Recollecting History: Songs, Flags and a Syrian Square

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Submitted in Partial fulfillment of
the Requirements of the Degree of

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Submitted to the Department of Architecture on May 22, 2003
In Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Architecture Studies

Abstract

Symbols have played a major role in the development of a Syrian national identity since the beginning of the 20th century. While the representations are official, national, and/or public (flag, song, and square), they are repetitively performed by successive generations of Syrian citizens, thus forming the historic collective framework of Syrian memory.

The symbols are remembered as public sites of independence and freedom while they currently signify an imposed loyalty to the authoritarian Syrian regime. By translating nostalgic memory as active resistance, the double play of meaning (both official and personal) creates an opportunity to subvert domination. This subversion is inherent in every official performance, in every pledge to the flag, in every performance of the anthem, and in every mandatory demonstration across the public squares.

This thesis weaves the visual and spatial representations of power and the subsequent subversions for empowerment to narrate an untold, recollected, Syrian history.
To the memory of my grandfather Mohammed Serjieh,
Your brave quest for truth and justice inspired my own search for freedom.

To Haleb,
The living memories embedded inside your thick walls will not stay silent forever. The cracks are beginning to appear.
Acknowledgements

I owe infinite gratitude to His Highness, the Aga Khan for his immeasurable generosity and kindness. His noble actions prove that change is possible, in any world, at any time. This work could not have been realized without his support.

A special thanks to Nasser Rabbat, who unselfishly shared his wisdom and his love of Syria with me. Thanks to my advisors, Heghnar Watenpaugh and Erika Naginski, whose criticism and encouragement kept me challenged, informed and confident. Thanks to Hashim Sarkis, his profound insights onto the world of architecture and politics opened a new space of research for me. I would also like to thank Julian Beinart, who began and ended these two years on a kind, beautiful note.

To my Syrian family, who mapped, sang and remembered. Your brave actions are the foundation of this work.

To all my friends in 7-401, my MIT family, you made the neon-lit room a pleasurable place to spend the days and nights, thank you.

Mohammed Aly and Ziad; you are my hope and inspiration, never forget.

To my parents, whose passionate nationalism urged me to map the meanings of being Syrian. Your endless sacrifice and support gave me the chance to live in the best of both worlds.

All my love to Ala Dean, your patience, humor, and understanding kept me sane. It was a pleasure to dream about the future while I was immersed in the past. You are my happy ending.
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If the people one day decide to live
And no doubt, the night must clear
then no doubt, destiny must answer.
and no doubt, the chains must break.

Abu Al-Qasem Al-Shabi
In *Ambiguities of Domination*, Lisa Wedeen paints a frighteningly accurate portrait of modern Syria, an authoritarian state that has been governed by President Hafiz al-Asad and his image since 1970. Wedeen argues that Syrian citizens are required to act only “as if” they believed in the cult of Asad, as her exhaustive examples from Syrian popular media of newspapers, television, film and a collection of jokes prove. The notion of acting “as if” implies that the citizens realize and control the acting role they are obliged to play. The “official” image of the cult adopt and adapt past symbols that have slowly constructed, during the last century, an emerging Syrian national identity. The Syrian flag, Syrian anthem and Syrian public spaces already inscribed with loyal national sentiments and historical events, are re-inscribed to serve the cult’s agenda of control. Thus, as the symbols of national identity are meshed within the symbols of domination, one symbol becomes a double representation of both loyalties: genuine and enacted.

Symbols have played a major role in the development of a Syrian identity since the beginning of the 20th century. The types of symbols and representations—that helped solidify the emerging national identity—vary from oral (songs, chants, folk tales), graphic (flags, banners) and
physical (demonstrations in their architectural and urban context). The nationalist representations, though designated for public use, were often officially enforced in service of the ruling class (like the flags, anthems, national holidays, and mandatory demonstrations.

Because of the double nature of the use of these representations (official designation and public interpretation), other traces of Syrian history are uncovered. The traces separate the representations from the official narrative—imposed by the mass production and dissemination of government-controlled media—to narrate a multiplicity of meanings that are extracted and performed by the Syrian public.

In this thesis, I will attempt a mapping of these traces, sifting through political histories, memoirs and fictions, visual environments to track the development of the ideologies that form the present Syrian identity. Working between text and image, between memory and history, and plotting a map of moments and places within the Syrian historical landscape, reveals otherwise imperceptible pauses of significance within the national official timeline. These pauses are recovered by another everyday action in the lives of contemporary Syrians: the action of memory. By reading memory as a form of non-threatening resistance, it affords a means for allowable, yet almost uncontrollable thoughts. Thus memory becomes a powerful tool for expression, construction, and fabrication of monumental significance while it can be retracted, concealed, denied or forgotten as quickly as it comes to mind.

The individual fragmented memories of the nation’s history represent a multiplicity of Syrian nationalities that emerge within the borders of a sovereign Syria, while at the same time, the multiple fragments in their collective form also structure the Syrian frameworks of memory. As Maurice Halbwachs explains, there are certain “collective frameworks” of memory at work in every circle of society and at every scale (from family to nation).3 Each framework is structured around the significance of a specific group experience within a specific circle that triggers a remembrance of their collective past. Although the past for each member is a singularly individual experience, it is remembered as the entire groups’ history, memory, or heritage.4 Halbwachs’ theory is
especially relevant in terms of nationalist discourse because of the diverse nature of the members of society that gather under the shelter of a constructed nation-state identity. As Halbwachs explains: “Collective frameworks are precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society.”5 The representations of Syria as nation are the collective frameworks that organize the collective memories according to their present relevance to each past. In other words, the collective memory is always triggered by a present need to retrospectively gaze at the past, while the frameworks of representation slowly shift in practice and meaning. Halbwachs states: “Everything seems to indicate that the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present.”6 If every history is reconstructed as needed by current events then a reading of the fragments tells as much (if not more) about the present than the past.

The telescoping scale between collective “family” memory to the collective “national” memory allows for an inclusive space for the smaller frameworks within the larger one and but also the autonomy of the smaller frameworks of memory as belonging to a specific society. It is in this light that I would like to present my sites of analysis, as collectively national and collectively localized frameworks of a Syrian memory. Although neither the sites nor the memories are representative of all Syria’s citizens, they remain valid recollections of the past and critical commentary on the present. Within the authoritarian context of Asad’s Syria, every repressed, rehearsed and terrified voice matters even if it is a Muslim, Sunni, Aleppine, bourgeois, educated one.7

Navigating Memories

In the chapters that follow, I place an example of performed memory into its defined historic context and question the current implications of remembrance. Chapter one, Flag Mutations, looks at how the changing flags of Syria work as both multiple representations of political rulers and a singular timeless representation of Syria. The shifting flags fall under the category of “official” representations in that they are
enforced and imposed symbols, although the Syrian flag is embraced by the people as representative of the country and not the government.\textsuperscript{8} Chapter two, \textit{Demonstrated Maps}, is set within the historical and political context of 1958, a fateful year that complexes the wavering lines between Arab and Syrian nationalisms. The chapter takes as its case study Sa’ad Allah al-Jabri Square, which developed parallel to the Syrian political timeline that ultimately determined (and determines) its urban and architectural context, and its public use. Through a formal analysis of a set of collected memory maps drawn by members of my family, multiple interpretations are set against the historic urban development of the square and its architectural surroundings. The third chapter, \textit{April 17:Retreated Liberty}, deals with two instances of nationalist expression: the patriotic songs of Syria and a political lecture. Both instances are explored, translated and analyzed as sites of remembrance activated by the present. The conclusion, \textit{Choosing Destiny}, explores how collective memory constructs a nostalgic desire for the specific pasts of the nation, while the construction itself is as an active resistance to the oppressive present. The objects of nationalist representation serve as a method to examine a repressive present through chosen moments of recollection.

\textbf{Between Histories and Memories}

The remembrance and performance of the sites or objects of representation that I choose to analyze exemplify the constant return to certain dates and places that form the current collective framework of Syrian memory. The method of separating the entwined strands of representation from the larger image of national history in some ways resembles the premise of Pierre Nora’s \textit{Realms of Memory}.\textsuperscript{9} Nora’s vast collection of essays on the objects, events and histories that define France’s national repertoire of memory treads the thin line between the concepts of history and memory. In his introduction to the English version, “Between Memory and History”, Nora defines the realm of memory as a site of the past in which a “residual sense of continuity remains”, in other words, pasts revived by the present, for the present.\textsuperscript{10} But unlike Nora who studies the separated strands as an experiment that challenges the dominant

\textbf{Introduction}
history, to write an “inclusive” French history, the Syrian project is critically different because all views are completely repressed and marginalized.11 “Official” Syrian history is simultaneously dominating (in public) and rejected (in private) by the Syrian people.12 But since memory is not of authoritative significance, it works within a “safe” zone that can be emphasized as emotional reaction (not intended) or denied as amnesia (it never happened). The collective frameworks —of recollecting historic sites— function in this case not as national melancholia but rather subversion through melancholia to allow for memory.

The citizens of Syria live between the two worlds of an official historical narrative and a retained collective memory; between an imposed history that is revered by force and fragmented memories that are scattered as nostalgic dwellings. Or in Homi Bhabha’s terms, they are caught between the constructed worlds of historical national pedagogy (or propaganda) and temporal national performance.13 But as the objects of memory are national, official, and/or public (flag, song, and square) and are performed throughout time by succeeding generations, the representations become critical symbols that exist doubly within the two opposing spheres. Thus, the opportunity for subversion is inherent in every pledge to the flag, in every performance of the anthem, and in every mandatory demonstration across the public squares.
One

Flag Mutations

White, our hearts.
Green, our fields.
Red, our wounds.
Black, our eyes.

This poem was recited to me a few weeks ago when I asked a family friend to describe the Syrian flag. She told me that she was taught the poem to always remember what the flag looked like. The flag she describes could be one of three different flags of Syria used five times (two were repeated) since 1932, each a variation of white, green, red and black. The singular verse is capable of defining three flags because of the subtle differences in their appearance. Each of these flags represents a Syria, as each flag signifies a specific shift in the country’s government and each flag acts as an official record of Syria’s historical and geographical status at a particular moment in time. But its citizens recognize one Syrian nation through the changing flag, as they abstract the rectangular cloth to
its essential qualities of color: white, green, red and black. Therefore, the flags' multiple, graphic forms along with its' multiple historical and political representations are collapsed into one unified symbol of Syria, through an uninterrupted and unquestionable Syrian nationality.14

Flags of Syria

The Syrian flag, in fact, was officially changed nine times since the formation of the sovereign state after it gained independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1918. Through a historical narration of the formal mutations alone, it becomes possible to map the turbulent political timeline of modern Syria.

The Arab Revolt flag (1918-1920) enforced in Syria under the reign of Sherif Hussein's son King Faysal immediately after Ottoman independence was the first to have the four colors (white, green, red and black). 15 The Islamic symbolism of the four colors—white for the Damascene Umayyad period, green for the Caliph Ali, red for the Khawarij (a radical Islamic movement), and black for both the Prophet Mohammed and the pre-Islamic symbol of revenge—represents the Arabs' political use of religion as fundamental opposition to the increasingly secularized Turkey [Fig. 1].16

French Mandate period (1920-1946), witnessed a wide range of Syrian flags, both official and illegitimate. The French-enforced flags multiplied in number as each flag represented one fragment of the loosely bordered country. The French Mandate's flags divided the territory into five "states" of Syria: Sanjaq of Damascus (1920-1922), Sanjaq of Aleppo (1920-1924), Alawite State/Sanjaq of Latakia (1920-1936), French Mandate of Jabel al-Druz (1922-1936), French Mandate of Greater Lebanon (1920-
1943). Each flag had a French flag branded in the canton (except Greater Lebanon that was the French flag with the cedar tree in the center), thus exemplifying France’s enforcement of a representational occupation to emphasize the territorial one [Fig. 2-6]. The “unofficial” flag of 1932-1946 used during the Mandate by Syrian revolutionaries, adopted the colors of the flag of 1918 but in a new form that would later absorb the subsequent shifts. The flag symbolized autonomy (or the desire for autonomy) and was formed by three horizontal stripes of green, white and black with three red five-point stars that represented the three united “states” (Damascus, Aleppo, Deir al-Zor) [Fig. 7]. The same flag was used after liberty from France in 1946 until 1958; thus becoming the genuine flag of “autonomy” as it now represented the entire state of Syria with its relatively stabilized borders. But the symbols of the colored stripes have by this point gone through a radical shift from the previous Islamic references to the rising Pan-Arab desires: black for the dark oppressed past, white for a promising future and red for the blood needed to be sacrificed in order to move from black to white [Fig. 8].

The United Arab Republic (UAR) flag was the official symbol of the short-lived union of Syria and Egypt (1958-1961). This flag was also composed of three horizontal stripes, red, white and black with two green five-point stars that represented both states. The two stars that were tacked onto the blank tri-striped Egyptian flag should have been an indicator of the underlying intentions of President Abd al-Nasser: Syria as part of a greater Egypt [Fig. 9]. From 1961-1963, after Syria dismantled the union with Egypt, the Syrian flag was reverted to the previous one of autonomy/liberty. Here in this second reversal, the desire for a return to the previous time before the doomed union indicates the Separatists
 political effort to skip and rewind the present to a previous exactly three years before [Fig. 10].

