theoretical dimensions (deductive)		**Main category (deductive/inductive)**	**Characteristics (inductive)**	**Description of characteristics**
Actors		Authors	Author	A person or group that is responsible for authoring and publishing a text.
			Replicated/original author	A person or a group whose text is reproduced/copied/submitted to an archive by a different author.
		Site/source	-	Name of the site/platform where a text was published
Practices	Archiving	Archive	Archive (library)	Entries in " The Anarchist Library"
			Archive (wiki)	Entry in the Wiki " Anarchy in Action"
			Archive (Wikipedia)	Entry in " Wikipedia"
	Circulating	Backlinks	-	-
		Language	English, French, Arabic, German, others	The language of the text/podcast etc. " Others" : Spanish, Greek, Italian, Portuguese.
	Claiming	Genre	Original text and translations	All publications of Aziz' original text in Arabic and all translations thereof
			Obituary	All texts dealing predominantly with Omar Aziz in the style of a biography or obituary
			Archive	All articles, obituaries, podcasts, etc. that re-appeared in library and in Wikis
			Interview	All interviews
			Article	All articles (journalistic, activist) that are not predominantly obituary/biography. Including articles that are (re)published in printed books
			Book	All printed books (including e-books) and translations thereof
			Podcast and transcript of podcast	All podcasts and transcriptions thereof
			Other	Very brief text pieces such (book description, short blog post, announcement)
Technology		Type of platform	Blog	All platforms that are predominantly blogs (featuring at least one of the following characteristics: tags, commentary, or identifiable blog content management system).
			News portal	All platforms that predominantly publish content in a regular periodic manner and aim at up-to-date-information
			Archive	All platforms that deliberately aim at saving content
			Wiki	All platforms using a wiki software as content management system
			Web portal	Websites with complex possibilities of content management (e.g. inclusion of blog within the website, a forum)
			Book	All printed books (including those with e-versions)
			Podcast and transcripts	All audio files and all transcriptions thereof
Overall/across dimensions		Title and date	-	Title and date of text. " Text" includes podcasts.

Appendix 2: Coding guideline for RQ3

Deductive Codes	Description	Keywords and semantic field	Example
Agency	Councils as realization of self-organization	agency; self-organization; self-government; grassroots vs. hierarchies; (non-)professionalism; participation; decision-making; skill; creativity.	" Remarkable experiments in autonomous self-organization" (Al-Shami 2021)
Anti-authoritarianism	Anti-state character of councils	Relationship with state (independence, autonomy, refusal etc.); social vs. political revolution; negation of leadership and parties.	" convince people that they can (...) manage their affairs independently from the state and its bureaucracy" (Hassan 2013)
Prefiguration	Councils as institutions that anticipate alternative social order	Prefiguration; alternatives; destruction vs. creation; order.	" Local councils were set up in liberated [areas] to organise civilian rule, provide aid and (…) attempt to construct a new democratic society." (Boothroyd 2016)
Association	Councils as expression of association and community	Cooperation; solidarity; collectivity; community; mutual aid; networks.	" groups of people adapting to local conditions with a shared commitment to collaboration" (BbS 2017)

Stylistic devices (inductive)	Description	Keywords and semantic field	Example
Aziz as anarchist	Aziz is framed as anarchist	If genre is identified as obituary (highlighting Omar Aziz); evocation of anarchism	“ The local councils were the innvovation of Syrian anarchist Omar Aziz…” (Boothroyd 2016)
Explicit claiming	Appellation to recognize and remember Syrian uprising	Meta-reflection that local councils should be dealt with and/or learnt from	“ as with the Paris Commune, there is much to be learnt from Syria's revolutionary experience” (Al-Shami 2021)
Paris Commune quote	presence or absence of Aziz' quote referring to Paris Commune	Quote of Aziz “ We are no less than the Paris Commune workers (…)”	“ We are no less than the Paris Commune workers (…)” (BbS 2017)
Mnemonic chains	Evocation of revolutions related to anarchism and their linking to Syria	Paris 1871, Spain 1930s, Russia 1917, etc.	“ S' intéresser à la révolution syrienne et à ses échecs est nécessaire au même titre que pour la Commune, malgré son écrasement (…), ou que la Révolution espagnole (…)” (Amilcar 2019)

