Activism Across Time and Place

A Study of Syrian Activists' Trajectories in Berlin and Oslo

Amany Selim

Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor (PhD)
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Abstract

In this thesis, I explore *how Syrians' activist trajectories have unfolded across time and place*. I look at how Syrians who were active in the uprising of 2011 navigate and anchor their participation experiences within contexts of exile. The thesis engages with this inquiry from a comparative perspective, employing Berlin and Oslo as two exile contexts of different characteristics to address the impact of place on trajectories. Drawing on 34 in-depth interviews conducted with Syrian activists living in these cities, I combine scholarship on political socialization with an opportunity structure approach and the concept of emotional resonance to understand and analyze how *experiences of participation* in the uprising and *mobilization structures* in exile interact in shaping different trajectories.

Three articles form the bulk of this thesis, each addressing a different case for exile with the exception of article I that engages in a direct comparison between Berlin and Oslo. The link between time and place, through past experiences and mobilization structures, cuts across all articles where it is employed as framework for analysis.

Article I analyzes how the mobilizing structures of each of these contexts contributed to divergent trajectories among participants, encouraging activists in Berlin to continue action on behalf of Syria while motivating those in Oslo to retreat from this kind of politics. I attribute this divergence to differences in the quality of spaces for activism created by these structures and to the ways they have worked to accommodate activists' experiences of participation lived in the past. In Oslo, networks and protests for Syrians contributed to feelings of hopelessness because of their scarcity and divisiveness, validating participants' past of how they experienced action as futile, while failing to resonate with their needs for deriving hope to continue activism. In Berlin, these spaces, with their density and frequency, contributed to feelings of stability by resonating with activists' needs to have connection and mitigate guilt, while speaking to their experiences of action as pleasurable and rightful. The article shows how trajectories can diverge according to the level of emotional resonance in the two exile contexts.

Article II explores how activists in Berlin foreground their commitment to action on behalf of Syria. The article finds that experiences of mobilizing under repression socialized activists into adhering to specific ideals and modes of participation. Participants learned from experiences of mobilizing under repression that engaging in multiple activities maximizes

impact, while doing so without being tied to organizations. They also learned to use activism as a space for learning. The context of Berlin and the different avenues it provides for participation helped activists maintain this kind of engagement without having to compromise their past experiences. The article foregrounds the role played by experiences of repression in shaping engagement later in exile.

Article III unpacks the participation trajectories of Syrians in Oslo and what their disengagement means. The article unveils that the skills and ideals that participants appropriated while engaging in the uprising of 2011 were embedded in different projects in response to the context of Oslo. They were found to take part in civic engagement, acts of care for community members, and identity-based causes. The context of Oslo, with its specific integration narratives, the state of its Syrian community, and its solidarity infrastructures contributed to an understanding among participants that favors a reworking of their past experiences of activism to fit the new context and address its particularities. The article contributes with insights on how past experiences are embedded in locally embedded forms of participation in small contexts of exile.

The thesis demonstrates how a contextualized approach to activist trajectories can provide new insights into processes of (dis)engagement. First, the study shows how the specificities of exile contexts can contribute to different trajectories by providing different environments for the past lives of activists. Second, I demonstrate how these specificities can play a key role in how participation experiences are incorporated and embedded in exile, contributing to different forms of engagement. The opportunity structure approach employed in this study serves to unpack some of the ways in which place may influence activist trajectories. Finally, the thesis calls for attention to experiences of participation formed within contexts of repression, arguing that these contexts have impact on activists' political socialization and that past experience with activism may facilitate integration in exile.

List of Articles

Selim, A. (2023). “It gave us a thrill”: Emotions, exile, and narratives of (dis)engagement among activists from Syria. *International Journal of Comparative Politics*.

Selim, A. Unpublished. When mobilizing under repression can teach you “a 100 things”: Examining the roots of multifaceted engagement among Syrian activists in Berlin.

Selim, A. (2021). “I turned to things that mean more to me”: Unpacking the activist trajectories of Syrians in Oslo. *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*.

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1. Introduction

More than a decade ago, Syrians became the center of public and scholarly attention as the uprising of 2011 took people by surprise and unfolded in a humanitarian crisis of unparalleled scale. The peaceful movement that started in 2011 has turned into a multifront war and prolonged conflict with no end in sight. More than 14 million Syrians have fled the country since 2011, and about 7 million are internally displaced and living in dire conditions (UNHCR, 2023). Meanwhile, the Assad regime remains in power, backed by normalized relations with international forces and a growing realpolitik of accepting the status quo in view of its ugly alternative.

These consequences attracted scholarly investigations in various fields, from area studies to social movements, security, violence, international relations, and integration as there exists now a large Syrian population in Europe and the Western hemisphere. Scholars of social movements have been preoccupied, for example, by how a revolt erupted in such a context that lacked the necessary foundation to pave the way for a mass uprising, paying specific attention to mechanisms of mobilization, innovation, and moral obligations (Pearlman, 2018, 2021), networks and framing (Droz-Vincent, 2014; Leenders and Heydemann, 2012; Leenders, 2013), neoliberal policies and grievances, (Baroot, 2012; Conduit, 2017; Hinnebusch, 2012), and communication technologies (Ozgul, 2020). Later when the situation escalated, more attention was placed on the intervention of key foreign players in the conflict and how that stabilized or undermined the regime in Syria (Khatib, 2019; Kızılkaya, 2017; Maher and Pieper, 2021). As conflict escalations ultimately culminated in a major displacement crisis, many scholars turned to analyze what that means for the countries of reception that opened the borders for Syrian refugees, focusing on experiences of integration (Bucken-Knapp et al., 2018; Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2019 Pearlman, 2017). Despite being a turning point in the lives of individuals that witnessed and participated in the uprising, little attention has been paid to the impact that the uprising has left on the people who made it possible (Pearlman, 2016) and what experiences Syrians have gained from taking part in the uprising (Abiyaghi and Younes, 2018; De Elvira, 2018; Fourn, 2018). It is towards this endeavor that this thesis is positioned to generate new insights.

Accordingly, the overarching question guiding this thesis is

How have Syrians' activist trajectories unfolded across time and place?

To address this question and further unpack the elements constituting it, I ask:

In what ways do Syrians' past experiences of activism and conditions in exile impact and shape their trajectories and forms of engagement?

Situated within the scholarship of political socialization (Fillieule 2013; Fillieule and Neveu, 2019), and by drawing on an opportunity structures approach (Tarrow, 2011) and the concept of emotional resonance (Schrock et al., 2004), this thesis explores how Syrians' activist trajectories have unfolded across time and place. Studies on the biographical consequences of activism stay muted on how activist trajectories develop across different places, and between the countries of origin and destination. Much of this scholarship is quantitative, measuring consequences by statistical indicators (Fendrich, 1974; Nassi and Abramowitz, 1979), and focusing on movements lodged within specific national contexts, including most notably student, leftist, and civil rights movements in the US (McAdam, 1988a, 1999). Thus far, much of what has been produced is limited to democratic contexts, with so little knowledge available on authoritarian or non-Western contexts (El-Chazli, 2020; Gayer, 2019) and how experiences travel from one context to the other: from contexts of repression to fairly liberal contexts (Massicard, 2013; Rihoux and Kernalegenn, 2018).

There is a growing research on Syrian activist trajectories that is systematic in its tackling of past experiences and highlights engagements from repressive contexts (Abiyaghi and Younes, 2018; De Elvira, 2018; Fourn, 2018; Khoury, 2017). Yet, while it is mindful of the host contexts' impact on these engagements, it offers little theoretical insight as to how this can be combined with individual experiences, and thus do not offer a roadmap for how activist trajectories can be studied in context. In addition, they focus on the experiences of activists located in the neighboring countries to Syria, lacking perspectives on those who have relocated to other geographies and how their activism might differ.

In light of these shortcomings that have been henceforth highlighted, three objectives guide the scope of this thesis. The first objective is to explore the relationship between Syrians' past experiences of activism and exile conditions in the formation of activist trajectories. I am particularly interested in understanding how individuals' experiences that they accumulated from participation in the uprising are foregrounded differently as they interpret, interact, and engage with the different infrastructures of exile. Through combining time with the perspective of place, this study aims to advance existing research on activist trajectories, stimulating discussion about place as an ignored aspect in this strand of literature

and its potential role in shaping activist pathways and motivations into the continuation or discontinuation of activism. Exile is such a formative aspect of Syrians' lived experiences and an important implication to their experience of revolt that was ultimately made part of a population's history. It is thus essential to address and assess its impact as it manifests through different countries of reception and the interactions these stimulate through their infrastructures of engagement.