In 1963, as a result of the Ba’ath Party coup d’etat, a new flag was enforced with the same colors: three horizontal bands of red, white and black and three green five-pointed stars that represented the three Ba’ath states of Syria, Libya and Iraq. This flag is almost identical to the autonomy flag of the three Syrian states (Damascus, Aleppo, and Deir al-Zor). The representation substitutes Syrian autonomy for Arab unity [Fig. 11]. From 1972-1980, Syria joined the Federation of Arab Republics (FAR) with Egypt and Libya, under the rule of President Hafiz al-Asad. The modified flag of the federation carried a new symbol in new color that replaced the stars, a yellow hawk that represents the tribe of Quraysh, the Arab tribe of the Prophet Mohammed. The hawk creates a superimposition of both Islamic and Arab identity. This religious reference is no doubt an attempt to contain the growing frustration of the Muslim majority in Egypt, Syria and Libya with the secular socialist regimes. The political impact of this move is extremely significant especially when compared to the next mutation of the Syrian flag by Alawite Asad. [Fig. 12] In 1980, in the midst of the historic bloodbath between the Ba’ath military and the opposing Muslim Brotherhood (an Islamic Fundamentalist group based in the northern cities of Aleppo and Hama), Asad changed the flag of Syria. He replaced the hawk with two green stars; in other words, he re-applied the UAR flag of 1958, as if to re-apply the national sentiments of 1958 or to replace the charisma of Abd al-Nasser with his own iron fist. Although the two green stars remain at the center, the identical flag of Arab unity has morphed into a symbol of Syrian autonomy. But the flag also transferred the leader of Arab unity, Abd al-Nasser to the figure of Asad. Because of
the historic repetition the flag acts as current symbol of Syria while its previous symbol continues to extend geographically to include a metaphoric Pan-Arab nation [Fig. 13].

The enforced mutations of the Syrian flag (as official representation of nation) are literal recordings of Syrian nationalities rather than one nationality representative of all Syrians at all times. The constant need to change the image of the flag through the enforced mutations indicates the fragmented nature of the emerging Syrian State. Therefore, a minor modification in the flag marks a shift in power while at the same time reduces the impact of its replacement (flag and ruling power) in the Syrian people’s conscious registration of the change. (Thus only one poem is needed to teach schoolchildren to remember the Syrian flag). The “official” mutation strategy is both recorded (present in history) but not visible (absent in memory), in other words, the mutation is just enough to mark a change but not quite enough to remember what has changed.

**Shifted Graphics = Shifts in Power**

The strategy of minor modifications may not only be to an attempt to forge a smooth transition between the ruling governments, but also to signify that these governments also represent a Syrian image. The power of representation in the flag is recognized and treated as an essential symbol of Syrian nationality, ultimately embodied in the highest power of the ruling Syrian government. Thus their new flag must remain the image of Syria, as it flutters on the masts of every schoolyard, as it asks the people’s honor and respect, and as we pledge our allegiance to the shifting, rectangular colored cloth; we indirectly support its modifiers.
The representation of the flag is also essential in building national identity within the minds of the people. As the flag is shifted its symbol remains static, it is important here to emphasize the imposed changes from above did not change the image of the flag within the minds of the people. The Arab/Syrian flag (regardless of its form) symbolized Syrian freedom from foreign colonization and thus was granted ultimate loyalty by the people. For example, in the poem *Oh My Flag (Ya ‘Alami)* by Lebanese poet Bashara al-Khouri, a popular nationalist song performed to this day, Al-Khouri’s flag achieves glory and victory from the blood and tears of sacrifice of the nation’s children. The flag transcends its symbolic nature and becomes a figure burdened with the people’s responsibilities to build their nation.

Oh my flag, Oh my flag  
Oh flag of the Arabs, rise and wave  
on the blue horizon  
Oh flag  
Oh fabric of the mothers  
For their free sons  
during the dark black nights.  
for their free sons  
How can we not save you,  
A tear from their lids,  
a throb from their chests,  
a kiss from their mouths.  
Oh flag  
 every thread within you.
Walk us to glory and build from us the country
For we have sworn by the law for we have sworn by the law,
an honorable oath that we replenish you.
From the blood of the martyrs, from the wounds of pride
you live for the glory of heaven.
Oh flag

Authority shifts in the poem between flag and people, the flag will
build the nation while the people sacrifice, after which the people swear to
fight for and save the flag. But as the first verses indicate, the flag is an
Arab flag, an imagined immaterial and object. The quest for a unified
Arab flag (that equals a unified Arab geographic map) is reinforced within
the lines of the poem by a Lebanese poet but performed today by Syrian
people. The insistent and continuous yearning for an imagined utopian
flag while simultaneously addressing the sovereign state’s flag in the
words of a non-Syrian apparently does not conflict with a Syrian
nationalism.

Between Identity and Nationality

The flag, as graphic, two-dimensional object, is one form of
representation that serves to bind a group of people together under a
communal set of ideals, histories and values that defines a collective
nationalist identity. In this case, the unified Syrian identity like the utopian
Arab flag, is a constructed historically in the name of multiple loyalties
that overlap while are simultaneously in opposition (mainly Islam vs. Arabism). But in the same way that an individual’s identity is not fixed
through time but is constantly shifting with the individual’s various
affiliations, an entire nation cannot be historically and socially defined by a
singular fixed symbol. This is especially true in a place like Syria with its
diverse population made up of the Sunni majority in addition to many
minorities (Shiites, Christians, Armenians, Kurds and others) that
amplified and triggered major fluctuations in its politics, ideologies and
geographic borders. The diversity created a social and political situation
where Islam could no longer be the unifying factor between the people. The seduction of a unified Syrian nationalism that folds into the larger Pan-Arab nationalism founded a discourse of nationalism that struggled to absorb the significant Islamic sentiments of the Muslim majority while adjusting to a desired secular “inclusive” Arab Syria, hence the county’s official title of Syrian Arab Republic.

The discourse of nationalism can be examined through application of the imposed symbols of the emerging state of Syria by the various ruling groups and the practice of these symbols by the emerging Syrian people. Syria’s history is divided between the two participating parties (the ruling government and the ruled public) and the two active practices (official imposition and adapted performance). The first party constructed the foundation of an “official” pedagogy of Syria, the widely spread propaganda-based history inscribed in mandatory textbooks, censored media and favored national holidays. The public however, in the repetitive performance of these symbols through time, formed a fragmented collection of Syrian histories preserved in texts about revolutions (mainly against the French), photographs of revolutionary heroes (mainly against the Ottomans and French), and oral memories of national events (mainly before 1963). As Homi Bhabha explains:

“the nation’s people must be thought in double-time; the people are the historical ‘objects’ of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin in the past; the people are also the ‘subjects’ of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity”

Bhabha’s point is a significant one in the context of Syria; it is precisely this “double-time” —through the generational shift— that is at work within the activated national memories and the repeated national performances to resist the “official” pedagogical propaganda that produces
the historical narrative. In other words, the people of Syria perform to remember the past as they simultaneously perform in order to erase that past in the name of the present; and moreover what they perform are the same official structures that are inherently resisted. This cyclical domination throughout time, —expressed in the morphing flag, “safe dates”, and “neutral” songs— is resisted through the memories that can function at the periphery of “official” propaganda. These memories are also selective according to the social framework in which they operate, but nonetheless, they open gaps in the seamless nature of the “official” history and thus they inadvertently undermine the legitimacy of one dominating narrative.
Two

1958: Demonstrated Maps

After Syria was officially independent from the French mandate in 1946, the young country struggled to stabilize its internal political and economical situation. With the end of foreign occupation (both Ottoman and French), the various groups that fought for independence now were expected to shift gears to establish a ruling power responsible for governing and for developing the Syrian state. Thus, the following decade proved to be an unstable period defined by alternating short-lived ruling parties and sequential military coups. The first elected president Shukri al-Quwatli was overthrown in March 1949 by the Za’im coup that represented the Socialist Co-operative party. Six months later, Husni al-Za’im was removed from his temporary throne by Quwatli’s friend Hashim al-Atassi of the Populist party, that was strongly supported
in Aleppo. Adib Shishakli was the next on the list to take over Syria in 1951 and transform it into a police state designed to keep him in power and the opposition at bay. When Shishakli’s rule ended in 1954, the turbulent political environment escalated to create a state of great uncertainty as Syria went through a series of short-lived governments (two of which lasted less than three days). The need for stability grew more urgent as the Syrian public witnessed their government change, at a whim, depending on which party was able to take over the national broadcast station that morning to declare yet another coup and enforce yet another set of rigged elections.

In 1954 Jamal Abd al-Nasser took over the presidency of Egypt, though a similar revolution. However, this charismatic leader affected the public with his speeches that focused on the Arab masses main concerns: Arab unity, freedom from the economical aftermath of colonialism, and the tragedy of Palestine after the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948. The people of Syria were mesmerized with the Egyptian leader, as were the Syrian political parties that opposed the shifting military coups. As the parties sympathetic to Nasser gained power in Syria, negotiations between the two countries began to seriously explore the possibility of a Syrian union with Egypt as the first building block towards Arab unity, political/military strength and economical freedom. The growing interest to unite with Egypt rekindled the Syrian people’s utopian dream of a united Arab front. The union was viewed as an optimistic seed that would eventually grow to incorporate the rest of the Arab countries together as one self-sufficient nation with interdependent cooperative economic parts.

Egypt’s strong president Jamal Abd al-Nasser encouraged this seductive view of an undefeatable Arab nation and emphasized the literal role destined to him as leader of the Egyptian/Syrian initiative. In one of his speeches entitled The Philosophy of Revolution Abd al-Nasser explains:

"History is also charged with great heroic roles which do not find actors to play them on the stage. I do not know why I always imagine that in this region in which we live there is a role wandering aimlessly about seeking an actor to play it. I do
not know why this role, tired of roaming about in this vast region which extends to every place around us, should at last settle, weary and worn out, on our frontiers beckoning us to move, to dress up for it, and to perform for it, since there is nobody else who can do so.”29

Though he quickly admits that the role he describes is not a leading one rather it is one “of tremendous power capable of lifting this region up and making it play its positive role in the construction of the future of humanity”, Abd al-Nasser definitely played the role of the demagogue of Arab unity. 30 Therefore, he ingeniously tapped a deep emotional chord with disenchanted Arab people dispersed across the dividing borders. Abd al-Nasser’s charismatic speeches especially affected the Syrian public who had been represented by successively weak governments since the retreat of France in 1946. So as Abd al-Nasser’s acting role was performed perfectly within the public squares of Syria, the people in turn willfully performed their own resistance to the ruling Syrian government by accepting another ruler in the name of revolution.

The United Arab Republic was officially formed in February of 1958, after the Syrian government seceded to Abd al-Nasser’s rejection to the Syrian’s request for a federation and insisted instead on a complete union of both countries. Alas, the stage of “Arab unity” could only accommodate one leader and Abd al-Nasser was the obvious choice for the lead role in the play that he had imagined himself to star in. But he was generous (or rather smart) enough to add a green star that represented Syria on the Egyptian flag. Ambivalent to the critical problems this union caused to the sovereignty of the Syrian State, the people (especially the youth) were overcome with joy and hope for a new prosperous era. The public’s strong Pan-Arab support and their affection for Abd al-Nasser were enacted on the streets and in the squares of Syrian cities and demonstrated through a frenzied display of marches, flags, songs, and chants [Fig. 14].
Fig. 14 Sketch of a Damascus Square during a UAR demonstration.
Banners in the foreground inscribed: “Leader Jamal Abd al-Nasser”
and “Unity Freedom”.

A young Nasser Rabbat vividly remembers one of these exciting events:

“One of my earliest memories dates back to the winter of 1960 when I was almost four years old. I remember being hoisted on my mother’s shoulders in the middle of the Qasr Al-Dhiyafa Square in Damascus and screaming with the crowd around us: “Nasser, Nasser.” I thought it was exhilarating that everyone was chanting my name and I strove to outshout them all. But I also knew that we were in reality shouting the name of Gamal Abdul-Nasser, the president of the United Arab Republic, not my name.”

Rabbat expresses a key element crucial to the people’s demonstrations, the constant repetition of Abd al-Nasser’s name. The name
signified the union as one figure was equated with the entire Arab cause. The *image and utterance* of Abd al-Nasser giving his speeches, standing above the crowd, and radiating charisma, literally embodied the masses' dream of unity, freedom and hopes of finally entering the world-scene of modernity, leaving behind all the traces of backwardness (*raj’iya*) and colonialism (*isti’mar*).