Appendix 3: Connectivity through likes on Facebook: Tahrir-ICN and Arab anarchist groups

BEING LIKED ⇨ LIKING ⇩	Pal	AiLeb	RaBei	HIT	AnMa	Alt-Lib	HaAs	SyAn	AoAra	ArAn	T-ICN	*seeing others*
Pal		x	x					x	x		x	5
Anarchists in Lebanon			x			x			x			3
Radical Beirut		x			x		x	x	x		x	6
Haraka Ishtirakiya Taharruriya (Egypt)												0
Anarkiya Masriya (Egypt)								x				1
Alternative Libertaire (Lebanon)				x	x							2
Harakat Asyan				x							x	2
Syrian Anarchists			x	x					x	x	x	5
Anarchists of Arabs	x			x			x	x			x	5
Arab Anarchists	x	x	x	x			x	x			x	7
Tahrir-ICN	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		11
seen by others	3	4	5	6	3	2	4	6	5	2	6	

Note: x signifies that a group liked another group, an empty table element signifies the absence of a like. Names of the Facebook groups: Pal=Palestinian Anarchists, AiLeb=Anarchists in Lebanon, RaBei=Radical Beirut, HIT=Al-Haraka Al-Ishtirakiyya Al-Taharrouriyya, NaMa=Anarkiyya Masriyya, AltLib=Alternative Libertaire, HaAs=Harakat Asyan, SyAn=Syrian Anarchists, AoAra=Anarchists of Arabs, ArAn=Arab Anarchists. T-ICN=Tahrir-ICN. Source: A.W. As of June 2016.

Appendix 4: Comparison of the two versions from October 2011 and February 20212

I have compared the two versions of Aziz' papers on the level of text structure and on the level of meaning in order not to miss major changes in structure or shifts in meaning that would reflect how Aziz estimated the course of the revolution in relation to his vision of the local councils. The two-column table below gives an overview of the main changes in structure as a first step and highlights details that were changes. The left column contains the summary of the first version (October 2011) and the right column the summary of the second version (February 2012). I draw on the translation by Bordered by Silence (2017) for both introductions. However, whereas my summary of the main text of the second version relies completely on the translation made by Bordered by Silence, I base the summary of the first version of the main text on a mix of my own translation and the one made by Mobayed (2013) altering Mobayed's translation where it diverges far from the literal translation, where points are left out (this is indicated). With regards to the first version's main text I added the numbers 1) to 5) as Aziz himself did in his second version in order to make the comparison in the table easier visually. With regards to both texts, I stick to the original wording of the titles and superscriptions of paragraphs, but I paraphrase the main points of paragraphs and the larger bullet points staying as close to the text as possible. In order make parallels between the two versions better visible, I use spacing between lines in order match the left column with the right column so that the same numbers of enumerations are on the same height.

Version 1, October 2011	Version 2, February 2012
Title62: Discussion paper on the Formation of Local Councils in Syria	Title: The formation of Local Councils in Syria. Practical suggestions for the continuation of the revolution
Introduction Title: Authority's time and revolutionary time 4 paragraphs: 1. What is a revolution? 2. Achievements: break of absolute control of space; establishment of SNC 3. Problem of "daily division of work", two threats (militarization and getting tired of revolution) 4. Strategy to face threats: self-organizing must remain independent; further blend life and revolution; therefore: local "councils"	Introduction Title: Linking collective self-defense and continuing the revolution 6 paragraphs: 1. Achievements: break of absolute control of space. 2. Syrians have transformed society and themselves. 3. Spirit of resistance; actions that oppose tyrannical power and contribute to rich human relations 4. Social formations have emerged (LCCs, LCs) allow for resistance and autonomous control over own lives 5. "Daily division of work" is partially overcome, link between revolution and life is evident

[62] The translation of both titles is mine, since the titles have not been translated by BbS 2017.