The second objective of this thesis is to accommodate space for the experiences of people originating from repressive contexts into the scholarship of the biographical outcomes of activism. As already mentioned, besides being underresearched and dominated by quantitative methods, this strand of literature focuses primarily on outcomes that relate to participation in movements that were not subject to horrific conditions like in the case of Syria. The puzzle in question is how we can understand these conditions to be productive of the same patterns of engagement, perceptions, effects, and such when the state reaction towards them and the environment is not the same? A clear aim of this study is shifting the focus from liberal to repressive contexts in the study of the biographical consequences of activism, exploring experiences that were lived and made in the contexts of incredible repression as shaped by dynamics of revolution, armed struggle, and war while engaging with their potential crystallizations and manifestations in later life, especially in relation to engagement in exile.

The third objective relates to the concern over the overproduction of knowledge on the integration of Syrians in their new countries of destination. While migration scholars establish a clear role for the agency of Syrians in navigating the structures governing their existence in these countries, they do not pay enough attention to the experiences they had prior to exile and how these can be made relevant in such contexts (Bygnes, 2019). By proposing to explore activist trajectories across time and place and the focus on experiences of activism that entails, the thesis aims to take Syrians' past experiences seriously. In doing so, I endeavor to address the experiences of Syrians within a framing that includes their past lives as they shape and are being shaped by present circumstances and conditions in exile.

My study combines literatures on political socialization with an opportunity structure approach and the concept of emotional resonance. By bridging these three strands of literature, I advance a framework for the study of activist trajectories across time and place, exploring how trajectories unravel as mediated by the interaction between experiences of the

past and the structures of exile, while encouraging particular trajectories and forms of engagement. I analyze these interactions while maintaining a focus on the conditions and dynamics that created experiences lived in Syria and in relation to the unfolding of the uprising.

The thesis engages in a comparison of Syrians' activist trajectories in Berlin and Oslo. Comparison here is argued as essential, as it can aid with fleshing out the role of place in shaping activist trajectories, through contrasting cases of dissimilar characteristics. The significance of place can be best understood when the exile destinations have drastically different mobilizing structures. Driving this comparative logic is the interest to understand what can happen to activist trajectories when the exile contexts in which individuals are situated are different. But even more so is understanding and identifying the ways that differences can impact these activist trajectories, as they provide different environments for their experiences. Accordingly, Berlin and Oslo, with their vastly different community size and activist scenes provide contrasting contexts for examining and specifying the ways in which Syrians' activist trajectories can unfold differently, as individuals experience these contexts and respond to them in view of their activism experiences. The thesis makes use of 34 in-depth interviews conducted with Syrian activists, 14 in Oslo and 20 in Berlin. These interviews follow a biographical line and chronological order, with detailed accounts of activism including both experiences of participation in the past as well as experiences of engagement in the present. The table below illustrates the articles constituting this thesis and their sequence, along with other relevant details. All articles are guided by the main research question and its sub-question that unpacks specifically the elements that constitute the two major axes of time and place governing the inquiry of this thesis. The first article features the two cases of Berlin and Oslo, whereas article II and III each focuses on a single case to address its complexities thoroughly.

This thesis is written as an independent contribution to a larger project called *Imagining and Experiencing the Refugee Crisis* (IMEX). While the overall project focuses on the experiences of arrival and settlement among Syrian newcomers to Norway as well as the responses of local communities to diversity increases, my thesis draws on the experiences of Syrian activists in specific, exploring how their activist trajectories have unfolded from the time of the uprising to exile and how their experiences might contribute to integration.

Table 1. A summary of articles in this thesis

	Article I	Article II	Article III
Title	"It gave us a thrill": Emotions, exile, and narratives of (dis)engagement among activists from Syria	When mobilizing under repression can teach you "a 100 things": Examining the roots of multifaceted engagement among Syrian activists in Berlin	"I turned to things that mean more to me": Unpacking the activist trajectories of Syrians in Oslo
Location	Berlin and Oslo	Berlin	Oslo
Selected data	34 interviews	20 interviews	14 interviews
Journal	*International Journal of Comparative Sociology*	*Social Movement Studies*	*Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*
Status	Published	Submitted	Published

Why Berlin and Oslo?

In diaspora mobilization and migrant politics research, there have been several calls for studying migrant activism within the framework of cities and not nation-states as new entry points into the study of mobilization (Koinova, 2017; Yalaz et al., 2022). Yalaz et al., (2022) draw on a number of justifications for city-level analyses, including most notably how mobilization is essentially localized. Individuals access the institutions of their host country through the cities in which they are based and engage with the politics of those cities in raising their claims on the national level. Most importantly, some cities, especially large ones, may enjoy leverage on their own, acting as bases for important international organizations or being rich in networks and resources. These justifications could not be more relevant for this study and its focus on the relationship between the individual and their immediate environment and their understandings of these environments from the perspective it can reflect on dynamics of engagement or disengagement.

As cities, Berlin and Oslo differ in so many aspects. On the level of the Syrian population, Berlin hosts some 47,075 Syrians (Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg, 2021), while Oslo is home to 4,259 Syrians (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2023b). Syrians have been noted for their efforts and mobilization in the German, not to mention Berlin context with their

organizations rooted in humanitarian relief and capacity-building, sites for protest, and heeded interest in pursuit of transitional justice, building on the principle of universal jurisdiction (Ragab, 2020, Stokke, 2019, 2022). In contrast, in Oslo a few have been seen to operate in these areas. In fact, this is the first study to illuminate this aspect of Syrians' arrival in Norway. In terms of activism, Berlin provides a fertile ground for claims-making on behalf of migrant and diaspora issues (see Koopmans and Statham, 2003), whereas the Norwegian context, while favorable to certain causes, generally nurtures participation in local arenas and civic engagement (Eimhjellen et al., 2018). These aspects made Berlin and Oslo appear different and suitable for comparison in relation to the central inquiry of this thesis and how activist trajectories have unfolded across place. Their differences were seen as can be used for illuminating the specific ways that they can impact these trajectories and to which outcome.

Structure of the thesis:

The thesis consists of six chapters. Following the introduction, in chapter two, I outline the theoretical premises that constitute the foundation of this thesis, drawing on themes of political socialization, opportunity structures, and emotional resonance and how I tie these in my study of activist trajectories across time and place. In chapter three, I discuss the three contexts involved in this research, including Syria, Berlin, and Oslo. I provide a brief account of the uprising, while focusing on how the engagements of Syrians developed along conflict escalations. With regards to Berlin and Oslo, I provide some key background information about the Syrian community in each as well as the sociopolitical context and organizational landscape that characterize each of them. In chapter four, I turn to the research design of the thesis, including case selection, data collection and analysis, and some notes on my positionality and the ethical considerations concerning the production of this project. In chapter five, I summarize the three articles included in this study, and conclude in chapter 6 with the main research insights and contributions of this thesis and a roadmap for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I introduce three overarching theoretical themes that guide the exploration of activism across time and place in this study: political socialization, opportunity structures, and emotional resonance. Drawing on these three themes, I construct an interdependent framework, connecting the macro-level of mobilization environments with the microlevel of individuals' experiences of activism. This framework is inspired by recent calls for incorporating context in the study of activist trajectories (Bosi 2019; Fillieule and Neveu 2019), which I respond to here by incorporating an opportunity structure perspective.

I start with an introduction to political socialization in relation to social movements and the role that these movements play as socialization institutions. I place experiences of past activism within the literature of movement socialization to investigate the ways in which they travel across place and impact engagement as they are embedded and lodged within different contexts of exile. Second, I provide an overview of opportunity structures theories to outline the factors understood to aid or constrain mobilization. I draw on this aspect in particular to understand differences between the contexts of Berlin and Oslo and to operationalize how they work. Third, I move to the concept of emotional resonance. I introduce this concept as an additional angle into bridging different levels of analysis (the individual and the structural) to flesh out the emotional dynamic in the interaction between past experiences and mobilization structures. I explore this link in the first article that inaugurates the thesis to set the scene for how activist trajectories diverged across the two exile contexts of Berlin and Oslo.

Before elaborating on these perspectives, I first sketch a conceptualization of activism across time and place that I supplement as a prelude to my framework. I make this introduction to draw attention to the importance of understanding activism as a contextualized phenomenon before we are able to analyze how it shifts and varies over different circumstances and structures.