Syrian squares were transformed during this brief period (1958-1961) into urban platforms where the public cheered and chanted for their utopian dream: Umma Arabiya Wahida (One Arab Nation). The nation-wide sentiment of support for the UAR was performed by the people in the conduction of a series of official and non-official demonstrations in public spaces in both Egypt and Syria. The most important ones were the ones that Abd al-Nasser himself was present, like the demonstration Nasser Rabbat describes:

"The man himself was to soon appear on the *balcony of the palace* facing the square surrounded by a bunch of his aides and guards: a handsome, tall, square-jawed and dark complexioned man with mischievously intelligent eyes, captivating smile, and mesmerizing charisma. He lunged on with a fiery speech about something I did not understand that aroused the masses even further, and everyone went ballistic with excitement: Nasser! Nasser! Nasser!" 32

Here Rabbat describes the space of interaction between leader and his subjects. The hierarchical difference in elevation from balcony and square is not strange but rather ironic as Abd al-Nasser’s socialist preaching about equality and justice is certainly not represented in this intentional space of the grand scene. The unbalanced spatial relationship of Abd al-Nasser in a guarded palace to the masses crowding together in chaos, renders the raised figure and echoed name as *equal* to all the people below. The social configurations of the demonstrations combined with the biased UAR flag, as entire Egyptian flag with one star for Syria are spatial and graphic indicators of Abd al-Nasser’s practice of power as total and
absolute. The doomed marriage of Syria and Egypt ended after three short years as Abd al-Nasser's role as father of Pan-Arab unity was revealed as Pan-Arab dictator. His unjust policies and tough constraints on Syrian politics and economics made it clear that the UAR was Syria ruled under an (almost) Egyptian flag.

The government of Syria soon stabilized two years after the collapse of the union, and on March 8th 1963, the final successful military coup d'état took over Damascus under rule of the Ba'ath party. It has been the ruling party of the authoritarian state ever since. But the short union of Syria and Egypt remained in the minds of the 1958-generation of Syria as their revolution in the name of national hopes and aspirations. Thus, although the UAR was constructed for the broad cause of Pan-Arabism, it is ironically remembered as a strong moment that defined Syrian national identity. Abd al-Nasser is still viewed—even in the disappointed eyes of his Syrian followers— as fighter for Arab unity, even though he was a great part of its failure.

His larger than life image—as Arab hero and revolutionary—is still inscribed within the collective and personal memories of the people. Urban squares in Syria were tainted with Abd al-Nasser's imagined image, the balconies he stood on were marked by his presence and the objects he touched later became desired relics that represented the independent "spirit" of the time.

In Aleppo, Sa'ad Allah al-Jabri Square, was the urban site where Abd al-Nasser performed his dramatic role and inspiring speeches to the motivated crowds from the balcony of al-Shabariq building. As I will demonstrate, the political significance and public participation—leading up to 1958 and throughout the union—left an enduring mark on people's memory of the square. The vibrant memory transcends their everyday experience of passing through the square. In the moment of empowerment, a unified dream coincided with the will of the Aleppine public. The square in turn was activated as a spatial platform where people gathered to play their double role of supporting extras and vital voices that filled the city. For how is a powerful speech measured but by the cheers of an adoring, thunderous crowd?
The Square

Sa’ad Allah al-Jabri Square is located at the heart of Aleppo, outside the Old City’s walls, between al-Aziziya district from the east and al-Jamiliya district from the west. The site is completely encircled by major streets on all four edges that direct traffic counterclockwise around the square. [Figs. 15-16] Many significant surrounding structures and urban interventions were planned during and after the French Mandate period. The two main streets, Shari’ Sa’ad Allah al-Jabri or popularly known as Shari’ al-Hadiqa (Garden Street) forms the eastern boundary of the square, while Shari’ al-Quwatli (along which ran a main tramway that connected the Old City to the Jamiliya quarters) stretches across the southern edge. Al-Barid (the main Post and Communications Office) is located to the southwestern of the square, and the Hadiqa al-‘Amma (The Public Garden), the largest park in Aleppo extends to north. French landscape and garden principles —such as the wide central axis, symmetrical paths, and large-scale pools and fountains— strongly influence the Public Garden’s design. The Quwaq River, which once ran through the site of the current square and the park area, was a vital component needed to execute the ambitious Public Garden in Aleppo’s hot, dry climate. [Fig. 17] The streets, tramway, central post office, large park and river were major elements that defined the square’s site as new crossroads of the city (previously the citadel at the center of the Old City) because of its strategic location on the border between the old city (central business district) to the east and the expanding modern city (mainly residential area) to the west.

The square, today, is a major hub of public transportation due to its proximity to Aleppo’s main bus station —Mahatat Ibrahim Hanano— to the south, the main train station —Mahatat Baghdad— to the north.

Although these elements seem to suggest a vibrant urban space, the reality of the square today is that it is a no mans land, a space to hurry across but never linger, always an intersection but never a chosen destination. The square, as urban site, has within it every element that is crucial to create a public space (transportation, communication, and recreation). But the site’s historical significance and events make it not just a public space but also a place of monumental meaning to the collective
Fig. 15 Detail of Tourist Map of Aleppo

Fig. 16 View of Sa’ad Allah al-Jabri Square towards Public Garden (north)
framework of Aleppine memory. The elements of the past are not erased from the square's place but exist as traces that are inscribed within the memories of its once enthusiastic inhabitants. As the current regime controls demonstrations, speech and collective action, the frameworks of collective memory are relocated to the memories of the individuals where they are safely stored.

Sa'ad Allah al-Jabri Square is an urban site, burdened with conflicting meanings as it caught both between a silent present and vibrant past and between collective action and individual recollection. Sa'ad Allah al-Jabri Square is a realm of memory, not in Pierre Nora's terms, but rather as a site where maps of memory overpower the everyday experience of the square. Here, forgetting plays as important a role as remembering (if not more important), but what is forgotten is the present (or presence) of the square rather than its past.
Mapping the Square: Between the Official and the Personal

Sa’ad Allah al-Jabri Square in this context is a former site of performance and slow shifts of development but also a present site of loss and rapid movement. Because Sa’ad Allah al-Jabri Square is a site caught between the past and present; I propose a reading of the urban history of the square using two distinct lenses: the first through the official historical maps of the city and the second through personal sketched maps (hereafter referred to as memory maps) that I collected from a group of members of my family. I asked 13 citizens of Aleppo, between the ages of 13 and 80, to draw a quick map of the square “from memory” (“min al-zakira”). This common Arabic figure of speech has a double meaning as “from memory” and “as memorized” so the mappers were not directed towards any specific time frame of remembrance. Without a clue to what was expected from the memory map, each citizen had no preconceptions of what should be drawn (as a representation of the city). Thus, drawing from memory eliminated the need to act “as if” they knew, in other words, it reduced the everyday Syrian habit of self-surveillance.
My question to draw “min al-zakira” inherently encouraged the citizen to go back to a past moment yet it did not indicate how far back and it did not whether one should go back at all. Nevertheless, two specific moments were consistently drawn and remembered: one representing the period around 1958 and the other rendering the present condition of the square. Although the memory maps rendered multiple pasts onto one page, the mappers still set a specific date for each of their maps. The dates of the memory maps were split into two groups: the first group of six drew the square in its current situation (2001-2002) while the second group of seven drew the map at various dates that were either exact (1920, 1950, 1958) or more loosely described. For example, one map was drawn in “1956,57,59”, while another was illustrated “before 1958”, and one was mapped in “1970 to the present”. One person was not able to date her drawing and another decided to draw two maps (2002 and 1958).40

The two groupings of memory maps (present and past) expose two types of mapping, the first a precise geographic rendering of borders, edges and blocks and the second, a chorographic marking of narrative layers and
events. While the first type—drawn in the present—begins to resemble the historical maps of Aleppo, the second “past” memory maps, in Michel de Certeau’s terms, are more of a “tour” rather than a map. 41 Reading these “tour” maps becomes more complex than de Certeau’s examples in “Spatial Stories” because the collective memory of a public space in a specific past is superimposed by the mapper onto the same page (the same space) as personal experiential memories. Thus, the memory maps that are set in the past are “tours” of an urban space using the tools of official “geographic” (or proper) mapping; they are a hybrid example of mapped tours. (In this act of drawing the personal through the official, an act of subversion, however faint, is beginning to appear, as I will explain through the description of the maps.) The significant difference of how the two types of maps were drawn, and the comparative similarity or dissimilarity of the memory maps to the “official” maps of Aleppo, uncovers a difference in the rendered spatial meaning of the square through three generational shifts. Spatial meaning is inscribed into the memory maps of the past chorographically, while the memory maps of the present are rendered geographically.
For instance, in an early 20th century map of Aleppo, the square’s area is merely a loosely bordered field. Its future site is marked by the intersection of one main street that connects the old city to the western expansion of parceled land and the flowing Quwaq River [Fig. 18]. In a 1930s map, the site’s borders are further developed by the expanding urban context around the square [Fig. 19]. The new structures are mainly the French mandate’s interventions of public buildings and services: a military club to the east and the electric and tramway building to the north. The main street has become a major connecting artery from the west into the heart of the old city; it has been named Boulevard de France. In an “Undated” memory map of the square, however, the drawing is painfully etched, weak uneasy uncertain lines form only two boundaries of the square, while the square itself is absent; it cannot be drawn (therefore, cannot be remembered). A thick border of text fills each footprint of buildings with a highly personal description [Fig. 20].

In Andre Gutton’s official map of 1950, the urban master plan of a modern expansion of Aleppo begins to appear as the square’s area is
confined as an empty block along the east/west city grid [Fig. 21]. In the subsequent 1954 map, the Public Garden’s landscape is carefully drawn with its central axis along large pools and fountains fed by the river [Fig. 22]. The busy tramway runs along the main street now re-claimed and re-named post-independence, as Shari’ al-Quwatli or Quwatli street after Shukri al-Quwatli the first president of sovereign Syria. When these two “official” maps are compared with a memory map dated “1950”, once again, physical markings of sites are vague, but rather the text narrates the spatial stories of memory [Fig. 23]. The places that are marked — the post office, Cinema Dunia, the Public Garden, al-Azbakiya Malha and Shari’ al-Quwatli— from the perspective of a remembered annual event, the military parade (‘Ard Askary) on the occasion of the 17th of April Independence Day). Sa’ad Allah al-Jabri himself is crossed out to make room for the parade. There is no sign of square; the street is only a name without edges.

The collective memory maps become a narrated devise that vocalizes the privatized traces in layers similar to an archeological section of a historic site. Each layer exposes another piece of history and recounts a
missing part of the larger collective story as the memory maps are read in terms of intensity (repetitions) and the dates (specific event) against a set of historic maps of Aleppo.

Mapping 1958

As the maps of the 1958 period combine a collective intensity within a national event they become double references to both past and present. Thus the maps go through several operations of trans-interpretation, first by the mapper: from remembered experience to abstracted representation, then by reader: from interpreting the graphic marks to creating a textual narrative of the square, and finally by the placement of the map within both time frames: the past it represents and the present it defies. The following descriptions of the “1958” maps, seek to render the method of navigation and the operations of trans-interpretation more clearly.

Map #1- “Before 1958”: This map is of childhood memories [Fig. 24]. The lines are hesitant, incomplete and fragmented. Accuracy of scale is clearly not an objective of this citizen, as streets are stretched to become as wide as
the square itself and the page struggles to squeeze in the Tawhid Mosque (this is the only map to include this much of the city). Some of the words on this map indicate existing places, Al-Barid (the post office) and Funduq al-Siyahi. But in addition to the “general” sites he has also identified other buildings by specific functions, thus creating a sub-context of specific, individual landmarks: Binayat al-Wattar, Mabani al-Sheikh Taha, Cinema Dunia, the amusement park, the falafel stand and other illegible markings. The map portrays a defined square but also superimposes previous occupiers of the space. These blocks seem to be buildings, but from the names one realizes the temporary nature of the structures (falafel stand, street vendors, amusement park). The only street name that appears is Quwatli Street with only a small portion drawn; it is not used as an organizational element as in most of the other maps. Indeed, the one organizational element of the map, its backbone, is the Quwaq River with its uninterrupted path straight through the square to form the critical bend that allows for the Tawhid Mosque to fit onto the extreme margin of the page. The mosque reveals his tendency to always remind his children of the importance of faith. The map is located within two historic frames, the first as a young boy playing outside his grandmother’s building around 1950s and the second later when the Tawhid Mosque was built. But the prominent river connects the two frames seamlessly in his map although the series of historic maps reveal the quickly diminishing role of the river in Aleppo.

Map #2—“1958”: This is a heavy drawing with dark lines and reinforced marks of emphasis [Fig.25]. The composition is centered around the square, the main element on the page. Edges dominate the map, lines define and contain both spaces and titles, and the page is filled with boundaries to the extent that the park is literally described as “the edge of the park”. Three streets organize the map: Shari’ al-Nahr (River Street), Shari’ al-Quwatli (Quwatli Street) and Shari’ Iskandaron (Alexandretta Street). The river is not drawn, only indicated by the double underlined word “the river”. The square has two clear boundaries with the other two sides left open and undecided with the surface defined by a series of diagonal hatches. A pentagon-shaped footprint marks the post office with several lines reinforcing her certainty. Specific sites are titled and placed in
a rectangular box: Cinema al-Jumhuriya (the Nation’s Cinema), malha layli (nightclub), the Cotton Festivals’ platform, Shabariq Building and al-fawwal (street vendor). These sites differ in nature between precise specificity (Cinema al-Jumhuriya) to ambiguous functions (nightclub and fawwal) and an annual ritual where the platform mentioned is constructed every September for the Cotton Festival. The unboxed sites bleed into an ambiguously open area at the top of the map: Circus and Amusement Park. This large open field is the site of Tajamu’ al-Muthaharat (Gathering of Demonstrations), rendered by the series of parallel semi-circular lines that become a topographical mound, a public amphitheater creeping into the space. This is the most explicit reference to an action that includes the mapper in the map as she recalls the school marches she walked in to welcome Abd al-Nasser, who gave his speech from the arched balcony of al-Shabariq Building. This balcony is carefully drawn at the top center of her map, facing the crowds, the circus and the amusement park.