	6. Strategy to overcome/face threats: self-organizing must remain independent; further blend life and revolution; therefore: "local councils"
Main text	Main text
This is an invitation to form LCs in order to: - support humans in managing life without state - reinforce and spread practices of cooperation in adequate spaces/bodies - incite activities on regional level, unify supporting structures	This is an invitation to form LCs in order to: - support humans in managing life without state - reinforce and spread practices of cooperation in adequate spaces/bodies - incite activities on regional level, unify supporting structures
The following are the objectives and tasks of the LCs	The following are the objectives and tasks of the LCs
1) The matter of inhabitants: encouraging trust in the relationship between people - 3 points63 (help displaced people; help families of detainees; moral and financial support)64 Paragraph: 'life' has been replaced by search after safe places and loved ones; 'work' has been replaced by finding info on missing relatives and places of detention. Role of LC is to transfer this suffering that happens under authority's time to the revolutionary realm and transform it into a common initiative/task. Thus, LC has to take on: - 3 points (cooperate with LC in area of origin of displaced families to secure livelihoods; organize information flows to support relatives of detainees; create (also regional) solidarity funds to support families sustainably)	1) Human interdependence and civil solidarity: encouraging trust between people65 Objectives: - 5 points (relieve suffering, also psychological; provide practical solidarity to families; improve living conditions; logistical support for medical practitioners; continue educations service) [this paragraph is included in "Role of the LCs" below] Role of the LCs: - 10 points including sub points (alleviate misery solely through popular initiatives; cooperate with LC in area of origin of displaced families to secure livelihoods; organize information flows to support relatives of detainees; create (also regional) solidarity funds to support families sustainably; provide physical, emotional, logistical support to families because 'life' has been replaced by search after safe places and loved ones and 'work' has been replaced by finding info on missing relatives and places of detention --> document al abuses; create spaces to alleviate psychological stress; tasks of civil administration such as registering births, marriages, divorces etc.; coordinate with relief organizations to distribute aid well and generate data; coordinate with medical committees to establish field hospitals in homes, find supplies; help coordinate educational activities --> identify needs, find teachers, manage; coordinate outreach initiatives.

[63] I briefly render the content of each point and separate each point using a semicolon.
[64] These three points as well as the superscription "1)" are missing in Mobayed's translation.
[65] This second part of the chapter's title was omitted by BbS (2017), but I added it here to make clear that the chapter's topic is identical in both versions.

Paragraph: people are indeed skilled; work must be voluntary; mentality shift will take time	Paragraph: *Note*: people are indeed skilled enough; not intended to replace family and friendship bonds (for now); mentality shift will take time
2) On relationships between individuals: creating new common interests66 - two points (create common spaces for interaction; build horizontal links between LCs) Role of the LCs: Paragraph: revolution has transformed individuals and broadened their horizons; social richness through mutual aid instead of individualism - two points (encourage humans to discuss their daily concerns and solve problems together; consider regional level for solutions)	2) On relationships between individuals: creating new common interests objectives: - three points (increase the capacity for action; create common spaces for interaction; build horizontal links between LCs) Role of the LCs: Paragraph: revolution has transformed individuals and broadened their horizons; social richness through mutual aid instead of individualism; friendly relations - three lengthier points including sub points (encourage humans to discuss their daily concerns and solve problems together; consider regional level for solutions; defend land from state expropriation) *Note*: possible only in liberated areas; plans specific to areas possible
3) The topic of land - 1 point (defend land against state expropriation strategies). Paragraph: state's expropriations are part of strategic policy for domination and social exclusion. The revolution is also a rejection by marginalized people of this policy. Role of LC: - 3 points (intervene quickly into ongoing expropriation processes; cooperate with legal networks and raise cases before courts; encourage people to act on this issue collectively in their areas)	[the topic of land is included into the second chapter: On relationships between individuals, see above]
[The section on the FSA is missing in the first version]	3) On the relationship with the Free Syrian Army: The need to protect communities while continuing the revolution Objectives: - two points (protect people and demonstrations so that they can spread; ensure regional communication by protecting movement and logistical support) Role of the LCs: - three points (provide housing and supplies to FSA; coordinate and build consensus with FSA; work with FSA

[66] Here, Mobayed's translation has to be strongly contradicted: Aziz' concern is not to create spaces in which people can "trade", and the content of the paragraph is not on "exchange" between people, but as BbS (2017) rightly translates it is about the human relationships and their common concerns.