Theorizing activism across time and place

The concept and meaning of activism and what it denotes and entails remains contested in social movement research. This is because the concept itself is highly contingent

and involves a plethora of meanings, forms, and scales of contention. For one, does activism entail becoming part of an organized entity, be it a political party, a social movement, a civil society organization, or informal networks in order to count? Or could it be individualized and reduced to everyday practices and lifestyle commitments? Because activism implies a multiplicity of meanings and actions, it is important to understand activism within the context in which it occurs. It is thus essential to employ a situated understanding of activism in order to recognize the varieties it may assume over time and across different contexts.

In foregrounding this approach, I draw insights from debates around what 'counts as activism' (Martin et. 2007; Horton and Kraftl, 2009). This debate contends that "activism needs to be conceptualized and understood as an activity that emerges from the everyday lived context in which people are embedded" (Martin et al., 2007, p.80). This theoretical premise establishes activism as context dependent and suggests that any kind of act may be considered an act of activism if it is done in response to particular needs that actors wish to address in their local communities. In the context of this study, I use this debate to understand how activists respond to different contextual and temporal conditions as they define how activism should be formed and practiced according to these conditions.

Studying Syrians' activist trajectories in exile, such a flexible approach is key as it can help us understand how actors' activism evolved and shifted as they mobilized through revolution, armed conflict, and across different contexts of exile with different opportunity structures. Each of these phases and contexts posed particular challenges or opportunities that affected and shaped how activists were to mobilize and enact their engagements. Thus, a grounded approach to studying activism is crucial in order to fully recognize the broad spectrum of possibilities for action that may arise in such extraordinary circumstances, including revolutionary settings and what it set in motion from violence to mass displacement.

In her study of how the Syrian uprising took shape, Pearlman (2020) delineates how in the absence of organizational structures, activists resorted to existent social ties in coordinating and incentivizing collective action, and how these networks continued to grow, supporting the spread of contention. When violence escalates, forms and structures of mobilization shift constantly and vary over time according to conflict developments. These moments demand specific responses and interventions based on how actors assess the situation on the ground. For example, Wood (2008) sheds light on the activities that civilians carried out during the civil war of El Salvador. These activities included land takeovers and

the gathering of intelligence to support armed groups in their counterinsurgencies that were likely viewed by civilians as a form of resistance against the local government. In Syria, activists put in place organizational committees responsible for coordinating protests on a wider scale, while covering a wide range of activities including media activism and humanitarian relief (Pearlman, 2020). These were also interpreted at the time as forms of resistance against the regime. These studies clearly conceptualize activism in situations of violence as reactive, revealing how it implies and requires a different set of actions as activists feel and see the need to extend their involvement.

A contextualized understanding of activism is useful not only in relation to examining activism under perilous conditions like that of revolutions and wars, but also in exile across different contexts. Historically, exile has been viewed to help activists resume political activity when it becomes impossible for them to operate in their countries of origin because of extreme repression or the outbreak of war (Wayland, 2004). Yet, it is suggested that this can only be understood within the context of host state configurations and whether they can aid the resumption of political activity (Koinova, 2014). A contextualized approach, embedded in opportunity structures, can help to analyze how this influence occurs.

Moreover, such an approach can be useful in making acts and impacts that often go under radar visible. The study of diaspora activism has been known for its bias towards established diasporas (see Eccarius-Kelly, 2002; Tölölyan, 2007; Wayland 2004), mobilizations that are visible and wide-scale (see Adamson, 2013), and host contexts that are favorable in their opportunity structures (see Bolzman, 2011). This bias is also reflected in the study of Syrian diaspora mobilization (Jörum, 2015; Moss, 2016b, 2020; Ragab, 2020). We are gaining more and more knowledge about the range and character of Syrian activism in host countries where they constitute big communities and where mobilization efforts are most clustered (Ragab, 2020), but we know very little about other contexts where Syrians are considered invisible within the broader geographies of Syrian diasporas. Activism in such contexts may develop in ways that are uncharted by diaspora studies' toolkit of studying mobilization (Müller-Funk, 2020; Quinsaat, 2016). In this regard, this approach, with its emphasis on understanding activism as a situated practice, can help me to recognize the ways in which activism may develop in contexts like these.

The thesis builds implicitly on these perspectives in the analysis of activist trajectories. Inspired by the work of Østergaard-Nielsen (2002) that distinguishes between homeland

politics and immigrant politics, and building on the trajectories of engagement identified by this research, I distinguish between two forms of activism: action on behalf of Syria and broader fields of action. The first pattern refers to any kind of action that involves and targets Syria, be it humanitarian activities geared towards displaced communities in Syria or its neighboring countries, development projects that seek to develop the skills of people living inside Syria in the fields of education, documentation, journalism, and filmmaking, protest organizing and lobbying in the countries of destination in connection to events related to Syria, or mobilization in the areas of human rights and transitional justice. What I call broader fields of action, on the other hand, involves different forms of activism that are not necessarily connected to Syria and include but not limited to: civic engagement, identity-based activism in connection to other causes, cultural activities, and community building activities that are both formal and informal.

Political socialization and social movements

The field of political socialization is vast and nested within several theoretical models and paradigms (see Fillieule, 2013). In this section, I will limit the discussion of political socialization to that forged by social movements and critical events. This is not to downplay the importance of family as a formative institution of socialization, which has predominated for long the study of political socialization in view of its undisputed significance (Neundorf & Smets, 2015). Rather, this is to shed light on aspects that have been often excluded to the study of early socialization and how it impacts political engagement in adulthood.

According to Fillieule (2013, p.1), political socialization is becoming more and more understood as "the gradual development of the individuals' own particular and idiosyncratic views of the political world, the process by which a given society's norms and behavior are internalized". Next to the family, school, and religious entities as primary socializers, this understanding highlights the importance of other institutions as equally important, and not only complementary to the process of shaping political behavior. Yet, little attention has been paid to social movements as an agent of political socialization (Fillieule, 2013; Fillieule and Neveu 2019; Passy and Monsch, 2019). Individuals can spend years in movements during which they learn about different strategies and adopt certain worldviews. Therefore, to ignore these effects as potential instances of political socialization is illogical as socialization does not only occur prior to recruitment but also during action itself.

To this date, political events have not received the attention they deserve in political socialization research as potential agents of socialization (Neundorf & Smets, 2015). The occurrence of a certain political event can alter individuals' lives and their way of understanding and behaving in this world, leading to radical transformations in the society. In social movement theory, these impactful moments are categorized as transformative events (McAdam and Sewell, 2001; Sewell, 1996). The transformative capacity of any event is defined by the extent it can ultimately dismantle existing social orders, produce radical ruptures in political systems, and launch new conceptions and ideas to uproot long-standing traditions of governance and behavior (Sewell, 1996). They are captured by a spark where new possibilities for change are imagined, discovered, and enacted in the midst of the messiness and uncertainties created by the moment. In the context of the Arab uprisings, Ayata and Harders (2018) argue that the affective climate created by the physicality and spatiality of protesting did not only introduce ruptures with old ways of being, but also gave rise to new ways of enacting oneself, while creating a new repertoire of contention born out of these affective moments. Applied to activist trajectories, I argue that these perspectives of political temporalties are important for theorizing political events as a socializing agent. According to this understanding, the uprising and its ensuing circumstances capture a long-term register that set in motion a process of learning and becoming as activists navigated new challenges imposed by the reality of revolution, war, repression, and crisis.

The literature on the biographical consequences of activism has made substantial contributions in bringing the socializing effects of social movements to the fore and how they can affect later engagement (see Giugni, 2008; Vestergren et al., 2017). In particular, movements affect individuals through the worldviews and ideals they acquire during participation (Beckwith 2016; Down and Wehr, 1997; Isacc et. Al 2016; Owen, 2019). For example, Owen (2019) notes how exposure to grassroots ideals through brief trainings in the early phase of recruitment made activists years later question professionalized activism as it was at the odds with what they had conceptualized as good activism. Learning that social change can only be made bottom-up and that it is important to forge non-hierarchical relationships with marginalized groups made them reject professionalized structures that operate in contravention to these ideals, and thus return to voluntary service as the kind of activism most aligned with their egalitarian convictions. Thus, the learning of particular ideals early in trajectories can enforce specific modes of enacting participation in later stages.

Skills is another important outcome that can reinforce people's commitment to activism (Beckwith, 2016; Down and Wehr, 1997; Van Dyke and Dixon 2013). As individuals join movements, they gain new skills in organizing and the ability to navigate different challenges as they undertake the everyday tasks connected to their participation. The acquisition of these skills builds a feeling of self-efficacy and empowerment that inspire activists to continue activism (Van Dyke and Dixon 2013).