She maps events and rituals; her temporary places activate a multitude of singular moments within the realm of the square. All of these functions (cinema, nightclub, the Cotton Festival, al-fawwal, circus, amusement park) no longer exist in the present use of the site. As the area in the historical maps increases in resolution through time, its boundaries become hard and smooth [Fig. 26]. Between these two views it is clear that as the space developed as square, the coarse edges filled with light programs were filed away. The square today, while remaining a public space has lost its publicity as it was slowly un-programmed. Pedestrians are dispersed into small fragmented groups while they cross the square’s surface [Fig. 27].

Map #3: 1956/57/58: The map is small and contained within an undrawn border. It is a map of edges, precise streets and intersections with minimal text: the map of an architect. The river runs through the site and out of the page. Her map is void of the “events” that the former maps illustrated. But the post office, cinema and park appear as the usual characters while three names undermine the apparent of precision. Al-Azbakiya and al-Wattar mark buildings by their names. Mr. Jamal Abd al-Nasser is positioned just outside the square, his entire name fills the crowd’s area (his name occupies
the space of the people) and emphasized with an X. Her grandmother's building lacks a name but is also marked by an X. The precision of her drawing is betrayed by the two Xs of memory. The map collapses a personal space (her grandmother's building) with a collective one (Abd al-Nasser) while the two Xs equate one with the other. But the name is needed to reinforce the collective significance of Abd al-Nasser's presence, while the building's X marks it significant but conceals its meaning [Fig. 28].

The three previous maps visually exemplify how each mapper remembers the square through the chorographic moments, not the geographic limits. Some landmarks are consistent throughout, like the post office, which is the only element in all the maps (except the "Undated" one), or organizational urban elements like the Quwatli Street, the tramway and river. But, most of the other places are events, or personal experience that don't expand in meaning beyond the mapper and their immediate familial collective framework.

Mapping the Present

The maps drawn in the past uncover overlapping layers of time, whereas the maps that represent the present are curiously void of personal substance. They are disengaged, "realistic" drawings that aspire to show
the present “reality” of the square. The square in all of these maps but one is empty. The stone statue is indicated in only one map. Has the muted presence of the square aggravated the people to disregard it? Does memory become a heavy burden so that the people—who no longer live in their own city—“act as if” the past never happened? Do they wish to erase the past that destined them to become silent citizens? Do they wish to avoid responsibility for the legacy of this present? The drawings in the “present” unfold a repression of memory versus the vivid yet hopeful escapism in the previous maps [Figs. 29-31].

As I have shown, the technique of representation of the present maps resembles that of “proper” or “real” maps (like the historical maps shown). These maps curiously resemble the official “map” of the square that is displayed on a billboard in the square. [Fig. 31] The municipality’s map drafts an overly simplified street grid of the city, so simple that no stranger to the city would be able navigate the surrounding area by using it. As the map includes the airport and Damascus, the scale of the map must be intended for drivers but the severe abstraction would confuse any visitor. So who is this “official” map within the square intended for? The map is a representation of the square by the city; this is what the square is means to the city, just one connecting block in a series of others. Empty in both representation and reality from its former programs, events and
rituals, the square is rendered by the municipality (the officials) as merely a stop and go transportation hub. It is for this reason that the previous memory maps of 1958 can be read as an active subversion of domination, a re-demonstration, through the temporary memorializing the critical date of freedom and demonstration.

The young generation, however, who grew up under the cult, desires to draw a “good” map that has no room (or danger) for misinterpretation. As they draw —without question or doubt— the square as it is, they express disinterest in the place but more importantly, they demonstrate obedience by copying the official map, the cult’s map. Therefore, no map of the present maps any of the countless, mandatory Ba’ath party demonstrations that this generation has participated in by force. These demonstrations cannot and should not be drawn (or remembered); they neither hold meaning nor importance to the young Aleppines. The difference in touring and mapping the two demonstration periods (Abd al-Nasser’s 1958 and the Ba’ath party’s present) is drastic. However, in the following section we will see that the “official” circumstances of both demonstrations are actually, historically very similar, they are just remembered as drastically different.
The Stage of Power

In *Divided Loyalties*, James L. Gelvin examines a critical moment in Syria’s history, the two years of King Faysal’s rule between 1918-1920. Gelvin discusses the specific power strategies that the King and his cabinet used to create the image of a strong valid ruler of Syria to Europe, the surrounding region and to the people of Syria. The carefully planned ceremonies, edited plays, censored newspapers, and organized demonstrations orchestrated a forced mobilization of the Syrian people. The demonstrations that welcomed the new monarch on several national celebrations were mainly composed of students, teachers and tradesmen. The people’s procession through the streets was strictly ordered and timed, while the chants were scripted and distributed. These acts were not new to the Syrians who had similar experiences during mandatory Ottoman celebrations in the previous decades. So, the strategies of controlled mobilization of the masses were common practice by 1958. But the practice also has cultural roots as weddings, funerals and other rituals are exercised by processional, vocal performances in spaces both open (streets and squares) and enclosed (mosques, hammams and courtyards). The double genealogy of the processional performance as cultural/religious ritual and
social/political obligation allows the practice to be experienced (or manipulated) as public participation/demonstration or authoritarian mobilization depending on the meaning of the performance to the performers. 48

The demonstrations of the UAR period are closely related to this mixed past of organized mass movements. In the 1950s, the Syrian youth was filled with hopes of finally achieving the goals of the generation before: freedom and unity of the Arab people. They were fed the rhetoric of revolution—while they witnessed coup after military coup in the capital Damascus—by Abd al-Nasser who preached to them from his balcony (the modern secular minbar). 49 The extreme hopes coupled with the extreme disappointment of that generation (the authors of the 1958 maps) resulted in a present collective memory that parallels the grave political, social, economical situation of the union with the demonstrations, the chants, the joyful processions and ultimately the freedom of expression. Although it is unlikely that those demonstrations were any less staged or orchestrated, but the union’s significance to the people caused a collective amnesia of the forceful “mobilization from above” strategies and instead they chose to recollect their own participation as willed action.

Two Demonstrated Maps
Though this may be an obvious observation, it is a critical one in order to understand the selective nature of remembering and forgetting and its role in the construction of Syrian nationalism. The memory maps render both the blatant amnesic erasure of some past and present elements of Sa’ad Allah al-Jabri Square, while excessively describing detailed accounts of others. One of the most prominent absences in the maps is that of the figure and memory of Sa’ad Allah al-Jabri himself. Sa’ad Allah al-Jabri was one of the revolutionaries against the occupations of the Ottomans and the French. He was from one of the most prominent families in Aleppo, well educated and traveled. As such, he was part of the same Sunni Muslim educated society of my mappers’ social collective framework. He played an essential political role in building the Syrian government after the end of the French mandate. But this patriotic leader is forgotten in every map, although his name is frequently uttered as the square is drawn.

Another prominent, literal figure that is repeatedly omitted from the maps is the large stone monument that occupies the northern central area of the square [Fig. 33]. The massive block is set upon a stepped plinth, a sloped gray slab and raised stone pedestal. The sculpture is a group of
massed bodies that collectively support the one upright figure that stretches to hold up the flag or banner that flutters behind him. The bodies represent the people of the Syria; many (people) needed for the glory of one (nation or leader?). The ultimate sacrifice of death is depicted, as one limp body is held by a fellow citizen, the dead body is part of the foundation of the nation. Behind the sculpture, a backdrop of empty flagpoles lines the park’s edge.

The statue is prominently, visually present by both vehicle and pedestrian, but it was not rendered in any memory map. Why is it ignored along with the square’s namesake? Collective amnesia rather than memory works here as resistance. The square’s name and modern sculpture are openly rejected as essential parts of the square. The events and programs are what make the square significant to Aleppo’s citizens. The demonstrators of 1958 ignore the modern changes (of sculpture and landscape), as their monument exists in that moment when they marched across the square to perform for their chosen leader.
The square, with its unnoticed statue, empty flagpoles, dry river, drier fountains, and canceled events is now a stage cluttered with unused props and countless and silent extras [Fig.34]. The recollected square tells another story, one of a platform with no props but full of leading performers and overlooking rulers. The ruler on his balcony looks down at the square, while the performers mirror his power and reflect it back up to him. What the people did not know was that they were severely shortchanged. All the endless chants of “Nasser, Nasser, Nasser” could not fulfill the dream he promised, but their repetition trained the people later to deafly chant other names, without feeling or emotion. The man with the “mischievously intelligent eyes, captivating smile, and mesmerizing charisma” stood on the balcony, no doubt radiant with the people’s energetic calls. He had nothing to reflect back to them from above but a mask of lies and a treacherous future.50
April 17th: Retreated Liberty

In the previous analysis of Sa’ad Allah al-Jabri Square and its memory, the emerging Syrian nationalism is expressed through performance. The urban site defines the spatial environment of this performance but the act itself requires the accompanying representational codes to effectively become *an image of will*. In this chapter I will analyze two instances of nationalist performance that reactivate another specific date in Syrian history: April 17, 1946 or Independence Day. The national holiday commemorates the day that the French completely retreated from Syrian soil on April 17, 1946 after 26 years of colonial power. The first part, takes as its subject the national songs of modern Syria, their translation from poem to song, and the recent voluntary resurrection of the songs in a series of concerts commemorating Independence Day. The second part is a
close reading of a lecture entitled *Thoughts about the Independence* by Judge Mohammed Serjeh (my late grandfather) that was presented in 1976. These two instances are not only joined by the date they remember but also by the choice to remember this specific past in each of their respective presents (2001 and 1979).

I. Songs of Syria

In late 2001 a group of mostly middle-aged Sunni Muslims from Aleppo began to practice national songs for a concert entitled “Some of the Songs that Helped to Achieve Independence”. This group was composed of professionals (doctors, engineers, lawyers, students) within a wide range of ages and backgrounds. They sang together to general audiences in free concerts in private venues in the major Syrian cities. They distributed a printed booklet of the songs so the audience would follow along, and remember. The concert series were conducted to celebrate Eid al-Jala’a (Independence Day).

The performed songs were originally poems written in the first quarter of the 20th century when the Arabs gained independence from the Ottoman Empire and fought European colonialism. The poems embodied (and embody) the desire of the Arab people to rise against occupation and became a fundamental part of the people’s resistance. As previously explained, the struggle for national identity and cries for Arab unity and sovereignty characterized this period. The political and economical relapses caused by the imposed borders of the Sykes-Picot treaty in 1916, the subsequent occupation of the divided Arab territories under European mandates, and increased Jewish immigration to Palestine, intensified the need for the ultimate Arab cause: unity (wahda) and freedom (hurriya). While mass demonstrations and revolts erupted with banners and slogans, the people marched, chanted and sang for their united cause. The songs they sang expressed their solidarity against the opposing forces, as performed poetry moved them together as a nation. However as the Pan-Arab ideology developed, the political circumstances of the Arab territories generated a parallel movement: state nationalism. European colonialism divided the land into separate modern states, therefore, a
counteraction of resistance by the people was needed to defend the very state that was in the process of mutilation.

The shifting flags of Syria represent the fluctuation between the two interdependent (and sometimes conflicting) ideologies of being Arab vs. being Syrian; while the modern patriotic poems/songs form a map of mutations that navigates the shifts in national meanings. April 17th is the date that activates an annual repetition of retreat through the national songs. The recent initiative to perform the songs for Independence Day reveals another historic moment caught between its original event and its successive memory. Why is there a desire to commemorate this holiday as opposed to others? Retreat is practiced by the performers in three forms of collective frameworks: a specific reference to the physical withdrawal of the French from Syria, a temporal and repetitive return to the pasts of the April 17th of 1946 and yearly April 17ths that followed, and a metaphorical retreat to the days of the poems’ initial emergence as representatives of Syrian national identity and resistance to oppressors. The three temporal frameworks of memory are embedded within this urgent, present need to sing, in 2002, the songs of the multiple pasts and struggles.

During one of the concerts performed in Aleppo for April 17, 2002, in the middle of a particular song We are the Youth, the audience unexpectedly joined the singing group; the two sides became one during a part of the song. After they finished and after the cheers subdued, the chorus looked at each other and then began to sing the song once more. This was not an encore but a repetition to give the audience what they wanted to hear; giving themselves what they wanted to hear. The usually silent audience was suddenly alive with song (in repetition). Why did this burst of emotion happen? What affected the audience, the revived song or the revival of a faded solidarity? But during the song and its repetition, not everyone was clapping, singing, dancing or crying. The first row of spectators — usually reserved for “official VIPs” invited to public events as both guests of honor (persons with some form of power, mas’ulin) and honorable informants (secret police, mukhabarat) — sat uncomfortably not knowing if they should (or could) join the crowd in singing the national patriotic song. Actually, they sat, listening and watching, uneasily not
knowing if the crowd was singing "as if" or rather dangerously just singing. So they decided to play it safe and act "as if" they did not hear [Fig. 35-36].