	to enable people to take charge of security and administration)
4) The structure of LCs - 7 points including sub points (regionally different possibilities according to the respective strength of revolutionary movement; realization depends on needs and the extent of engagement of people within LCs; success of each council will enrich other councils and foster determination of members67; no easy task, not only because of repression, but especially because it involves unusual practices of living and relating to each other and common organization of economic and social tasks; establish LCs first in areas with suitable conditions, which will generate experience that other areas can build on; LC shall consist not of elected members, but of respected and skilled individuals with time and desire to work voluntarily; projects according to regional need assessed by council members, regional activists, volunteer activists from outside the area68)	4) On the formation of LCs and their organizational structure Paragraph: difficult circumstances in view of reaction of regime, nevertheless people have found mechanisms to resist, adapt, create; new practices have emerged. - 6 points including sub points (realization depends on needs and the extent of engagement of people within LCs; success of each council will enrich other councils and foster determination of members; varies according to local context and regime strategy; establish LCs first in areas with suitable conditions, which will generate experience that other areas can build on; no easy task, not only because of repression, but especially because it involves unusual practices of living and relating to each other and common organization of economic and social tasks; LC shall consist not of elected members, but of respected and skilled individuals with time and desire to work voluntarily; projects according to regional need assessed by council members, regional activists, volunteer activists from outside the area. paragraph: start small and focused on practical concerns and let develop; all according to balance of power with regime regarding the integration of neighboring regions/localities
5) The role of the National Council69 - 3 points (process must be bottom-up; it shall finance; it shall coordinate regions but: autonomy of LCs!)	5) The role of the National Council - 3 points (process must be bottom-up; it shall finance; it shall coordinate regions but: autonomy of LCs!)

The main differences between the two versions lies in the following points: The first chapter, namely "Human interdependence and civil solidarity: encouraging trust between people", is more detailed in the second version: The points Aziz added and thus highlighted as 'objectives of the LCs' are medical support and the matter of education. Against the backdrop of the experience over the past months, the specific tasks Aziz assigned to the LCs grew (the increase from 3 to 10 points partially stems from restructuring the chapter slightly): He added the issues of documenting abuses and creating spaces to alleviate psychological stress as well as the need to coordinate with relief organizations to distribute aid well and generating data for that purpose. A need was also seen in

[67] Here Mobayed's translation is to be corrected: The point is not that success will be measured by growing membership as she translates, but instead that the more people see and feel the success of their common engagement in a council the more they trust each other and themselves, which again will help the other councils' efforts and increase the determination of everyone involved.
[68] One important correction of Mobayed's translation is the word 'region' instead of 'regime': "The launch of the local councils (...) will be in accordance with the priorities of the region".
[69] Referring tot he Syrian National Council (SNC).

establishing field hospitals in homes and in finding medical supplies. The second chapter is very similar in both versions. Aziz only incorporated one issue into it to which he had devoted an own paragraph in the first version as third chapter: "The topic of land". The other way round, the third chapter in the second version is missing in the first one: The question of the "Relationship with the Free Syrian Army". The role of the councils was seen in cooperating with the armed forces and supporting them by providing housing and supplies with the aim of keeping armed forces rooted in the community. The fourth chapter on the organizational structure of the LCs essentially remained the same in both versions apart from one final paragraph affirming that LCs should remain small entities with a very concentrated focus on practical concerns and that the potential for growing varies for each LC according to the balance of power with the regime. No changes were made by Aziz in the last chapter on the National Council's role and its relation with the LCs.