When activists retreat from visible action, activism impacts them in other ways, encouraging new repositionings of ideals and skills acquired in the past. For example, previous involvement in activism affects the kind of careers individuals pursue. Former participants are more inclined to choose jobs that can allow them to practice their vision for social change, including jobs in the academic, creative, and social and human service field (Fendrich and Tarleau, 1973; Fendrich, 1974; Nassi and Abramowitz, 1979; Nassi, 1981; Sherkat and Blocker, 1997). Combining ideological commitment with career involvements is a particularly flourishing strategy among activists that they employ to stay connected and true to their beliefs (Driscoll, 2020; Roth, 2016).

Parenting is particularly such an arena that individuals utilize to put in practice what they have acquired from their movement socialization (El-Chazli, 2020; Maynard, 2018). El-Chazli (2020), for example, shows how this was a change he observed among his participants who took part in the Egyptian uprising of 2011 and how their participation taught them to follow a liberal parenting style different from the authoritarian one they grew up within. Parents with an activism history can sometimes capitalize on this as a space to uphold and inculcate a particular narrative about conflict in their homeland (see Baser, 2013).

The processes through which these outcomes materialize have not been subject to much research (Passy and Monsch, 2019; Vestergren et al., 2017), despite the light it can shed on how processes of persistence or disengagement occur (Accornero, 2019b; Bunnage, 2014; Corrigall-Brown, 2011, 2012; Fillieule, 2010; Sawicki and Simeant, 2010). Passy and Monsch (2019) highlight two interrelated mechanisms of political socialization: cognitive-relational process and experiential process. During movement participation, activists acquire a "radical habitus" that is internalized through not only teachings but also interactions with others. The "experiential" mechanism refers to the experience of being within a movement and what people learn while being in the movement that lead individuals to adhere to a particular worldview, strategies, tactics, or patterns of engagement. Continuity is also another key

channel of diffusion through which individuals ascribe a connection between their past and present involvements to rationalize what might be conceived as ruptures with their past (Bosi, 2019; Gayer, 2019; Juhem, 2001; Leclercq, 2012; Tissot, 2005; Willemez, 2004).

This thesis draws on the aspects foregrounded by these studies to explore the different ways in which experiences of past participation travel in time, through which means, and to which outcome, taking on different roles and shapes, while affecting processes of persistence and disengagement differently (Corrigall-Brown, 2011; Fillieule, 2010). In the next section, I elaborate on the literature that tackles contexts of exile and the elements that can be understood to affect such processes as individuals navigate their past experiences within the structures of these contexts.

Opportunity structures

The concept of opportunity structures has been central, if not a paradigmatic reference in the study of social movements. According to Tarrow (2011), "the concept of political opportunity structure refers to consistent – but not necessarily formal or permanent – dimensions of the political environment or of change in that environment that provide incentives for collective action by affecting expectations for success or failure" (Tarrow, 2011, p.163). The political process model is what first coined the term of opportunity structures, contending that the emergence and outcomes of mobilization cannot be fully attributed to the resources and structures of movements alone, but rather to the interaction between factors internal and external to the movement (McAdam 1988b, 1996; Tarrow, 2011). Thus, to understand how movements emerge and sustain their mobilization, it is important to consider the environment in which these strategies are developed and deployed (Meyer, 2004).

Theoretically, there are four main elements that have been emphasized as core to opportunity structures. These include: 1) the relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system, (2 the stability or instability of that broad set of elite alignments that typically constitute a polity, (3 the presence or absence of elite allies, and (4 the state's capacity and propensity for repression (McAdam 1996, p. 27). Over the years, these elements have been refined and expanded to differentiate between different aspects of

opportunity structures, define opportunities according to the issue being mobilized, and include factors that are more specific to the context under study (Giugni, 2009; Meyer, 2004).

The opportunity structure perspective has made major inroads in scholarship on migrant political transnationalism and diaspora mobilization. Components highlighted by the relevant literature include state relations and foreign policy (Godwin, 2017), political discourse (Turner, 2008; Wayland, 2004), diaspora location (Bolzman, 2011; Koinova, 2012), funding opportunities (Eccarius-Kelly, 2002; Ragab, 2020), and local solidarity groups (Quinsaat, 2016), but among the most researched of these are integration, immigration, and citizenship regimes. This component is particularly relevant in the context of this research as Syrians arrived mostly as refugees in the last few years and the rhetoric of integration was significantly heightened around their arrival.

Scholarship remains inconclusive as to the specific impact that integration and citizenship regimes can have on immigrants' engagement. Some scholars claim that better integration facilitates and increases homeland engagement (Al-Ali et al., 2011; Baser, 2013; Guarnizo et al., 2003). Others retain that lack of integration leads to more interest in homeland politics and developments (Koopmans et al., 2003; Pilatil and Herman 2019; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2002). This specific strand of literature emphasizes experiences of exclusion, discrimination, and limited integration opportunities offered by the receiving state as the main factors behind homeland engagement. A third view looks at homeland engagement and integration as in harmony and synchronicity (Bolzman, 2011; Erdal and Oeppen, 2013; Hammond, 2013; Martiniello and Michel Lafleur 2008; Miller, 2011; Quinsaat, 2019). Through mobilizing for their homelands, immigrants integrate better in their host societies while they forge networks, build partnerships with local groups, and learn to gain general interest and partake in the struggles that pertain to them in the country of reception (Quinsaat, 2019).

Despite the abundance of research on this issue, the existing research has not moved beyond contradicting or confirming these archetypical theses. As a result, it is still unclear how integration narratives influence migrants' engagement in their countries of reception, shaping their responses in the way they incorporate these narratives in their engagement. By integration narratives, I mean the dominant views of how migrants are expected to participate in the society. In my research, I draw on integration narratives as an arena that can inform the

engagement of Syrians in exile and how it can be construed as an opportunity around which engagement is organized.

Local solidarity groups is another factor that refers to local movements and how they can sponsor immigrants wishing to mobilize for the homeland (Quinsaat, 2016). In my research, I take solidarity groups to mean movements that exist in the same sphere and mobilize for different issues more embedded in the host country. I investigate how the existence of these solidarity movements as competing groups in the same field of engagement in the hostland can win the interest of active individuals in line with their history and identity.

Community size has been for long argued to matter in terms of increasing possibilities for migrant mobilization (Müller-Funk, 2016; Shertzer, 2016). For one, the larger the community, the more resources it is expected to have that it can utilize for investment in collective action. There is a well-established strand in research elaborating on the different ways that community resources are crucial for political participation in the countries of reception (Fennema and Tillie, 1999; Michon and Vermeulen, 2013; Vermeulen and Berger, 2008; Tillie 2004). Resources in this literature is seen as the degree of immigrant representation and self-organization, that is the amount of networks, civic associations, and political organizations through which the community is interconnected. The utility of this literature for my study stems from highlighting the importance of having an organized space for individual participation. Individuals are shown to have a stronger propensity towards political participation when their community of identification is well-organized in the host country (Tillie, 2004; Vermeulen and Berger, 2008) and when they are embedded within social networks of relevance (Klandermans et al., 2008).

This literature opens up for ways to incorporate community embeddedness in the study activist trajectories across time and place. The capacity of individuals to continue an activism in favor of their countries of origin after they go into exile can be influenced by the degree of their community's organization in the country of reception. The size of the community, combined with its organizational landscape, mobilizing structures, and networks are all important factors that contribute to its embeddedness. Therefore, I think of community embeddedness as an extension of the opportunity structure of the host country that affects how individuals invest their experiences in ways that speak to the conditions of their communities. In this study, I will focus on how community embeddedness can shape individuals' engagement in exile, encouraging different utilizations of past experiences. In

particular, I seek to unpack the ways in which different degrees of community organization can promote different practices and forms of engagement when interacting with individuals' past experiences. While different degrees of self-organization within a particular community are expected to encourage divergence in activist trajectories, the aim here is not to confirm divergence but to show how it occurs. The next part on emotional resonance presents an additional way for exploring more specifically how mobilization structures and past experiences can interact.

Emotional resonance

In line with social movement research (Jasper, 1998), I do not see emotions as merely automatic responses, immediate physiological states, or natural sensations that occur within the body and reflects in behavior. To define them as such implies that they are irrational, which what decades of social movement research have long strived to refute in reestablishing emotions as inherent to all aspects of action (Flam and King 2005; Goodwin et al., 2001; Goodwin and Jasper, 2006). Rather, emotions are seen as referential, reflexive, and cognitively constructed (Jasper, 1998; Mills and Kleinman, 1988). Bericat (2016) proposes a definition of emotions that fits within the parameters of this theoretical standpoint and summarizes emotions as "the bodily manifestation of the importance that an event in the natural or social world has for a subject" (Bericat, 2016, p. 493).