In this act of singing, of interrupting, of taking control, there was a moment when liberty was achieved within the retreat and transference of authority from performers on the elevated stage above to the seated audience below. The words of the song or rather the memory of the song activated this temporary transference. Within the brief space, a poem, a song and a memory performed an act of empowerment.54

Songs of Independence

Through the translation of five Arab national songs that are currently recited in Syria included in the program of the Aleppine singing group, I take a closer look at the nature of these poems. The elements of nationalism —language, dialect, history, memory, tradition, culture, religion— all reside within this body of work that became a site for confrontation and struggle for freedom.55 The performance of the songs in the public concerts transcends the historical and authoritarian context, as the songs become double representations of Syrian identity and concealed resistance towards contemporary adversaries. Because the same songs are sung at schools, universities, and military celebrations, are performed in televised governmental festivals and are broadcast every morning and

Fig. 35 Video stills from the April 17th, 2002 concerts in Aleppo during the repetition of “We are the Youth”
night on Syrian radio, their repetition—in the voluntary concerts of April 17—becomes an extremely subversive tactic of willful expression.

The five poems I chose to translate revolve around different themes that were central to the Nationalist movement. They are in the same order of the singing group's list. While the National Anthem (Humat al-Diyar) is clearly defined as Syrian, The Arab Lands are My Homelands (Bilad al-Arab Awtani) stretches across the Arab Middle East to claim distant territories as collectively Arab or Syrian (as it depends on the nationality of the singer who utters such a statement). We are the Youth (Nahnu al-Shabab) makes a common circular claim; it collapses the Arab future with the rich Arab heritage, one as the cause of the other, a given destiny writes a bright future based solely on the past. Oh Darkness of the Prison (Ya Thalam al-Sijn) reverts to a dark pessimistic view, as it is the next to last song in the program. It asks for sacrifice to gain freedom from oppression. The song remembers past moments of treachery and weakness and therefore swears loyalty to the homeland. But it is a voice from behind prison walls; to sing this song from confinement one cannot but feel a tone of despair. Is the experience of imprisoned confinement transferred from writer to text to performer/listener/reader? But the finale, Oh My Flag (Ya Alami) erases such dark tones as it redelivers the authority to our flag. Our flag will save us, our flag will free us. But the flag is an Arab flag, an imagined immaterial object. The yearning for a non-existent flag, a vessel that will gather the fragmented countries give us back our rightful glory ends the
performance cleansing both chorus and audience from any responsibility or action.

As the poems work together to form a micro-slice of a larger historical social context of three different time periods —Ottoman struggle, French independence and state formation, and the stagnant present— a closer reading of each poem reveals another layer of the story. The readings attempt to uncover problems of words within and along both tongues through specific examples that range from the form of the poem, meaning and transference complexities explicit to English. The constant slippages between the two begin to reveal a territory of confused meanings, metaphors and localities that quite simply cannot be translated.58 Meaning blurs as translation becomes inadequate to bridge such subtle but visible gaps between ideas like nation, country state, homeland, land, fatherland, motherland and then the plural conditions of these words The multiple possibilities of meaning are linked to the poems’ historical and political significations that have been morphed continuously, like the flags, since their conception until now. Because of the mutability of the texts, translatability is not only possible but also essential.59 It is essential because the same songs are capable of tapping into the same emotions and desires over a period of time, there is a definite need for Songs that Will Help to Achieve Freedom or at least achieve a longer moment of empowerment.

The National Nashid/Anthem of the Syrian Arab Republic
Humat al-Diyar/ Shields of the Homeland60
Written by Khalil Mardam Bek
Adopted in 1936 (during French Mandate of Syria)

Shields of the homeland peaceful greeting upon you.
The noble spirits refuse to be degraded.
The Arab lair is a holy sanctuary.
And the throne of the suns is protected from harm.

Three

April 17th: Retreated Liberty
The fields of Sham
compete with the sky
So the ground blossomed
becomes a sky I swear,
and the soaring towers
with exalted brilliance.
with glowing suns
or like the sky.

Wishes flutter
for the flag will gather
but within it tears from
and blood from every
and the heart trembles
the fragmented lands,
every darkened eye,
stretched martyr.

Free spirits
and the soul of sacrifices
Because from us came al-Walid
so why should we not rule
and a glorious past
are a vigilant guard.
and from us came al-Rashid
and why should we not sing?

The Syrian National Anthem is sung everyday by countless students standing solemnly in order across the large schoolyards. The anthem starts and ends the national television channel and the national radio’s daily broadcast every morning and evening. The repetitive nature of its official use renders it as a static series of meaningless sounds, but when the anthem is read as text, a fluid chain of evolving meanings and changing interpretations is uncovered.

For instance, in the third verse, ‘The Arab lair is a holy sanctuary’, the multiple layers of meaning are embedded in the original. The Holy Sanctuary can only be understood as one place, Mecca the first Islamic center. But when it is ‘a holy sanctuary’ that refers to the Arab lair, a split occurs between an exclusive Arab center and an Islamic one that embraces all races, nationalities and languages. So the verse could be understood as a claim to Islam’s protection as rightfully Arab or as a shift from the religion as the unifying factor to Arab Nationalism as the strong bond between all Arabs not all Muslims. The second interpretation is the probable intention as it is in the spirit of the emerging Arab nationalism: a relentless Arab battle against all intrusions. A third more contemporary reading, a Syrian reading, takes “lair” as its focus, the lion’s den, now
Asad’s Damascus, and geographically displaces the Arab center and is forever protected by its Lion (asad literally means lion). In the next to last verse “Because from us came al-Walid and from us came al-Rashid”, two historic figures from the Umayyad and Abbasid Islamic dynasties related to the Lands of Sham (Bilad al-Sham) or Greater Syria are inserted into the modern poem to reference Greater Syria as the place of the past glory of the Arabs.

Other repetitions between words allude to a unity within the verses of the poem stitching meaning in a way that goes beyond meter or rhyme like the words aswad (black) and nasud (we rule). A black eye holds meanings of Arab genetics, an eye darkened with fury or sadness and the concept of collective leadership links itself through the origin of the world (masdar, participle) sawad. Self-government relates directly to the tears and anger of those dark eyes that are exclusively Arab. The Arab are entitled to rule through two kinds of blood, that of race and that of sacrifice.

The final word nashid also creates a veiled double meaning. It can have two roots depending on which conjugation one chooses to read (or hear). The first is the root nashada (to sing), the second shayada (to erect/build). In the plural third voice we have the verb nasheed (we sing or we build), but it is also a noun nasheed (song) that translates into Anthem in this case. This play opens parallel trajectories as the act of singing becomes equal to that of building, singing about the nation builds the nation, both becoming signs of patriotism. But back to nasud (we rule), which is parallel to nasheed (we sing/build), the question further equates singing to ruling, building to ruling, so authority ultimately lies in the hands and voices of the rulers. In all three active “doing” is demanded, but the inherited history —of the celebrated historic warriors of Damascus—reverts action to remembrance.
The Countries of the Arabs are My Homelands
Written by Fakhri al-Barudi (Syria)

The countries of the Arabs are my homelands from al-Sham to Baghdad and from Najd to Yemen. For no border distances us and no religion divides us. The tongue of dhad unites us with Ghassan and Adnan.

We have a past civilization, we will revive her although she was annihilated. And even if in her face stands the cunning man and jinn. So rise, my nation’s sons to the heavens with the flag. And sing, tribes of my mother the countries of the Arabs are my homelands.

The most striking and difficult aspect of the poem to translate is the plurality of meanings of countries (bilad) and homelands (awtan). The declaration that all Arab countries are considered my homelands acknowledges the existence of different countries but also claims the territories as home to all the others. So through a plurality of both counties and homelands, a kind of multiple yet inclusive unity is achieved. There is no center but infinite points at each of them there is a country and it can be home. Geography and religion cannot separate the Arabs because the unique Arabic language will always gather the diverse into a heterogeneous whole. The uniqueness of the Arabic language is emphasized in the line ‘the tongue of dhad unites us’. Dhad being the one letter or sound that exists exclusively in Arabic. But once dhad is uttered in another language it becomes more universal. For if all Arabs speak in the tongue of dhad, are all those who speak in the tongue of dhad Arabs? And what about those who don’t speak Arabic but are Arabs? If the tongue of dhad is read as the language of the Qur’an, the language that God chose to write the universal religion, Islam. The slippages that claim to privilege an Arab identity begin to blur the distinctions between lands and homelands, religions and borders that are all united under one language that is clearly the language of Islam, reverting Arabic to Islamic once more and negating what came before.
In the second part of the poem another linguistic problem arises, that of gender. I decided to translate “civilization” as feminine like the Arabic because it is so present in the original. The past civilization is female; she was annihilated but will be revived by the Arab defenders (probably men). Her face is confronted by the sly cunning nature of both mankind and the jinn. But in the last two lines gender has a more significant presence that has to do with the genealogy of Arab lineage. The first reads “So rise, my tribe’s sons to the heavens with the flag”, the male descendants of the Arab Tribe (one “imagined” united tribe across all the countries) will rise to defend the honor of the flag that has reached the heavens in its glory. But the next line “and sing, sons of my mother the countries of the Arabs are my homelands”, the matriarchal lineage bears the children who sing, who are destined to forever repeat the song that closes and begins with the same line. Both song and flag work together as symbols of honor and substitutes for action.

*We are the Youth*

Bashara al-Khouri (Lebanon)

We are the youth, we have tomorrow and its eternal glory.
We are the youth.

Our emblem through time is long live the homeland, long live the homeland.
We sold to it on the day of trial, our souls without a price.
Oh my country, your enemy faults you who shields us.
You taught us how to be proud and how to vanquish pain.
We are the youth.

The rocky plain and the streams and the field and the threads of wheat
and what the forefathers built are all our fortresses.
With faith in our hearts and light in our eyes,
the right in our right and the laurels on our foreheads,
We are the youth.

Three

April 17th: Retreated Liberty
We have al-Iraq and al-Sham and Egypt and the Holy Sanctuary.
We walk towards the violent death Forward. Forward.
We build and depend not; we fatigue without discouragement.
We have a hand and the labor. We have a tomorrow and hope.
We are the youth.

In this poem the responsibilities of the new Arab generation of the future are glorified and celebrated. The idea of the future shifts from the beginning of the poem to the end as it starts with ‘We own the tomorrow’ (literally) to close with ‘We have a tomorrow’. This is a pessimistic shift as the first is paired with eternal glory and the second with only hope. The performed song achieves a slow let down through the poem that might explain the enthusiasm in singing it and more importantly repeating it once more. It is as if the singing group and their audience wanted to recapture that euphoric high at the beginning but it only fades into a more solemn, darker end.\textsuperscript{63}

The previous poems/songs revolve around many of the previous and current issues that plague the Arab peoples. The desperate calls for freedom and unity have moved from being loudly anti-colonial to silently anti-governmental. But a constant theme in the poems is a repetitive return to specific pasts while handing down responsibility to the “youth”. As we have seen in both the memory mappers of 1958 and April 17\textsuperscript{th} performers of 2002, these citizens are no longer youths. They nonetheless sing, draw and describe nostalgically while they witness the current youths of Syria, disconnected from the past and disenchanted with the future. The “double-time” theory of Bhabha does not apply to the young generation of Syrians. For they are caught, repetitively performing propaganda without the double play of subversion, as they do not link the songs, flags or squares to any past but to that which they know to be true. The symbols of the Syrian nation have become —under the cult— inherently dominating symbols that cannot be performed in any other way but by force.
II. Khawater ‘an al-Jala’a - Thoughts about Independence

Mohammed Serjieh, the head judge of the Aleppo Court of Appeals, my grandfather, presented this manuscript during a lecture he delivered on the 22 of April in 1974 on the occasion of “Eid al-Jala’a” (Independence Day). The short essay describes his small struggle in the national battle against France but also addresses issues that relate to the Syrian society, both in the 1940s and the 1970s. Through my translation of the text, I hope to uncover some of the issues that drove him to give this public lecture during his terminal battle with cancer and so close to his early death in 1975 [Fig.37].

Let us begin with the title, the automatic, obvious English translation would be simply, “On Independence”, but this does not give justice to the subtle Arabic nuance. Khawater literally means thoughts, ideas or notions, but in its singular form khater, holds a deeper meaning when used in specific phrases. Li-ajili khateri (for my sake), akhaza bi khateruhu (he got upset), and in many similar instances khater alludes to an inner essence (like the soul or metaphoric heart) khater is closest to conscience. Its root khatar, complexes the meaning further as it means danger, peril, consequence, gravity. The implications of this word next to liberty, exposes the weight of the judge’s carefully constructed title. The play of words has multiple readings: “casual talk about my thoughts on
Independence”, or “our (plural) consciences on the day of a past retreat of unwanted rulers”, or the most concealed reading as “the dangers of retreat/independence”. But the context of the lecture gives a general meaning to the title as: “My memories of our struggle for liberty”. The use of khawater instead of zikrayat (memories) allows for a flexible timeframe; thus the judge expands the struggle beyond April 17, 1946 to an open-ended date: like the present moment of the lecture, 28 years after independence from France.

The lecture narrates the story of Mohammed Serjieh’s efforts to form a stronger united opposition against the French, operating primarily in the northern region of Syria (Aleppo, Hama, Idlib, Jisr al-Shughur). He remembers in celebration, many of the men who were an indispensable part of this opposition and subsequent victory. It is a story of internal betrayal from the Syrian side, of strong nationalism versus weak submission. And as I read it today, as it was read to the 1974 audience, it is a clear and deliberate juxtaposition and parallelism between the present and the past.