Appendix 5: Important aspects of translation

This appendix highlights aspects of translation that may be important for further discussions about councils as conceptualized by Aziz. One major problem of translation of Aziz' introduction (October 2011) revolves around the word 'tadakhul'. The French translators chose the potential meaning 'se chevaucher/chevauchement' which BbS (2016) adopts, correctly translating the French term into English as 'overlap/overlapping'. Quite conversely, I suggest using the English terms 'parallelism/juxtaposition/coexistence' (marked red). This at first seems to alter the meaning, but it makes sense when bringing in the term 'al-fasl' with its very unambiguous meaning of 'separation'. The other suggested changes (marked yellow) are related to that issue and in order to underline my point I propose translations that are more literal. The starting point is that since the start of the revolution people have been experiencing two different times simultaneously: revolutionary time, in which people organize protests etc., and authority's time, in which people pursue their basic life activities to secure their livelihoods (e.g. go to work) and to organize their lives (e.g. send children to the state's schools, register their marriages with the state). The essential question is: In which of the two times – authority's or revolutionary time - do the basic life activities take place? So far, Aziz states, they take place in authority's time. Thus basic life is separate from the revolution, the latter remains something that is external to daily life. The strategic question then is: Will it be possible to make the basic life activities happen within revolutionary time based on self-organization or will people's basic life activities remain enclosed in authority's time and control. At the same time, revolutionary time is supposed to remain as much separated from authority's time and preserve its own logic. To be clear: The aim is not to merge revolutionary time and authority's time, but to extract the activities of basic life from authority's time in order to integrate it into revolutionary time, so that in a second step revolutionary time will supplant, supersede authority's time. I am afraid that Aziz' choice of words, especially 'tadakhul', is a bit misleading. If 'tadakhul' is translated as 'overlap', it invites for the interpretation that the essential point was to merge authority's and revolutionary time. But again, it is not. Revolutionary time and self-organizations must preserve their independence, as Aziz emphasizes. And the basic life activities have to be disintegrated from authority's time and integrated into self-organization and revolutionary time. The right column shows my suggested translation in that sense:

Original Arabic text	Translation Bordered by Silence	My suggested translation
غير أن الحراك الثوري بقي مستقلا عن الأنشطة الحياتية للبشر ولم يتسطع()أن يتداخل مع حياتهم اليومية. فهي مازالت تدار كما في السابق وكأن هناك "تقسيما يوميا للعم"بين النشاط الحياتي والنشاط الثوري.	"However, the revolutionary movement has remained separate from day-to-day activities and so has been unable to enter into everyday life, which continues as it had in the past. It's as though there exists a 'daily division of work' between the necessary tasks to live in this world and revolutionary activities.	However, the revolutionary movement has remained separate from people's basic life activities and has been un able to enter into their everyday life. The latter continues as it had in the past and as though there was a 'daily division of work' between the basic life activities and revolutionary activities.

ما يعني أن التشكيلات الاجتماعية في سورية تعيش تداخل زمنين، زمن السلطة الذي مازالت تدار فيه الانشطة الحياتية وزمن الثورة الذي يعمل الناشطون فيه على اسقاط النظام.	This means that self-organizing in Syria is happening in two overlapping times: authority's time and revolutionary time, in which peope take action to overthrow the regime.	This means that the social formations in Syria experience the juxtaposition of two times: authority's time and revolutionary time, in which activists take action to overthrow the regime.
لا تكمن الخطورة في ذلك بالتداخل بين الزمنين فهذا من طبيعة الثورات وإنما في غياب التلازم بين الخطين الحياتي والثوري للجمهور.	The danger doesn't lie in the overlap of these two times, which is part of the nature of revolution, but rather in the separation between the progress of daily life and that of the revolution, for everyone involved.	The danger doesn't lie in the [initial] juxtaposition of the two times, which is part of the nature of revolution, but in the lack of conjunction of the [private] life sphere and the collective revolutionary sphere.
بناء عليه، فبقدر ما تستقل التشكيلات الاجتماعية عن السلطة بفعل جهود البشر للفصل بين زمن السلطة وزمن الثورة، بقدرما تكون الثورة قد هيأت أجواء انتصارها.	Accordingly, the more self-organizing is able to spreadas a force through the efforts of human beings to live in revolutionary time rather than in authority's, the more the revolution will have laid the groundwork for victory.	Accordingly, the more the social formations become/are independent from authority based on the efforts of humans to preserve the separation of authority's time from revolutionary time, the more the revolution is able to spread the atmoshpere of victory.