The concept of emotional resonance originates from the framing perspective. At its core, framing functions as an interpretive framework through which an event is perceived and experienced to motivate action (Benford and Snow, 2000). The way a particular event or situation is framed has to reflect not only the interests of the movement, but also those of the targeted audience for the movement to achieve its goals. This is called frame resonance, that is, the extent to which movement frames and its analysis of the situation resonate with targets of mobilization. One of the most critical aspects that affect resonance is experiential consumerability, which refers to the degree to which frames are consonant with the personal experiences of potential participants. In other words, individuals have to perceive these frames as familiar, convincing, and closely related to how they view and experience the problem diagnosed by framing (Snow and Benford, 1986, 2000).

Emotional resonance remains an underutilized concept in social movement research. Thus far, only few studies have strived to conceptualize and make use of this concept in studying social movement activity and explaining the root of differential outcomes across movements (Cadena-Roa, 2002; Robnett, 2004; Schrock et al., 2004). Robnett (2004) views emotional resonance as "an emotion package that includes many emotions and is in a dialectical relationship with frames as interpretive packages" (Robnett, 2004, p.196). Emotional resonance is at its core an interaction between different emotions that seek to reinforce or rule out each other in the process of reaching a particular outcome. It is generated depending on the extent to which collective action frames emotionally resonate with a targeted audience (Robnett, 2004; Schrock et al., 2004). Schrock et al., (2004) study emotional resonance as the outcome of social movement framing meeting the emotional lives of potential recruits by speaking to their experiences and emotional needs. Emotional resonance thus crystalizes an immediate connection between individuals' emotions and structures of support existing in their surroundings, opening up for critically examining the ways in which certain contextual configurations affect individuals' decisions to continue or exit activism.

My study builds on this concept that I use it to identify the precise circumstances and exact elements under which structural contexts can create emotional resonance for individuals. Within the larger study of activist trajectories, I use this concept as an approach to understanding and unpacking the ways in which different contexts of exile shape and contribute to shaping activist trajectories. Following how Schrock's et al. (2004) conceptualize emotional lives, I treat emotional needs as an aspect of participation experiences and how the ways that individuals experienced activism in the past comes with an emotional package that needs to be addressed. I bring in the element of memory as a carrier and transmitter of participation experiences to account for how and why these experiences create emotional needs, drawing inspiration from how memory has been conceptualized in social movement literature as aiding motivations into action (Accornero, 2019a; Tang, 2021; Zamponi & Daphi, 2014). As to the context, I focus on space as a composite of protests and activist networks (Ayata and Harders, 2018; Gould, 2009) that I treat as a dimension to how mobilization structures manifest. Thus, I examine how differences in these spaces between Berlin and Oslo impact the construction of emotional resonance and the ways that individuals' interactions within these spaces affect decisions of (dis)engagement. As such, theoretically, I locate emotional resonance in the interplay between memory and space.

I tie these separate strands of political socialization, opportunity structures, and emotional resonance in my examination of how Syrians' activist trajectories have unfolded across time and place. To reiterate, each of these literatures are drawn upon for making sense of a specific aspect implicated in influencing these trajectories. While political socialization is utilized for unpacking the impact of time through the accumulation of certain experiences during participation, opportunity structures is employed for unpacking the specificities of place and the different ways that exile contexts can shape how previous experiences are embedded. Emotional resonance, on the other hand, is introduced as a link that can accommodate these two aspects of time and place, political socialization and opportunity structures, and how their interaction manifests through emotions.

3. Context

In order to contextualize the trajectories of Syrian activists, their experiences of past activism, and those lived within exile, it is important to provide an overview of both the Syrian uprising and the exile contexts of Berlin and Oslo. Given the complexity of the Syrian uprising, I seek not to provide a comprehensive history of its roots, developments, and consequences, but rather focus on how it opened up spaces for engagement and how these spaces were expanded and contracted by violence. This focus is chosen because it best contextualizes the experiences of Syrian activists interviewed for this study. Thus, in this chapter, I will limit the discussion of the Syrian context to the first few years (2011-2015) where, according to activists' narratives and the timing of their migration to Europe, it was still possible to make a change on the ground while still within Syria.

The following sections on the exile contexts will provide a key background information on the migration history and characteristics of the Syrian community in Berlin and Oslo as well as the sociopolitical context and organizational landscape characterizing each of them. It is essential to gain an overview of the migration patterns that shaped the community in these contexts to understand the environments in which Syrians develop their forms of engagement.

The Syrian Uprising

From peaceful protest to sectarianized conflict and multidimensional war

The wave of protests that swept away the region in late 2010-2011 sparked hopes for change in Syria. As early as 4-5 of February, several activists called for protests against the Syrian regime in Damascus, which were however contained by the government. The turning point that contributed to the widespread of protests across Syria came with the arrest of 15 children in the provincial town of Daraa in late February 2011. Inspired by the slogans that were raised in the Egyptian and Tunisian uprisings, the children painted a graffiti on the walls in Daraa reading "The people want the downfall of the regime". To demand the release of the children, thousands of people went to the streets, demanding the resignation of the chief police. When the police responded with violence, the entire region went into a full-fledged revolt (Beshara, 2013; Baroot, 2013; Majed, 2013).

The situation in Daraa fueled the spread of protests to other cities, especially in Rif Dimashq, Homs, Deir-ez-Zor, and Hama, reaching the peak in late April with the emergence of mass demonstrations of hundred thousands of followers and the occupation of public squares. The initial demands of these protests focused on economic and political reforms, but with the revolutionary momentum and continuation of repression, the overthrow of the regime became a central demand and slogan. The popular uprising remained concentrated in these peripherical areas, most notably in small and medium-sized towns and villages that suffered from economic marginalization by the neoliberal policies of the Assad regime, creating a catalyst for protest while making space for political demands (Beshara; 2013; Majed, 2013).

While the periphery assumed the leadership and centre of resistance in the early phases of the uprising, the traditional opposition in Damascus, human rights defenders, and young aspiring activists joined in line to support and take part in protests (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami, 2016). In Aleppo, the university played a key role in spearheading the movement and acting as a site for protests (Aljasem, 2021; Donker, 2019). These early phases of mass mobilization were marked by the participation of people from different backgrounds across all sectors of the society, transcending ethnic, sectarian, and class divides while mobilizing through non-violent and peaceful means and adhering to discourses embedded in values of freedom, dignity and national unity (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami, 2016).

The regime adopted a securitized approach in responding to these protests. At first, it was selective in its response, targeting activists via arrest, torture, killing, and expulsion, while also opening fire on sites of protests. Unable to successfully put an end to protests, the regime deployed the national army in the suppression of protests, opting for a military solution. As early as May 2011, the army started invading different revolting areas across Syria, shelling neighborhoods in preparation for ground assault (Beshara 2013; Majed, 2013). Most importantly, the regime allowed sect-based militias to form and roam freely, taking an active role in the killing of civilians on behalf of the state, while sectarianizing the uprising (Philips, 2015).

This wide-scale aggression prompted the militarization of the uprising, which wearied and divided activists. Some feared this might radicalize the regime further in its attack against civilians, neutralizing the grassroots movement while hardening sectarian identities. From August 2011 onwards, while the majority of army soldiers and officers sided with the regime, a few refused to open fire on demonstrators, defecting from the institution and forming

eventually what came to be known as the Free Syrian army (FSA). Armed groups composed of civilians also formed and operated either independently or under the auspices of the FSA. In the fall of 2012, almost half of the Syrian territories were successfully liberated from the regime's control, where rebels established ad hoc local councils to fulfill the role of the state. As the FSA was a mere umbrella organization that had under its wing different local groups with patronage relations and loyalties to outside actors, it lacked a command structure and influence over the monopoly and distribution of arms. While Qatar and Saudi Arabia supplied the armed opposition with funding and weapons, it was not considered enough. This weakened the position of the FSA and contributed to its fragmentation. Away from the battlefield, a political body for the opposition was also established under the name of the Syrian National Council (SNC) in Turkey in October 2011, bringing actors from different ideological, partisan, and sectarian backgrounds, including the Muslim Brotherhood, Kurdish parties, and young activists. However, internal divisions soon undermined the authority of the body as well as its credibility as a respected actor (Beshara, 2013; Majed, 2013; Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami, 2016).