Mohammed Serjieh’s friend and colleague, the prominent lawyer Ali Zakkur, presented him in this lecture. Zakkur’s flattering introduction reminded the audience of the judge’s past achievements.

“The great judge Mr. Mohammed Serjieh, head of the court of Appeals in Aleppo, needs no introduction, as he is a famous figure of justice in this country, a leader of the leaders of the law, messenger of the right and the just since 1943, and a fighter against occupation, exploitation, and despotism since his infancy. This absolutely comes to no surprise, as he nurtured pure nationalism from the great leader, the late Ibrahim Hanano, as his grandfather’s home at the time, was a secret shelter for the revolutions against the French colonizers. He was leader of many student uprisings that led to his dismissal from al-Tajhis (preparatory school) and al-Layik (French school) but this did not deter his will to continue the struggle and participate
in the popular and nationalist movements as an invisible soldier sometimes and as a leader other times.”

The introduction continues for three pages, chronologically tracing accomplishments of the judge: from battling against the French, and saving Palestinian revolutionary Abd al-Qader al-Husayni from the death penalty, to rescuing a group of Syrian revolutionaries from execution by the Infisaliyin (the Separatists) in 1962. Zakkur goes on to describe the judge’s brave position in Hama and Aleppo against the executions and life sentences of innocent citizens as he asked officials to use reason and compassion instead of violence and cruelty. After these open criticisms of the government within the sphere of justice, the judge then begins to write, expresses his opinions about the Syrian and Muslim society. He composes an experimental novel in 1971, 

‘Hilm fi ‘Arafat aw al-Ghufran al-Jadid, (A Dream in ‘Arafat or The New Forgiveness). The judge’s writings are Sufi inspired illuminations on Love, the love of God and all people. As Zakkur describes, “they (the writings) lift reader and listener to elevated horizons of pure conscientiousness.” The writings are in the form of letters addresses to his mother and his only son (my father). The metamorphosis of my grandfather’s accomplishments are tracked by Zakkur: from physical combat, to legal battles against oppositions, and a retreat to spiritual writings about God and finally an open correspondence about past and future aspirations to his mother and son. The published text is divided into seven parts: “The Meeting with Mustafa Hadj Hussein”; “With the Chief of Police”; “The Eyes of the French are upon Us”; “Our Eyes are upon the French”; “The Collision with the General Deputy”; “The Battle”; and “After the Independence”.

The story begins with the young judge’s desire to meet Mustafa al-Hadj Hussein—the leader of the revolution in the mountains and a friend of Hanano— because of his capability to unite the disparate forces of the opposing front. Mohammed Serjieh tries to meet Hussein but his efforts are confronted with suspicion because of his position in the current French controlled legal system. After two of his friends swear that the judge is trustworthy, he is allowed to meet Mr. Mustafa al-Hadj Hussein. The judge
describes the encounter, “We went into his room and I felt the same feeling that I sense when I enter a sacred place. The room was quiet like a monastery with no whisper or movement to be heard.” He uses religious metaphors to describe his nationalist feelings. The judge’s present (Sufi) spiritual direction and past (judge) governmental duty merge as he remembers the ordinary man’s room and grants it a sacred aura. Hussein, still suspicious of the judge’s intentions, initiates the following interaction:

“He said to his son: ‘I’ve heard of him, and I know his father the Hadj Ali, and my friends from the revolution — Ibrahim Hanano, Najib Uwayed, al-Sheikh Yusif Sa’adon, Abd al-Qader Hadjar — told me about both of them.’ I said: ‘How do you spend your time, Abu Hassan?’ He said: ‘After I returned from exile I started to battle the emptiness of my predestined life experiencing the sunlight between the cherry trees in my orchard, and I spend my days dragging the past decades that I wish would come back.’ I replied happily: ‘So will you go back to revolt against France if it was necessary?’ I intended to give his thoughts a little nudge with this sentence, as I might unveil what lies behind the barrier to reveal what is in the core.”

At the beginning Hadj Hussein plays the role of an old tired man, portraying concerns about death and uselessness but this is only an act as he is the head of the revolution in the mountain. He openly expresses his mistrust of new people asking to fight in the revolution.

“He said in a conservative, condescending tone: ‘You, child, are at the beginning of youth, and I am at the end maturity, thus your fire burns while my fire is dying.’ I said: ‘Uncle, you are like the fire in the volcano, that rests but never subsides, that calms but never dies.’
He replied in a sad tone: ‘You, child, are hopeful because you are imagining and I am pessimistic because I can see and touch.’

‘Take note child, the revolution is not ignited by pretentious people who do not feel or value responsibility. Then they start the revolution before the people are ready emotionally and militarily.’

His tone of speech to me was like that of a psychiatrist who treats a person with a mental age that is younger than his physical age. So I felt humiliated.”

The old man, at the end of his life, tries to discourage the promising young man from participating in the revolution with a strategic dismissal. First, he repeatedly refers to the thirty-year-old judge as “child” or “walad”; this disrespectful manner of address could have been easily avoided if he called the judge “waladi” or “my child”, thereby converting condensation to patronized endearment. Second, he accuses the judge of not being grounded in reality, the space of vision and touch not the realm of fanciful imagination. Third, he claims that the young man is just not ready to assume responsibility.

“I felt humiliated but contained my embarrassment and said: ‘The Syrian people will not turn away from evil. They only step back to prepare for the jump forward.’

He said painfully: ‘The revolution in the mountain has lost its momentum and so it has frozen, and homes of the remaining swordsmen have been demolished, their wives widowed, their families fragmented and their money confiscated.’

I said: ‘The sun of freedom has announced its rise. And one shout from you Abu-Hasan will revive the revolution in the spirits like those revived in their graves.

And the discussion lengthened... and lengthened. Until reassurance replaced doubt.
He said to me, jokingly: ‘And why do you want to participate in the revolution? I’m afraid that you might be from the lovers of ‘Live, Live, Live’.’
I said: ‘The person who does not expect to be alive in one hour, isn’t from the lovers of ‘Live, Live, Live’.’
He says: ‘So I ask you to choose your friends on this path carefully. For there is nothing more dangerous to the revolution than the carriers of her torch. The revolution is a message, and nobody should carry this message but a messenger. Revolutionaries must be at the same level of the prophets in character, the revolutionary is a prophet, a prophet, a prophet, not a devil in a prophets clothes.’"69

The dialog between the rugged revolution leader and the young urban judge reveals another tension between faith and nationalism, as the religious metaphors of prophet blur with the revolutionary role of messenger. The old man physical gaze begins to emanate metaphysical qualities. Then his attention shifts to a social commentary on the unjust corrupt state of the urban areas. He blames the city men for betraying the revolution by hiding behind the insincere symbols of nationalism without courage or action.

He came closer to me and looked into my eyes and I felt that he pulled me towards him with a magnetic power that radiated from between his shoulders, and I felt that my will shattered in front of his personality that I cannot describe. And then he said in a Bedouin dialect: “You people of the cities, talk a lot and do little. You lose Iskandaroon and don’t feel sorry as long as the party you belong to stays in power, and as long as the people’s money ends up in your pockets.” I said: “You are discrediting the sons of cities, Abu Hasan.” He said: “Syrian Revolution has been joined by city boys; men who are mostly poets, people with chants and other
with banners; they were the most fervent for war but when the time came they fled from the battles.”

Here Mr. Duwaydari interrupts and says: “Hope is in the Bagawat, the Afandis, and heads of the tribes and the faces of the state and the sons of important families.”

I said: “And who are these people? They are the feudalists, the capitalists and owners of the factories.”

Mr. Wahid replied: “And what is wrong with them? They are representatives of the people.”

I said icily: “If the Jews represented the Arabs of Palestine, then the feudal lord represents the interest of the farmer and the tribal head represents the interest of the tribe and the boss represents the interest of the workers.”

These words hurt Mr. Wahid but calmed the heart of the leader, the hero.

Long moments went by and I felt that I had ruined everything but the leader this time saved the situation with his light humor. And after the spirits calmed, we went back to the main issue and he promised to give me two hundred men under my command.

We went back at sunrise and I felt that I returned with the courage of a thousand heroes.”

This long opening passage exemplifies the many layers that the judge is using to complete a collaged image not only of the French Syrian past of 1945 but actually many others. After an interaction about the judge’s intentions, both men describe the nationalist movement with religious metaphors. Socialist terminology enters the discussion after the religious parallelism. The superiority of the urban elite over the masses enrages the mountain leader, while the judge stands with him it is implied this is done to calm the Hadj, not from real conviction. These remarks made in 1974, —four years after the Alawite President Hafiz al-Asad, another man of the mountain, became leader and seven years since the
socialist Ba’ath party overtook the government — could not be without impact on the listening, mostly Sunni Muslim Aleppine city audience.

At the heart of the story, in the chapter “Collision with the Deputy”, the judge is told that there is a group of revolutionaries that are convicted with murder and will be executed before they can complete their mission to take over a French control point at Idleb and Jisr al-Shughur. So the judge goes to see them and decides to set them free on the condition that they immediately continue with the scheduled mission. Mohammed Serjieh promised the head judge that he would pay all costs of being their sponsor. The Deputy is infuriated by this decision and begins to fight with the young judge to put him in his place. At the climax of this heated debate the judge actually threatens the Deputy by showing his gun. At that point the Judge al-Sheikh Taher Kayali enters the room to stop the fight. The dialog continues as follows:

“The Sheikh intervenes: “Mohammed is a good man, my brother.”

The Deputy replies: “I have never once told you that he is not a good man, but he is crazy, crazy.”

Here I lost my patience and shouted at him: “If I’m crazy according to the professional standards that you understand, then you are a traitor according to the nationalist standards that I understand.”

After the Sheikh Taher realized how far we had gone, he invited Mr. Rashid Ghazi, a judge that the entire jurisdiction figures admired and respected. To please the Deputy’s ego, Mr. Rashid told me: “The opinions of the Deputy are 100% correct and you are 100% wrong. I have told you a thousand times, Mohammed, that politics and justice do not mix, and when politics enters justice, justice is ruined. I declare to you truthfully, that if I were the Minister of Justice I would award you with a Syrian Medal of Accomplishment for your nationalist courage and then dismissed you from the jurisdiction. There is nothing that forbids you from working
in politics but on the condition that you resign from the jurisdiction.”
He then continued to satisfy the Deputy until he was in a good mood. So he said, smiling: “The lawyer and the politician are both like a one-eyed man. The first doesn’t see anything that isn’t in the interest of his client even if it contradicts justice and the second doesn’t see anything that isn’t in the interest of his party even if that contradicts the interest of the nation. The best thing about being a judge is that you prefer to be blind in one eye instead of both.”

The long discussion ended with a compromise by the judge. He gave the Deputy a signed letter that the Deputy was forced by gunpoint by Mohammed Serjieh to let the men free. This letter would be kept secretly until the time came when the Deputy would be questioned by his French superiors on the matter he would have evidence. And if the French were defeated, the Deputy would share the nationalist’s glory.

In “The Battle”, the judge describes the victorious fight with the French soldiers, which was the cause of the first French group to leave Syria. After this chapter, the judge tells us that the Deputy has resurfaced and grouped all the other Deputies that served under the French to form the new Parliament. The Deputy tries to connect with the high leaders of the revolution like Rushdi Kaikhaya who replies when asked by the Deputy to join parties: “I would rather be nothing if my success depends on supporting the people who betrayed their countries. It would have been better for you to hang by nooses than to sit on the benches of the Parliament.” The deputy is so embarrassed that he tries to join an opposing weak party and asks them to dismiss Serjieh from his post in return for the power they gain from having him within their party.

In the final lines of the story/lecture the judge declares: “Days passed, and weeks and years, and my promotion was delayed for two years and the Deputy’s protection was not lifted, and his position became
very powerful. And this is how, gentlemen, betrayal conquers nationalism, even since the beginning of the age of independence."\textsuperscript{73}

The lecture that was supposed to commemorate the victory of Syrians against France, instead becomes an address of the defeated Syrian people against contemporary traitors and corrupt leaders.

**Repetitive Retreat**

The concerts and lecture exist within the repetitive commemoration of Independence/Retreat. But Retreat (of France) slowly transforms to just retreat (of oppressors). April 17\textsuperscript{th} is one of the only secular celebrations that is not directly linked to the Ba’ath party (March 8, November 16, April 7). April 17\textsuperscript{th} allows a return to a "safe" opposition as it opposes the "right" enemy. But the annual opposition of a distant foreign colonization erodes to become a space of national expression without totally succumbing to the everyday rhetoric. As the years pass, the events of April 17, 1946 fade in importance in light of the current political, economical, and social states of Syria. While the national poems are constant returns to significant Arab pasts, the performance of the songs in each concert is a constant reference to the current moment. Desire for retreat is embedded within every trembling voice and freedom is demanded within every syllable of the tired, worn-out words.
Choosing Destiny

The past chapters analyzed the current insistence and obsession to return to specific Syrian pasts through the various modes of nationalist representation. I have explained why these two moments of retreat and unity were essential national events for the construction of collective public identity. In conclusion, I would like to explore the relationship between the two realms of memory and the implications of their present re-activation.