With regards to the latter paragraph in the table, two further points have to be clarified: First, Aziz doesn't write on any form of 'self-organizing', but he focuses on a specific form of self-organization, namely the local councils. Secondly, Aziz argument is a qualitative one: the existing or even developing formations (i.e. the councils) shall become more independent or assert their independence from the state. It is not a quantitative argument, aiming at 'spreading' the councils and making them more numerable. Of course, this is also desired by Aziz, but the point he is making here is the importance that the councils are not drawn (back) into the logic of the state, but that they instead affirm their independence of the state institutions. As a result the phrase "the atmosphere of victory will spread" aims at the hope that people's motivation and confidence will grow, based on the experience that working independently from the state indeed functions. This, by consequence, will lead to what the other translators suggest but what is not the original wording: it will lay the groundwork for victory.

Another, last and minor, point revolves around the qualification of the councils as 'flexible' by Aziz. BbS translates as shown in the left column in the table below. I would prefer to keep the Arabic 'marn' as adjective that describes the Local Councils, as shown in the right columns:

ما يتطلب بدروه تكوينا اجتماعيا مرنا يقوم على تفعيل التعاضد بين الثورة وحياة البشر اليومية. وسنسميه فيما يتبع "بالمجلس المحلي	This involves organizing for flexibility within social groupings by developing processes to co-ordinate revolution and everyday human life, which we will call here 'local councils'.	This requires a flexible social formation that can realize (mechanisms of) cooperation/assistance between people's revolutionary and daily lives. I will call this in the following 'local council'.

Abstract (English)

The dissertation deals with the memory of the Syrian revolution that began in 2011 in the context of the Arab Spring. It examines how leftist actors have used digital media to make visible an anarchist dimension of the revolution that has often been lost in the common narrative of a 'complicated civil war'. At the centre of this left-wing appropriation of the Syrian revolution are the local councils, hundreds of which have sprung up across the country from the late 2011 onwards. They were conceptualized in 2011/2012 by the Syrian intellectual Omar Aziz from an anarchist perspective as forms of local self-organization against the state and political parties. The aim of the study is to reconstruct digital memory work in social media (Facebook, Twitter) and blogs in such a way that the interplay of actors, practices (archiving, circulating, claiming) and technology for the emergence of memory becomes clear. Drawing on research in the fields of social movements, cultural memory and digital media, the study contributes to theory building, differentiates existing concepts and tests new methodological approaches. The manually collected data (posts, tweets, articles from blogs and other platforms) were coded and qualitatively analyzed according each platform in order to identify different aspects of memory work: temporal dynamics, different roles of actors, interactions between platforms in the circulation and archiving of memory, etc. A backlink analysis of blogs and a qualitative content analysis of the most relevant blog articles deepen the analysis of how memory is circulated and claimed. As a result, the roles of actors were differentiated according to their skills, degree of commitment and existing (offline) networks. The findings provide a nuanced picture of how the technological 'affordances' of a medium play out and depend on actors and practices. The importance of blogs as temporary archives or resting points in the initial phase of memory work is emphasized, while Twitter and Facebook functioned more as circular hubs and pacemakers of a memory rhythm over nearly ten years.

Alongside the question of how memory was created and cultivated, there is the question of the object of memory itself. Previous studies of the local councils have not adequately grasped how the councils functioned and have failed to recognize the links between the Syrian councils and a (left-wing) council tradition and hence their potential as an alternative to representative, statist democracy. Omar Aziz explicitly pointed to this connection by placing the Syrian revolution in the tradition of the Paris Commune of 1871, which has an iconic significance in all communist and anarchist movements and is seen as an early realization of council democracy. The analysis of claiming showed that the left reception of the Syrian revolution has also had difficulties in spelling out how the Syrian councils are related to the left council tradition. The main arguments proposed by the memory workers have relied on the 'anarchist' personality of Aziz, who functions as a guarantor of the anarchist credentials of the councils; on 'mnemonic chains' that refer to the Paris Commune; and on the emphasis on the anti-state and grassroots-democratic character of the councils. The dissertation therefore reconstructs in detail how the actual existing local councils came about and functioned while also examining the reasons for their failure. Methodically, the analysis is based on three pillars: On expert interviews, on the analysis of a website of the local council in Darayya and on studies by international NGOs. In dialogue with previous theoretical reflections