In 2013, the regime started targeting the areas that went out of its control, with the support of Iran and Hezbollah that became heavily involved in the conflict through providing logistical aid, training, manpower, and military strategizing. The intervention of these forces was a key turning point for the conflict, as the regime was emboldened to go heavy-handedly with ariel bombardments and sieges, using missiles, barrel bombs, and chemical weapons against the civilian population. The result was an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, with large-scale internal displacement, destruction of public infrastructure, and severe shortages in public goods and basic services. While international actors such as the US remained hesitant to intervene in the conflict, Russia continued to supply the Syrian regime with arms while supporting it diplomatically by using its veto in the security council against proposals for condemnation or sanctions (Beshara, 2013).

From 2013 to 2014 onwards, several actors rose to prominence, altering the military landscape in Syria. In specific, Islamist extremist groups became key players in the conflict, sponsored by different regional actors such as Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia (Khatib, 2019; Majed, 2013). Al-Nusra Front, that had direct links with Al-Qaida, dominated the battlefields. More importantly, the so-called Islamic state expanded in Syria with massive territorial gains. These groups had a major influence on the sectarianization of the conflict, committing large-scale sectarian violence from mass killings to ethnic cleansing (Al-Ali, 2016). In 2015, the

regime was under several attacks by different groups that it was left in a precarious situation and was about to lose the war, prompting the direct intervention of Russia that altered the regime's standing dramatically, tipping the odds in its favor (Oweis, 2016). This was a critical moment in the course of the conflict, as the intervention enabled the regime to reconquer strategic territories, while reestablishing its control over large swathes of the country that ultimately consolidated its power and made its overthrow a far-fetched scenario.

Shifting forms of engagement: From grassroots organizing to civil action

According to Pearlman (2019), the engagement of activists can be argued to have evolved along two phases. The first phase focuses on the uprising when it was largely still peaceful but faced with greater repression from the part of the regime. The second phase focuses on the militarization of the uprising and the shift in tactics. I organize the discussion in this section along this timeline, categorizing action according to how it interplayed with the expansion of violence.

Mobilizing organically at first, the informal networks that initially drove the mass demonstrations had to formalize. Soon, hundreds of what is called *Tansiqiyat* or local coordination committees (LCCs) formed within neighborhoods, villages, and towns, becoming in no time the main driving force of mobilization across the country through the umbrella networks they formed including the Local Coordination Committees (LCCs) and the Syrian Revolution Coordinators Union. In addition to coordinating protests, these networks documented human rights violations, collected data on the number of arrests and death toll, and had media and relief offices to train activists, report news, and support victims (Baroot, 2012; Beshara, 2013; De Elvira, 2013; Pearlman, 2019).

The defaming media campaign led by the regime's media apparatus made activists engage in citizen journalism, producing footage on the protests, relaying to the world what is happening on the ground, and acting as witnesses to violations and regime repression. In taking up this role, citizen journalism became a form of resistance, as exposing the truth and activists' narratives of the events became just as important as upholding the protests (Pearlman, 2019). Diaspora members were crucial in aiding this phenomenon with their logistical and financial support (Papadopoulosi and Pantti, 2013). Other forms of expression and participation also gained prominence during those early years of the uprising. Young

people mobilized opportunities for articulating their own version and vision of Syria through documentaries, literature, graffiti, music (Hinnebusch & Rifai, 2017; Khoury, 2014; Majed, 2013; Pearlman, 2019). As Pearlman (2019) argues, reclaiming a space for expression in a context where such liberties were banned was considered a form of resistance in itself.

The militarization of the uprising marked the expansion of the aforementioned forms of engagement, while suppressing other forms due to the escalation of violence and the taking up of arms by rebel groups, which gave rest to grassroots mobilization and pushed for other categories of action to emerge. Specifically, in a context of growing violence, humanitarian relief became a most urgent form of support that it took the upper hand and caused the recession of protests. Activists expanded their humanitarian aid networks to meet the needs of the displaced from accommodation to material aid including food, medical supplies, and such (Pearlman, 2019). Hundreds of humanitarian diaspora groups also emerged in consequence, driven by a moral obligation to alleviate the suffering of the displaced and the wounded in the homeland (Sweis, 2019).

As the regime forces continued to be driven out of one province after the other, some of what initially functioned as committees for organizing protests turned into civil society organizations. Beyond humanitarian assistance, these groups engaged in awareness-raising, with a particular focus on promoting dialogue, democratic values and equality, reconciliation, peacebuilding, transitional justice, and human rights. Others had a more developmental focus, with projects centered on the empowerment of youth, women, and children, especially in education (Khalaf et. al, 2014; Milani et al, 2016). Selvik (2019) indicates how activists not only sought to organize instruction and teaching, but also worked on children's mental health to avert their attention from the sounds of bombing.

Many of those grassroots networks also became key players in the local councils that were established in rebel-controlled areas. These councils supported services of garbage collection, bread supply, water distribution, education, healthcare, providing people with fuel, while developing and implementing security, judicial, and economic systems (De Elvira, 2013; Khalaf et.al, 2014; Khoury, 2014; Pearlman, 2019). However, the reconquest of the Assad regime of several of these areas following 2015 destroyed many of these local councils, causing their numbers to shrink from 800 to less than 600 in less than a year (Becker and Stolleis, 2016).

Meanwhile, newly exiled Syrians to neighboring countries that were active on the ground during the uprising but were forced to leave later continued to engage from these host contexts, transferring their networks with them, while setting up more professionalized entities. These entities were more than crucial in supporting the work of organizations and councils operating in Syria. They also conducted humanitarian relief for flows of forcibly displaced persons that would arrive to the borders, in addition to helping with the livelihoods of those trapped in camps and dire living conditions. Their work, just like it was in Syria, also featured a focus on human rights, advocacy, and development (see Diker & Ragab, 2019) that they saw as a continuation of their commitment from across the border.

In 2015, due to the intervention of several foreign actors in Syria and the deteriorating living conditions in the neighboring countries, Syrians were forced to go on a treacherous journey across the Mediterranean sea and apply for asylum in several European countries. It is estimated that one in every two making that journey in that year was a Syrian national (Clayton and Holland, 2015). Germany in particular received some half a million applications for asylum from Syrians in the years 2015-2016 (BAMF, 2015, 2016). Norway also experienced a spike in the number applications filed by Syrians, more than 11,000 (Thorud, 2018). The current study combines a context that received wide attention for opening the door for hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees to come, with a more peripherical context that welcomed less people and the implications of that on activism. The next sections will provide more details on the cases of Berlin and Oslo, including a focus on community numbers, characteristics, and socio-political context and organizational landscape.

Exile Contexts

A few notes are in order before I begin this part. First, while I will allude to larger aspects concerning the general standing of each of these cities in relation to activism, I will focus primarily on the mobilizing structures of the Syrian community, that is, how the community is organized and structured in the contexts of exile under study. This is in line with my research focus, both theoretically and empirically. Second, I also will discuss activism in these cities in the broader German and Norwegian contexts, while providing specific information when possible on the cities themselves. Finally, as each context is unique on its own, I will not engage in a symmetrical description of the two of them, but will see to aspects that can make us better understand how activist trajectories have unfolded in each

city. Given that the context of Oslo has not been studied before, I will rely on the subjective views of those I interviewed to discuss the mobilizing structures of the Syrian community in Oslo.

To reiterate, I do not define activism based on whether it is political or not but rather based on whether it fosters a direct connection with Syria. This conceptual clarification needs to be made explicit for the differences between Berlin and Oslo to be understood in this section. My categorization of engagement is inductive and based on the input of my participants in terms of how they engage within the contexts of their living in ways that entail or does not entail a connection with Syria.

Berlin

Germany is home to the largest Syrian community in Europe. It is amongst the top receiving countries of Syrian refugees in the world, ranking fourth after Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. According to the latest population census report, Syrians represent the largest third immigrant community in Germany after the Turkish and Polish communities respectively, with the number of Syrians reaching around 867,585 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2022a).

Before 2011, Germany was considered a traditional country of destination for Syrians in Europe, hosting over 30,000 people. During that time, the majority of Syrians came to Germany in search of better employment and educational opportunities, especially in the fields of medicine and engineering (Ragab, 2017). As far as 1960s, Syrians were reported to come to Eastern Germany as part of educational programmes where they received training in technology and other pertinent fields (Worbs, et al., 2020). During the 1980s, their numbers started to slowly increase as the regime's offensive campaign against dissidents during that time forced many to seek refuge in Germany (Ragab, 2017; Worbs, et al., 2020). These early migration waves included people who were more highly educated as well as highly skilled, whereas the latest waves following 2011 included people from all socioeconomic backgrounds (Ragab, 2017). The current demographic profile of Syrians in Germany is more dominated by men. The ratio of Syrian males to females is 58.2 percent to 41.8 percent (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2022a). As to age groups, Syrians make a young population, with persons under the age of 45 making up 88 percent of the entire population (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2022b).