1958 or April 17th

The two dates mark distinct events but each is recognized through both specificity and vagueness. 1958, is remembered as the day of Abd al-Nasser’s speeches in Sa’ad Allah al-Jabri Square which he visited twice throughout the short life of the UAR. Two days are remembered as an entire year or even an era. Just as Abd al-Nasser becomes the figure of Arab unity, his momentary presence in front of the masses stretches to fill an
infinite duration for the people who experienced it. The current flag of Syria assists this stretching of Abd al-Nasser’s presence into a continuous temporal existence in the public’s imagination [Fig.13]. The officially re-adopted flag, enforced in 1980, followed the Syrian tradition since Ottoman independence of slightly modifying the symbol of Syria as needed by the current government. The re-used flag of 1958 leeches onto an endeared collective narrative of unity to produce the authoritative claim over the symbol and its subjects. In this reversion, the flag acts “as if” it never changed since 1958, while Asad successfully claims the empowering moment as his own. Thus he inherits Abd al-Nasser’s strong political title of father of Arab unity and conquers his 1958 popularity.

April 17th, on the other hand, functions as an annual, repetitive commemorative moment. It is activated by the calendrical date as opposed to the spatial and relic stimulation of the memory of 1958. April 17th or Independence Day is not represented by one figure but by a revolutionary
public body that resisted for 26 years to achieve liberation. Its revolutionaries (including Sa’ad Allah al-Jabri) were citizens (now great-grandfathers of today’s citizens) of Aleppo, but their names are not publicly recollected, they reside within the anonymous title as “heroes of Independence” [Fig.38-39].

The active choice to remember Abd al-Nasser versus Sa’ad Allah al-Jabri is practiced by the Aleppine citizens in their nationalist expressions that are revealed “in private”. Whereas the commemorative celebrations of Independence —versus an unmarked date of the United Arab Republic)—openly take place in the public realm. The memory maps exemplify the deep trace that Abd al-Nasser imprinted onto the Square of Sa’ad Allah al-Jabri. But the recollections where granted in a safe enclosed space, these sentiments are not heard on the streets but rather in living room discussions among trusted circles. There are no demonstrations, celebrations, or holidays, however, that mark the historic event of the
Syrian/Egyptian union. The UAR’s chants (Unity, Freedom, Socialism) and flag are the only active representations of the period and they have been re-appropriated. The concerts and lecture that celebrate Retreat are public, open and permitted. But the people who propagated both performances (the initial singing group and my grandfather) are part of the 1958 supporters of Abd al-Nasser. The generation of 1958 and their (use of) memories (of both union and retreat) are the final link between the past they experienced and the younger generation that has grown up under the cult of Asad. Without these chosen memories and their carefully recollected histories, all April 17ths to come would be reduced to an official holiday celebrated by the mandatory marches and weak chants of the bored students and union workers. The generation of 1958, who waved the “original” UAR flag, sang the national songs, screamed their leader’s name, and crowded under the balcony to catch a glimpse of their savior repetitively reenact the defining moment through the spatial construction of power represented by the elevated stage and its audience below.

Stages of Power

The space of Sa’ad Allah al-Jabri Square was experienced by the hopeful crowds in 1958 not like the mandatory demonstrations of the past and the future, but rather as a willed expression of their utopian desires. The figure of Abd al-Nasser is permanently placed on the various balconies that overlooked the large urban squares of Damascus and Aleppo. The spatial relationship between the small private balcony and massive square renders the architectural representation of power as a directed arrow from top to bottom. This relationship is subsequently repeated and appropriated by the aging demonstrators during the concerts, as balcony is translated to stage and square to audience seating. In the 2002 concert, when the audience exchanged roles with the elevated performers, the spatial representation of power was reversed. The performance as dialogue between singer and listener renders the exchange as a sphere of power that smoothly transfers authority across the elevational hierarchy. The sphere, though at first accidental, was welcomed by the 1958 crowd —that filled both sides of the hall— and was thereafter expected in every successful
performance. The former demonstrators of unity finally found — through the "permitted" commemoration of April 17th — a method of active resistance. The "nostalgia-coated" resistance mimicked the spatial configuration of 1958 while it allowed what they never had (or have), a true union of voices that sang together in 2002 for the same cause of the original poems: retreat of oppressors.

Rulers and subjects repetitively perform on the stage of power throughout the turbulent history of modern Syria. While the rulers have mobilized the national symbols as representations of their infinite power, the subjects have subverted the same symbols to privately perform their own desires for freedom. The ironic state of Sa’ad Allah al-Jabri Square today as muted and mutilated space does not cause the people to forget its role as Aleppo’s public place, even if the memory lives through the oral tales told in small groups, or sometimes through captured marks on a white page.

The elite balcony, the vantage terrace, the platform and the podium are stages of power that aspire to imprison, manipulate, and control. The previous examples of subversion reoccupy the stages of power through the cult’s strategies and within their allowed symbols. But the flags, songs and squares will remain symbols of Syria within the minds and memories of the Syrian people: an imagined and desired Syria full of vibrant spherical public spaces.

As I was writing this thesis, I remembered the famous verses mentioned at the beginning of this thesis. They were written by the Arab Tunisian nationalist poet Abu al-Qasem al-Shabi. This poem is memorized by all Syrian schoolchildren, as it is wisely dissipated in the cult-produced textbooks. It states that the people’s will to choose their destiny, to choose life over oppression is what ultimately will break the restricting chains around them. It remains to be seen if endless performed repetition will eventually activate the choice.
Notes

1 Hafiz al-Asad died in the summer of 2000. After a few days of his death the Syrian Constitution was modified to reduce the age requirement of a Syrian president to 34, the exact age at the time of his eldest son Bashar al-Asad. Bashar al-Asad was declared president that day and has been in power since.


4 As Halbwachs explains this point: “the framework of memory confines and binds our most intimate remembrances to each other. It is *not necessary* that the group be familiar with them. It suffices that *we cannot consider them except from the outside* — that is, by putting ourselves in the position of others— and in that order to retrieve these remembrances *we must read the same path the others would have followed had they been in our position.*” (*On Collective Memory*, p. 53, my italics).


7 Halbwachs organizes his chapters according to the telescoping scale of society from family to social and religious classes and then society. The continuation of the zooming-out view to the limits (or non-limits) of “nation” with all of its diversity tests the theory of collective memory. This point is the breaking one between the collective memory and Benedict Anderson’s “imagined community”, as narration fills in the emptied slippages within the two scales.

8 For more in depth reading on the subject of flag as official representation both within and outside the context of Syria look at: James L. Gelvin’s *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* and Raoul Gidardet’s “The Three Colors: Neither White nor Red”, in Volume Three of Pierre Nora’s *Realms of Memory.*


12 *Ambiguities of Domination* is a great source to understand this point. Wedeen explains how the Asad regime is not absolute but rather that the people’s belief in the cult is not important or expected but rather “acting as if” is the main key for survival.


14 It turns out the friend who remembered the flag through the poem, was mistaken in her reference. While the colors were correct, their symbols were somewhat skewed. The poem written by Safi al-Din al-Hilli states:

White are our deeds  
Black are our battles  
Green are our fields  
Red are our swords
This does not illegitimatize the first memory, rather reinforces the importance of what we store as memories and what we erase and forget. The colors without precise symbols were critical for her to "never" forget. But meaning can always be filled in.

Gelvin's *Divided Loyalties*, (mentioned above) is a seminal text on this specific period in Syria’s political history.


If the movement from black to white is essentially the passing of time from past to future, the present is destined to be infinitely bloody.

A recent example of this was performed on April 9, 2003 the day of Baghdad’s fall during Operation Iraqi “Freedom”. As the now-famous statue of Saddam Hussein in Firdows Circle was ready to be pulled down by American troops supported by a small Iraqi crowd, one American marine placed an American flag on Hussein’s head and then replaced it with the Iraqi flag. The Iraqi flag was not the flag of Iraq under Saddam but the previous one (missing the Islamic inscription: Allah Akbar/God is Great), or rather same flag of the three Ba’ath States mentioned above. The display of a return to a past before Saddam’s power was essential as the world witnessed the transfer of power. The performance of both flags, Iraqi and American, played a great role in the dramatized spectacle.


James L. Gelvin uses the term “nationalisms” to displace the widespread idea of a singular dominant Arab Nationalism that developed across the Arab territories and to emphasize the heterogeneous grain of the Arab societies during and after Ottoman reign. “Nationalisms” are relevant in this sense as my work looks at the “alternative constructions” of nationalist concepts, representations, and sentiments that allows the subjective points of view to emerge within the overall concept of Arab Nationalism.

24 Amin Maaluf’s, *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*, is an excellent commentary on the links between the overlapping “frameworks” of identity.


26 The idea of national pedagogy vs. national performance is the topic of Homi Bhabha’s seminal essay “Dissemination” in the aforementioned *The Location of Culture*.


28 Shishakli’s dictatorship-like regime did not please the people in Aleppo, especially the students who conducted a series of riots against the imposed “nationalize” texts and required religious classes for all Syrian schools. The Ministry of Education’s reaction was to ban all student and teacher participation in politics and demonstrations. During this time the Ba’ath party’s founder Michel Aflaq realized the students’ effectiveness in resisting the current government.


33 The subsequent dismantling of the UAR was seen as an act of betrayal by the Syrian people (wahdawiyyin) who grew to believe in the myth of Arab unity (like
Nasser Rabbat’s parents and my own). The Syrian separatists (infisaliyin) were fighting for an independent Syria (with their own agenda of course).

In my family’s home in Aleppo, the only pieces of furniture bought from Syria is a complete formal Louis XIV style living room set made of carved white wood with needlepoint embroidered canvas pillows depicting a Romeo and Juliet scene. Even though the pieces were completely out of place in our modern home, I remember that my mother was so happy and proud of this antique set. I asked her what was so great about it and she told me in an excited tone: “In 1958, Jamal Abd al-Nasser came to Aleppo to give a speech. I was in the demonstrations and demanded to unite with Egypt. He stayed at the Sayem al-Dahr home and sat on this very couch. And now we own it.” The relic still occupies our living room but we never really think about him when we sit on it.

There are two significant characteristics of architectural sites outside the boundaries of the Old City of Aleppo. The first “official” one, is that only the Old City was declared as World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1986, thus the sites outside the borders of the city’s walls are not protected under preservation laws, unless they are officially recognized as monuments. (Sa’ad Allah al-Jabri Square is not.) The second “popular” view is that the people of Aleppo, tend to give less value to the sites outside the walls, particularly modern parts of the city. Sa’ad Allah al-Jabri Square and most of Aleppo’s western expansion of the last 70 years (post-French Mandate) are not considered of “preservation” quality. This lack of attachment to the fabric as architectural heritage, is particularly interesting in the case of the square because it is not the physical qualities of the past that are desired but rather the symbolic traits of the UAR era.

During Aleppo’s hot summers, the Quwaq River comes alive once more, not as flowing body of water but as pungent stench rising the trickling stream. The unbearable odor fills the area from the square to the Tawhid Mosque. It becomes impossible to enjoy a vital chunk of the city like the beautiful Shari’i al-Hadiqa (Garden Avenue which was once Boulevard de France), one of the city’s few avenues with full-grown trees on both sides that envelop the street and pavement with a cool shaded space. The rare cool oasis, in midst of the intense heat, is transformed to a hurried passage for visitors to escape as quickly as possible, holding their breath, as not to inhale the sewer-like odor arising from the bed of
the absent river. Once the river was Aleppo’s lifeline, now its open carcass seasonally releases its sensory memory to revive the missing visual physical presence of the water.

37 The square’s footprint follows that of the east/west city grid blocks that belong to the Aziziya and Jamiliya districts respectively. The clearing of square’s block to form an empty public square points to an apparent separation at the point that defines a blurry boundary between the Christian and Jewish/Muslim areas. In fact the square’s block is the only place that the east/west fabric touches at the point of the religious difference.


39 During my visit to Aleppo in December 2001, as I passed through Sa’ad Allah al-Jabri Square, I noticed that the streets surrounding the square were being widened a couple of meters at the expense of the square’s area. While this is not a remarkable incident in itself, it occurred to me that no one questioned, objected or even cared about the changes being made to the square that was so central to everyday life in the city. As I began to ask people about the trimming of the square, I realized that there was a disparity among individuals concerning particularities of the square. To clarify these differences, I gave each person a plain white A4 piece of paper and asked them to draw the square. When they began to draw the square it was apparent that they were not drawing it in the present but rather at significant moments in a specified past. As a result I began to collect the “memory maps” as a method of recording these moments grounded within the square and the experience of the mappers.

40 The four individuals who remembered the square around 1958 were born between 1940-1949 and are current residents of Aleppo. A quick analysis of the 2002 group breaks down the members into three people over 45 who were born and raised in the city but have not lived there permanently for at least 20 years while the other three are under 24 years old. This is significant because it shows that both the people living outside Syria (outside the cult) and the younger citizens who grew up within the cult associate the square with the present.