on councils and drawing on key principles of anarchism, the local councils are reconstructed along four dimensions: as social sites of agency and self-organisation; as institutions of anti-state democracy; in their capacity to anticipate a new order; and as manifestations of a cooperative order. The research shows that the councils initiated a de-professionalisation of politics in favour of an expansion of agency and learning processes; that they reorganised the separation of powers in different ways; that a major achievement was the preservation of order and the restoration of everyday life; and that they promoted to some extent a new cooperative ethic. The councils' failure to build up a 'structural solidarity' to ensure the provision of basic goods is identified as the major weakness which made them vulnerable to other actors' agendas (Islamists, international NGOs, opposition in exile) and substantially undermined their independence. These findings suggest to re-consider more classical materialist objections to the assumption that councils could consolidate themselves in the long term in a purely civil or political sphere while refraining from socialization of private property. Omar Aziz's Papers, that were written in 2011/12 from a pragmatic point of view during the turmoil of the revolution, are for the first time thoroughly analyzed, and the question is raised as to how they can be placed paradigmatically within the theory of the councils. The hitherto unrecognised theoretical potential of Aziz's texts is revealed by reconstructing his intellectual background. Ideas such as the different everyday logics 'authority's time versus revolutionary time', the 'desire for life' and councils as social spaces for learning and joyful experiences are identified as essential contributions to the further development of council theory.

Abstract (German)

Die Dissertation beschäftigt sich mit der Erinnerung an die Syrischen Revolution, die 2011 im Kontext des Arabischen Frühlings begann. Es geht um die Art und Weise, wie Akteure aus einem linken Spektrum digitale Medien genutzt haben, um eine anarchistische Dimension der Revolution sichtbar zu machen, die häufig hinter dem gängigen Narrativ eines ‚unüberschaubaren Bürgerkrieges' verschwindet. Im Zentrum dieser linken Aneignung der syrischen Revolution stehen die lokalen Räte, die sich seit 2012 hundertfach im ganzen Land verbreitet haben und die 2011/2012 vom syrischen Intellektuellen Omar Aziz aus anarchistischer Sicht als Formen lokaler Selbstorganisation gegen Staat und Parteien theoretisiert wurden. Ziel der Untersuchung ist es, die digitale Erinnerungsarbeit in Social Media (Facebook, Twitter) und Blogs so zu rekonstruieren, dass das Zusammenspiel von Akteuren, Praktiken (archivieren, zirkulieren, beanspruchen/‚claimen') und Technologie für die Entstehung von Erinnerung deutlich wird. Die Untersuchung stützt sich auf Forschung an der Schnittstelle von sozialen Bewegungen, cultural memory und digitale Medien. Sie leistet einen Beitrag zur weiteren Theoriebildung, differenziert bestehende Konzepte und erprobt neue methodische Ansätze. Die manuell erhobenen Daten (Posts, Tweets, Artikel von Blogs und anderen Plattformen) wurden je nach Plattform codiert und qualitativ ausgewertet, sodass unterschiedliche Aspekte der Erinnerungsarbeit erkennbar werden: zeitliche Dynamiken, unterschiedliche Akteursrollen, Zusammenspiele zwischen Plattformen in der Zirkulation und Archivierung von Erinnerung etc. Eine Backlink-Analyse von Blogs sowie eine qualitative Inhaltsanalyse der relevantesten Artikel ergänzen die Analyse im Hinblick auf die Zirkulation bzw. Aneignung von Erinnerung. So konnten Akteursrollen differenziert werden abhängig von Fähigkeiten, Grad des Engagements und bereits existierenden (offline-)Netzwerken. Die Ergebnisse ermöglichen ein differenziertes Bild über die Vorstellung darüber, wie technologische ‚Ermöglichungsstrukturen' (affordances) eines Mediums in Abhängigkeit von Akteuren und Praktiken zum Tragen kommen bzw. bedingt werden. Herausgestellt wurde die Bedeutung von Blogs als temporäre Archive oder Ruhepunkte in der Anfangsphase der Erinnerungsarbeit, während Twitter und Facebook eher als zirkulatives Drehkreuz und Schrittmacher eines Erinnerungsrhythmus fungierten.