By far, Berlin is hosting the highest number of Syrians in Germany. There are around 47,075 Syrians living there, of which 5657 are naturalized citizens and descendants born to at least one Syrian parent (Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg, 2021). Syrians make up 5 percent of the city's inhabitants, and 20 percent of its foreign population, making it amongst the largest immigrant communities in Berlin (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2021b). Similar to the demographic situation on the national level, men make up 60 percent of the Syrian population, while people in the age category of 15 to 45 are dominant in numbers, more than 60 percent (Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg, 2021).

Berlin holds a particular significance in relation to the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. In recent years, Berlin has become an exile destination for people originating from Arabic-speaking countries that witnessed major upheavals in the context of the mass uprisings of 2011, leading to a recognizably mass wave of migration to Germany, not only from Syria but from other countries as well. Arguably, these influxes of migrants and refugees have profoundly changed many aspects about living in this city for people originating from these countries. A burst in cultural activities has been observed in conjunction with the hailing of Arab artists, activists, and intellectuals to Berlin and the favorable conditions that enabled Berlin to emerge as a hub for Arab exiles from its relatively cheap living expenses compared to the cities of London and Paris as more traditional destinations for exiled dissidents, to its artistic flare and pioneering role in the arts and cultural scene (Ali, 2020; Bank, 2018).

The burst in cultural expressions can hardly be disputed on the ground. On a weekly basis during the time I was a resident in Berlin for my fieldwork, there would be often an event that relates one way or another to Syria. This could be in the form of a demonstration, public talk, artistic work, workshops, etc. Arenas for public discussion and engagement on the Syrian matter were abundantly available for participation and observation. Protests in specific were regularly held by different groups and in response to different political developments in Syria. The situation in Idlib in the spring of 2019 was dramatic that two demonstrations would be held per week to draw attention to the escalations there. These, however, were very low in turnout. There was a huge controversy over whether people in Idlib should be stood in solidarity with, since the area is controlled by extremists. The annual march organized each year to commemorate the start of the revolution in March is in comparison a solemn event that when I attended saw a huge turnout and interest from intellectuals, dissidents, and activists to attend, along with ordinary people with no political involvement. These demonstrations were often the scene of altercations between pro and anti-Assad

demonstrators, as pro-Assad forces are organized in Germany and enjoy the support of right-wing parties.

The ambiance in Berlin invites and encourages participation in different social fields for those interested in participation. There is a general perception that Berlin can provide people with the space to do their own "thing", sustaining the possibility that action matters. In that, Berlin differs from other cities in Germany (Koopmans, 2004). As a city, Berlin is known for its leftist inclinations, grassroots organizing for the rights of irregular migrants and workers, and much contention against gentrification. These issues are of general appeal to the activists I met and interviewed, despite being dismayed by the general stand of the global left towards the revolution in Syria, choosing instead to align with Assad and adhere to outdated anti-imperialist discourses. Moreover, other diasporas are organized in that context, including diasporas from the same region that hailed to Berlin for albeit the same reason. Syrian activists were seen to show solidarity interest in the struggles of other migrant communities, creating opportunities for cross-national collaboration and engagement in Berlin.

Organizationally, the Syrian diaspora community is argued to enjoy an extent of public visibility and outreach in Germany, despite its divisiveness and lack of a unified agenda. In the few years that followed Syrians' arrival in Germany, many organizations and initiatives were established by people who were active back in Syria, most notably civil society groups. A survey of Syrian-led organizations in Germany reveals that the majority of organizations operate in the area of integration, followed by humanitarian assistance, development, and political advocacy respectively. This distribution is largely shaped by funding opportunities that prioritize a focus on these areas as the predominate facets to the implications of the Syrian crisis either in Syria itself or in Germany. Humanitarian organizations are one of the most professionalized sectors among Syrians in Germany, with its actors playing a central role in shaping Germany's humanitarian response towards the crisis in Syria (Ragab, 2017, 2020).

In terms of civil society work, a number of organizations exist and operate in that field, supporting a range of issues including empowerment, capacity-building, accountability, and peacebuilding. This type of mobilization is mainly underfunded and continues to be led and coordinated via loose networks to ensure independence from international donors and their imposed principles of neutrality and conditioned help (Ragab, 2020). In the field of integration, the key areas of engagement are community-building initiatives through the

preservation of Syrian heritage, intercultural exchange and dialogue with the host society, and the provision of logistical and legal counsel to ease the settlement of community members in their new environments (Easton-Calabria and Wood, 2021; Ragab, 2020).

Oslo

Unlike Germany, Norway was never considered a country of destination for Syrians prior to 2011. The community as a whole consisted of 1500 people and the annual number of persons entering the country did not exceed 100 people (Tønnessen et al., 2020). The numbers of Syrians grew exponentially in 2015 when Norway received over 10,500 Syrian asylum seekers (UDI, 2015). Today, there are 39,897 Syrians living in Norway (Statistik sentralbyrå, 2022a), 34 429 of which are Syrian nationals while 5468 are naturalized citizens and Norwegians born to Syrian parents (Statistik sentralbyrå, 2022b). With their current numbers, Syrians now make the fifth largest immigrant community in Norway, preceded in that by the Poles, Lithuanians, Swedes, and Ukrainians respectively (Statistik sentralbyrå, 2023a).

Most of Syrians immigrating to Norway before 2011 came as refugees. Their share was as high as 45 percent of all people coming to the country, compared to 44 percent coming based on family reasons. At the same time, the number of those who came to Norway for work or education was very low, around 3 percent (Tønnessen et al., 2020). This means that the Syrian immigration to Norway was as largely shaped by political reasons like in the succeeding waves.

The pre-2011 community consisted mainly of men, whose share accounted for 54 percent of all residents. The community was also quite young in its composition, with people from the age of 15 to 45 years making up 64 percent of the community. The majority of Syrians residing in Norway at that time had the Norwegian citizenship, more than 60 percent and an average duration of stay of 10 years. They lived in the most populous cities in Norway, with around 24 percent of all Syrian residents living in Oslo, followed by Bergen, Trondheim, Stavanger, and Kristiansand (Tønnessen et al., 2020).

Similar to the demographic profile in Germany, the number of Syrian men is higher than that of women. While men’s share of the Syrian population in Norway is 57.5 percent, women make up 42.5 percent (Statistik sentralbyrå, 2023a). A youthful population, people between the age of 16 and 39 account for 44 percent of Syrians in Norway, compared to 37

percent under the age of 15. Today, around Syrians 4,259 live in Oslo (Statistik sentralbyrå, 2023b).

As the education levels of the Syrian community was an issue that came up in my interviews with participants as hindering of mobilization, I will give a brief overview on that point. The majority of Syrians have completed compulsory years of schooling known as *Grunnskole*. They comprise around 68 percent of all adults, compared to 20 percent with university education. As apparent from these numbers, the majority of adult Syrians have not received secondary education (Dzamarija 2018).

In one of my field visits to Oslo I undertook in 2018, I met with one informant and spoke with her on the phone several times before we met for an interview. One time she asked me to come to a community center in Tøyen that I later came to know about its social problems. As she was busy at the time preparing for an event in that neighborhood, she asked me to drop in for a quick chat and introduce myself and my research. While carrying boxes around and talking to other people, she told me how as 'foreigners' we have to help and take part in this society. These words and the whole setting stayed with me after our brief meeting. As newcomer myself at the time, this meeting was fundamental in introducing me to an aspect of engagement prevalent in the Norwegian context among Syrians in Oslo.

Norway is a country that places high value on active participation in the society. These normative expectations around participation are not only codified in policies (Borevi et al., 2017; Jensen et al., 2017), but they also permeate everyday conceptions and narratives of Norwegian nationhood (Strømsø, 2019). In the policy realm, it is within integration policies that these normative expectations are most embedded, and more prominently in the introduction programme designed for refugees. Introduced in 2004, this two-year programme includes an educational component based on intensive language courses, civic education, and vocational training (Hagelund, 2005). This programme is argued to be paternalistic and normative in character, as it presupposes that refugees are a passive population that need to be activated and made responsiblized towards the society of reception (Djuve, 2011; Fernandes, 2015). Emphasis is placed not only on the importance of participating in the labor market and paying taxes, but also on other forms of contribution, most notably volunteering in local arenas.