Notes
4 For a theoretical understanding on the differences between chorography and geography (or the “tour” vs. “the map”) see Michel de Certeau's “Spatial Stories” in The Practice of Everyday Life. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

4 The complete historic maps of Aleppo are located in Appendix II.

4 The map is a textual diagram of family history for family memory. Two sites are clearly marked: the Public Garden and the completely misplaced post office. The series of descriptions: “Hotel al-Siyahi: previously houses with one story”, “Al-Amiry Building: was occupied by the doctor Omar Zuhdi the ophthalmologist and he is the father of Nana Maliha”, “Tabkh Nafkh Building”, are personalized layers of information that register a specific past against the present. The streets are signified by not by name but direction: “to Maqha al-Qutr” (State Café), “to the electric company and then to Shari' Faisal where my father's clinic is”. “My father’s clinic” is not the author of the map’s father but my father. In other words, my grandmother maps her memory of the place but writes in my voice. This is the most traumatic drawing out of all the memory maps, as the mapper, frustrated by the request to draw the square, not only “forgets” to draw the main subject, but “remembers” her past in a voice that never lived through that it. Here memory is willingly, intentionally and forcefully given to the next generation.

4 The Quwaq River has been virtually dry for decades and in the 1970s was almost completely covered. Ironically a long piece of the river, that runs through a popular street lined with cafes and restaurants (initially established there because of the river view) is covered with a mostly stone surface interspersed with planters and large intricate waterworks.

4 This festival has recently been moved from its place in the square to a new area outside the city.


4 For a detailed account of these events see Gelvin’s Divided Loyalties, chapter five entitled “Mobilization from Above”.

4 Gelvin explains two types of demonstrations during Faysal’s short term. The first, the government-sanctioned demonstrations that were mandatory yet not effective, as a public staging of expression that would impress foreign delegations and would instill belief and loyalty within the hearts of the masses. The second,
the demonstrations of the popular committees, practiced similar techniques of the previous processions but were successful in engaging the crowds as they were transformed from standing as an impressive but puppet-like backdrops of support to central participants. Again for a detailed account read the final chapter in Divided Loyalties entitled “Demonstrating Communities”.

* A minbar is an architectural elevated platform that resembles a pulpit in mosques. The likening of the balcony as minbar, is significant here because of period of 1958 precisely defines the split between secular Arab nationalism discourse and that of Arab Islamism. The balcony onto the street, as an architectural typology and is a modern element common in the French-style apartment buildings (like the exact one that Abd al-Nasser stood on) that became so popular in Syria during that period. Although Abd al-Nasser preached secularism and Arab equality, he was basically seen, heard and received (by the moderate, educated Sunnis) as the Sunni Muslim leader that would guide the way to a moderate modernism. This distinction gained the Egyptian president the majority’s popularity but alienated both the Syrian Christian and the Fundamental Muslims.


51 The term jala’a literally means retreat, but in light of this important holiday, it now signifies a broader definition as liberty and independence.


53 The idea of three simultaneous, temporal frameworks of memory meshes together Halbwachs’ concentric frameworks with Bhabha’s “double-time” of nationalist subjects. Syrian citizens who expertly act “as if” are able —through these multiple “historic” references of the enforced representations— to balance the pedagogical, official display (singing out of duty for officers, teachers, suspicious informants, etc.) with the always contemporary performance (singing out love for the homeland).

54 This year the chorus began rehearsing for more concerts to be held in celebration of the Day of Retreat (April 17, 2003). They have decided not to perform in
Damascus again, because last year they were not received well by the audience. In the words of one singer “they just sat there and listened”. The tears, claps, dance of the listeners were needed by the chorus in order to continue. The chorus now expects reaction and participation from the seated audience, not “proper” listeners. The exchange of roles of both audience and chorus on the stage is a circular rotation of power that creates a spatial inclusion of stage and floor performers. The same national songs obviously did not move the jaded Damascenes or maybe that the performance stirred some sense of discomfort (like they were listening to something they shouldn’t). And so the resistance was resisted.

58 For an excellent reference of the biography of the main politically active poets and writers of the period see the last section of Hana al-Fakhoury’s Tarikh al-Adab al-Arabi.

56 The Arabic form of the five poems and their translation are included in appendix III.

57 This poem is located in the first chapter of the thesis “Flag Mutations”.


59 The previous concerns and problems question the method of translation as analysis between history and memory and across two languages. “If translation is a mode, translatability must be an essential feature of certain works.” Walter Benjamin’s declaration separates a translation from its original text, while it maintains the ‘vital connection’ through the act of translation; it is the “translated” text (text in process of translation) that allows the emergence of new chain of meanings. The text’s translatability is inherent within the original, but which text is the original, the poem, its political impact or its performance as song? The original text has gone through stages of translation and appropriation through the changing political and social scene, leaving each stage as another original. (Quote from “Task of the Translator” in Benjamin’s Illuminations, trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken. 1968. pp.69-82.
In the translation of this poem, I was able to break each line at the same point of the original except in the second line where the structure of the sentence did not allow for this flexibility. This sentence if translated literally would read: Refused to be degraded the noble spirits. Due to the complicated, awkward nature of this structure without helping either the flow or meaning of the line (because in the Arabic the passive voice is not implied), I decided to give content the priority over form. But I left the verse in one piece to indicate the difference instead of breaking it for the integrity of the poem's formal structure. The subsequent result of this decision is that the line stands out in difference as it formally signifies the line's resistance to translatability into English. I have also taken the liberty to add punctuation to the poems to transfer the understanding of the texts. This allows a space for a closer, more literal translation of the lines as the commas, periods and question mark enclose each sentence within itself to be understood as a unit separate from what follows.

There are several moments in this poem that an impossibility of translation within English meaning was more apparent. The first is in the eighth line 'becomes a sky, I swear or like the sky.' 'I swear' is not a literal translation rather it carries a close meaning to it but not exact. The literal would be 'upon your life' which is a common figure of speech that emphasizes the truth of one's statement. But to transfer it literally into the translation would affect the meaning of the line in a confusing way. The emphasis here is that this ground, the Arab landscape is so dense with glowing suns, glowing moments of history or glowing with its peoples richness becomes like a dazzling surface so bright that it could be confused with the sky above. It is the sky; you could swear your life on it, only to realize that it is only just 'like' the sky. It cannot be the sky only similar to it; the Arab landscape floats between two skies with no ground. The second moment happens in the phase 'but within it tears from every dark eye'. This line translated literally would read 'but within it from every dark eye', the substance from the dark eye has been erased unlike the blood of the martyrs in the following line which is clearly mentioned. I inserted 'tears' to make that clear. The balance between these two lines is important to carry across for it is read that way in the original.
In terms of the formal translation of this poem one major difference that is
general throughout all of the poems but is acutely obvious here, is in the length of
the lines from the Arabic to the English. The original version consists of three to
four words in each part; it is concise and uniform across. This is difficult to do in
English because an Arabic verb can contain within it, with additional letters the
subject, the object, the tense and other variations to create an almost self-
sustaining fragment with minimal volume. Letters that equal words is an
interesting equation in the comparison of these two languages.

A curious play was achieved in the translation that is not present in the original
that is ‘the right in our right’. In Arabic they are different words, the second that is
the right hand also carries with it the notion of the oath. So in a way the English
version separates this collapsed doubling and replaces it with the first to achieve a
rhythm that if not explicit in this particular phrase at least gives an understanding
of the poetic dimension at play throughout of the original Arabic text.

p.1.

Ibid., p.1-II.

This transformation of force (physical, legal, religiously inspired fictional
narrative, memory of the past unveiled to close family) and its presentation in
both introduction and lecture parallels an Islamic proverb that the strength of
belief is expressed in degrees, depending on the present strength of the people.
The strongest expression of faith is with the hands (action), then with the tongue
(language), finally during the weakest times with the mind (thoughts).


Ibid.,p.1.

Ibid.,p.2-3.

Ibid., p.3.

Ibid., p.9-10.

Ibid., p.13.

Ibid., p.15.
Appendix I: Maps of Aleppo

1. 1930s Map of Aleppo (During French Mandate)
3. Direction de Antiquities Syrie-Nord Map of Aleppo. 1954
Appendix II: Memory Maps

Memory Map #7 "1920" Age: 65
Memory Map #7 "1970" Age: 45
Memory Map #10 "2002" Age: 45
Memory Map #9  “2002”  Age: 50
Appendix III: Songs

Syrian National Anthem Humat al-Diyar/ Shields of the Homeland
Written by Khalil Mardam Bek
Adopted in 1936 (during French Mandate of Syria)

Shields of the homeland
The noble spirits refuse to be degraded.
The Arab lair is
And the throne of the suns
peaceful greeting upon you.
a holy sanctuary.
is protected from harm.

The fields of Sham
compete with the sky
So the ground blossomed
becomes a sky I swear,
and the soaring towers
with exalted brilliance.
with glowing suns
or like the sky.

Wishes flutter
for the flag will gather
but within it tears from
and blood from every
and the heart trembles
the fragmented lands,
every darkened eye,
stretched martyr.

Free spirits
and the soul of sacrifices
Because from us came al-Walid
so why should we not rule
and a glorious past
are a vigilant guard.
and from us came al-Rashid
and why should we not sing?
حماية الديار

عليكم سلام
النفوس الكرام
بيت حمّام
حمّى لا يضمّام

حمّامة الدبار
أيت أن تذّكِّر
عين العروبة
وعرش الشموص

بروج الشّام
تبعالي السماء
بالشموص الوضاء
وأي السّمعاء

رفع الأماني
على علم ضم
أما فيه من كل
ومن دم كل

وحقق الفؤاد
شمل البلاد
عين سماواد
شديد مداد

ومض مجيد
رقيب عائين
ومنا الرشيد
وأي لا نشيد

كلمات: خليل مردم بك (سوري)
تلحين: الأخوين قليع (ليبنان)
The Countries of the Arabs are My Homeland
Written by Fakhri al-Barudi (Syria)

The countries of the Arabs are my homelands from al-Sham to Baghdad
and from Najd to Yemen to Egypt to Tatwan.
For no border distances us and no religion divides us.
The tongue of dhad unites us with Ghassan and Adnan.

We have a past civilization, we will revive her although she was annihilated.
And even if in her face stands the cunning man and jinn.
So rise, my nation’s sons to the heavens with the flag.
And sing, tribes of my mother the countries of the Arabs are my homelands.
بلد العرب أوطاني
من الشام لبغداد
إلى مصر فتنفون
ولا دين يفقرنا
بغسان و عدنان
سنحينا و إن دثرت
دهاة الإنسان والجان
من الغليان بالعلم
بلد العرب أوطاني

بلد العرب أوطاني
و من نجد إلى بمن
فلا حد يسعدنا
لسان الصاد يجمعنا
لنا مدينة سبلت
و لو في وجهها وقفت
فهيوا يا بني قومي
و عنينا يا بني أمي

كلمات: فخري البارودي (سورية)
الحان: الأخوين فليفل (لبنان)
We are the Youth
Bashara al-Khour (Lebanon)

We are the youth, we have tomorrow and its eternal glory.
We are the youth.

Our emblem through time is
We sold to it on the day of trial,
Oh my country, your enemy faults
You taught us how to be proud
We are the youth.

long live the homeland, long live the homeland.
our souls without a price.
you who shields us.
and how to vanquish pain.

The rocky plain and the streams
and what the forefathers built
With faith in our hearts
the right in our right
We are the youth.

and the field and the threads of wheat
are all our fortresses.
and light in our eyes,
and the laurels on our foreheads,

We have al-Iraq and al-Sham
We walk towards the violent death
We build and depend not
We have a hand and the labor.
We are the youth.

and Egypt and the Holy Sanctuary.
Forward. Forward.
we fatigue without discouragement.
We have a tomorrow and hope.
Oh Darkness of Prison
Najib al-Rays
Arwad Island, Syria 1923

Oh darkness of prison linger
There is nothing after the night except
Oh guards be gentle
Give us a breath of air,
Oh clay abode
we have given you young men
And we all swore
we will never betray the oath

Oh rattling chains give me
there lies within your voice meanings
I have not, by God, forgotten,
So please witness oh star

we adore the darkness.
a glorious dawn rising.
and listen to our words.
forbidding it was a sin.
oh home of the loyals,
who are not afraid of death.
the day we pledged with our right
and we took honesty as our faith.

a melody that grieves my heart
of despair and tyranny
what my countries' are enduring
that I am of faith and devotion
Oh My Flag
Bashara al-Khouri (Lebanon)

Oh my flag, Oh my flag
Oh flag of the Arabs, rise and wave
on the blue horizon
Oh flag

Oh fabric of the mothers
during the dark black nights.
For their free sons
for their free sons
How can we not save you,
every thread within you,
A tear from their lids,
A throb from their chests,
a kiss from their mouths.
Oh flag

Walk us to glory
and build from us the country
For we have sworn by the law
for we have sworn by the law,
an honorable oath
that we replenish you
From the blood of the martyrs,
From the wounds of pride
you live for the glory of heaven.
Oh flag
يا علمي

يا علمي
يا علم العرب أشرق وأخفق
في الأفق الأزرق

يا علم

يا نسيج الأمهات
لينه الفان الأبا
كيف لا تفديك
دمعة من جفنتهن

يا علم

وباب منا الوطن
قد حلِفنا للفنا
أنا نسق قيد
عشت للمجد سماء

يا علم

سر إلى المجد بنا
قد حلِفنا للفنا
حلِفنا ترضيك
من دماء الشهداء من جراحكبراء
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