Neben der Frage nach der Art und Weise der Erinnerung, stellt sich die Frage nach dem Gegenstand der Erinnerung selbst. Bisherige Untersuchungen zu den lokalen Räten haben deren Funktionsweise mangelhaft verstanden und völlig verkannt, dass die syrischen Räte Verbindungen zu einer (linken) Rätetradition aufweisen und damit potenziell auch eine Alternative zu parlamentarischer, repräsentativer, etatistischer Demokratie darstellten. Omar Aziz hat diese Verbindung explizit hergestellt, indem er die syrische Revolution in die Tradition der Pariser Commune von 1871 stellte, die in allen kommunistischen und anarchistischen Strömungen eine ikonische Bedeutung hat und als ein früher Versuch von Rätedemokratie gilt. Die Claiming-Analyse zeigte, dass sich auch die linke Rezeption der syrischen Revolution bislang schwertut, eine stringente Verbindung zur linken Rätetradition herauszuarbeiten. Hauptansatzpunkte waren bislang eher die ‚anarchistische' Persönlichkeit von Aziz, der als Gewährsmann für den anarchistischen Charakter der Räte fungiert, ‚mnemonische Ketten', die sich auf den Vergleich mit der Pariser Commune stützen,

sowie die Betonung des anti-staatlichen und basis-demokratischen Charakters der Räte. Die Dissertation vollzieht deshalb im Detail zunächst die Entstehung und die Funktionsweise der real-existierenden lokalen Räte nach. Sie fragt ebenso nach den Gründen des Scheiterns. Methodisch stützt sich die Analyse auf drei Säulen: Auf Experten-Interviews, auf die Analyse einer Website des Lokalen Rates in Darayya sowie auf Studien von internationalen NGOs. Im Dialog mit bisherigen theoretischen Betrachtungen über Räte und unter Rückgriff auf Hauptprinzipien des Anarchismus werden die lokalen Räte entlang von vier Dimensionen rekonstruiert: als soziale Orte von Handlungsmacht und Selbst-Organisation; als Institutionen einer anti-staatlichen Demokratie; in ihrer Fähigkeit eine neue Ordnung zu antizipieren; und als Ausdruck einer kooperativen und solidarischen Ordnung. Die Untersuchung hat gezeigt, dass Räte eine De-Professionalisierung von Politik einleiteten zu Gunsten einer Ausweitung von individueller wie kollektiver Handlungsmacht und Lernprozessen; dass sie die Gewaltenteilung auf unterschiedliche Weise reorganisierten; dass eine wesentliche Leistung in der Bewahrung von Ordnung und Wiederherstellung von Alltag lag; und dass sie ansatzweise eine neue kooperative Ethik beförderten. Als wesentlicher Schwachpunkt der Räte hat sich erwiesen, dass die Räte es nicht geschafft haben, eine ‚strukturelle Solidarität' aufzubauen, um die Versorgung mit grundlegenden Gütern sicherzustellen und dadurch unabhängiger und weniger verwundbar gegenüber anderen Akteuren (Islamisten, internationale NGOs, Exil-Opposition) zu werden. Es wurde argumentiert, dass diese Erkenntnis eher klassisch materialistische Einwände gegen die Annahme aktualisiert, Räte könnten sich langfristig in einer rein zivilen oder politischen Sphäre festigen und von einer grundlegenden Transformation von Eigentumsverhältnissen absehen. Omar Aziz' Text, der im Handgemenge der Revolution 2011/12 unter pragmatischen Gesichtspunkten verfasst wurden, wird erstmals eingehend analysiert und nach seinem Beitrag zur Räte-Theorie befragt. Durch die Rekonstruktion der ihn inspirierenden Philosophien wird das bislang verkannte theoretische Potenzial des Textes sichtbar gemacht. Ideen wie die unterschiedlichen Alltagslogiken von ‚Autorität versus Revolution', die ‚Sehnsucht nach dem Leben' und Räte als soziale Lernorte und Orte von Freude wurden als wesentliche Beiträge für die Weiterentwicklung von Rätetheorie identifiziert.

Affidavit

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.