There is a salient culture of volunteerism in Norway. Statistically, Norwegians fare extremely high when it comes to levels of volunteering (Eimhjellen et al., 2018). It is

perceived as a moral obligation that citizens have towards their society and the welfare of its various groups (Von Essen et al., 2019). There is a particular preference towards volunteering in leisure-oriented and communal activities, such as cultural, recreational, and sports activities (Qvist et al., 2019). These are the kind of activities that are generally believed to constitute acts of contribution and participation, with acts lying outside of this category largely perceived as less worthy of being mentioned or deemed as such (Horst et al., 2020). Against this background, immigrants' integration is measured by how much they are willing to comply with this prevalent understanding of participation and seek to contribute through voluntary work and other accepted forms of contribution (see Strømsø, 2019).

In addition to civic engagement, there are certain causes that enjoy wider legitimation in the Norwegian context. Some of these causes in particular and which were found to be an arena of engagement for some of my participants were the Kurdish, LGBTQ, and Palestinian causes. The Kurdish diaspora is one that is deeply established in the wider Norwegian context, in parallel to its level of organization elsewhere in Europe. They have organizations and channels of communication with government institutions, their cause enjoys public sympathy, and their demonstrations are very high in turnout. Kurdish participants often spoke with pride of their ability to mobilize and organize in Norway.

The LGBTQ movement is also very highly organized in Norway and it is an arena that often attracts asylum seekers who were suppressed for their sexual identities in their home countries (see Akin, 2016). A few of my participants identified as part of the LGBTQ community and they were very much active in these issues, helping other Syrians come to terms with their sexual identity. As much as they spoke of the challenges of defending and enhancing their identity in Norway, especially if they were to remain connected to their community and Syrian roots, they also spoke of how it provided them with the means and tools to pursue an interest in LGBTQ mobilization.

The Palestinian cause is another that enjoys wider support in the Norwegian context, unlike many other European countries. For example, the Palestinian Committee of Norway is a solidarity movement that has chapters all over Norway and that is very much respected as a partner in debates, talks, and projects tackling and featuring the situation in Palestine. In Norway, pro-Palestine demonstrations are regulars and the commemoration of Al-Nakba, along with other triggering events, attract thousands of participants around the country (see

Jacobsen & Andersson, 2012). For many of my participants, this served as a channel for participation, given how they grew up with much awareness and identification with the issue.

There were very few initiatives I saw working on something related to Syria at the time I started my fieldwork. However, most of these were active for a while before going out of practice. In the fall of 2015, some were created with the intention of serving the Syrian community and finding ways to support the cause in Syria, but their efforts did not succeed or result into permanent establishments. One of these in specific was an initiative akin to a representative for the Syrian community. As many Syrians started coming to Norway in the second half of 2015, there was seen a need to communicate with those newcomers and meet their needs, while learning from them about the situation in Syria and how to best serve the revolution. A few of the pre-conflict immigrants, with more than 10 years of residency and membership in Norwegian parties in Oslo, met a few times to work out a plan for how to create such a platform. The plan was to create a unified front that can be invited and consulted by the Norwegian government and parliament when it comes to issues related to Syria, while also serving the community itself through help with legal and logistical matters and acting as a point of gathering for cultural and community events. The organization successfully operated for two years, from 2015 to 2017. They organized protests, assistance to refugees, and talks with parliament and party members.

Yet, a number of people noted that they knew the project would not succeed, as there were a lot of disagreements signaled while the plan was still in the making. There was a generational divide fueled by the understanding among activist newcomers that Syrians from the older generations are more preoccupied by titles and more traditional in their approach to how roles should be distributed. Some saw from the beginning that disagreements over ideological and identity differences would eventually destroy the initiative. Informants also pointed to personal reasons. None of the participants were fully dedicated to the organization. Most had their own careers and families to take care of, besides their own personal projects. Participants also mentioned that it was difficult to get Norwegian politicians on their side because of how complicated the Syrian situation was perceived to be.

In general, there were complains about how the Syrian community in Oslo and Norway is not equipped to create political mobilization. Participants viewed the community at the time as exhausted and traumatized to pursue mobilization at all or take part in such efforts when they have not yet established and settled their situation in exile. Three participants in

particular believed that many of those Syrians that just arrived had low levels of education and were low-skilled, and are families with special needs, which they viewed as an obstacle toward building mobilization. For them, trained cadres and the arrival of people with vast political experience from mobilizing in Syria are essential if possibilities for mobilization were to be created. They also blamed the topography of the country and the intentional dispersal policies of Norway from helping the diaspora connect, communicate, and gather over political issues. These dilemmas can be understood to have pushed towards particular patterns of engagement.

4. Methodology

In conducting this study, I have made use of qualitative methods and analytical tools that are considered central to sociological inquiry, including in-depth interviews (Brannen & Nilsen, 2011; Della Porta 2014a, 2014b) and grounded theory analysis (Charmaz, 2006). I also employed an explorative and flexible approach in my study, meaning that I mainly relied on empirical data to develop my investigation throughout the process of data collection, data analysis, and the writing up of the articles.

In this chapter, I start by providing an overview on the case selection procedure, followed by remarks on entering the field, the recruitment process and data collection methods, the process of data analysis, reflections on the epistemological underpinnings of this study, a note on my positionality throughout the research process, and finally a discussion of the ethical issues encountered in the realization of this study.

Case Selection

A core aim of this study has been to unpack the ways in which Syrians' activist trajectories unfole across different exile contexts and how activists shape their forms of engagement according to their experiences within these contexts. To do so, this inquiry was viewed as better investigated through a comparative research design (Øyen, 1990) to specify and examine the ways that differences across exile contexts can encourage different interpretations of how engagement should be enacted. The contexts selected for studying activists' trajectories had to be "separate enough" (Ragin, 1992, p.1), employing a "most different case" (Flyvbjerg 2006) to allow for comparison as a strategy for investigating how the particularities of exile contexts can help us achieve a better understanding of activist trajectories. Selecting cases based on how different they are instead of how similar they might be was considered a suitable ground for learning more about activist trajectories by comparing examples from different contexts.

Oslo and Berlin thus represent two contrasting cases with extreme variabilities in regard to community magnitude as well as activist milieus. Community size was initially selected as a point of comparison because of how it is conventionally known to influence the capacity of people to mobilize (Müller-Funk, 2016; Shertzer, 2016). The bigger the

community, the more organized actors and activists strive to create spaces for expression and mobilization, while smaller communities might have to look for alternative grounds to bring forward their claims (Quinsaat, 2016). In my study of activist trajectories, I included community size as a point of differentiation between the contexts in which I wanted to examine activist trajectories, without accounting for the singular role of size per se, but for its implications for community embeddedness, that is the presence and formation of activist milieus and networks. As I study activism from the individual perspective, I focus on those micro aspects through which I operationalize the ways in which larger contextual features such as community embeddedness can influence activist trajectories.

Besides theoretical justifications, the role of convenience must be emphasized in the selection of cases. Working at a Norwegian university meant a greater accessibility to Syrians living in Oslo. Including voices from exile contexts with small communities has also been important for shedding light on an unexplored case, thus contributing to generating new insights on the study of activist trajectories. On the other hand, my choice of Berlin was affected by having written my master's thesis on the reception of Syrian newcomers within the Arab communities in Berlin and the tensions it caused. Themes regarding activism, the uprising, and politics emerged during my interviews and conversations with the Syrians I met, which increased my interest in the subject. This provided me with key contacts that proved fruitful later when I started recruiting informants for my research.

Entering the Field

For Oslo, I conducted fieldwork between late June 2018 to February 2019. As I was based in Bergen, I went on four field trips to Oslo during which I conducted 14 interviews and gathered participant observations of selected events. For Berlin, I spent 4 months of fieldwork between March and June 2019. During that time, I managed to conduct 20 interviews, in addition to informal conversations and participant observations gathered through attending a more diverse range of events and protests. All the interviews were conducted in Arabic.

In gathering the interview data, I relied on purposive sampling criteria for the selection of interviewees. This sampling strategy was chosen to ensure that the data gathered answers to the key questions and the main topic of the study (Ritchie et al., 2003). Since this research makes use of the uprising of 2011 as a starting point for studying the activist trajectories of

Syrians, candidates for interviews had to have some experience in mobilizing for the uprising. Variations were to be discovered later during the interviews, but what mattered most was that potential interviewees shared a history of involvement in the movement.

Second, my initial research design privileged people who experienced and participated in the uprising from inside Syria. However, during my fieldwork in Oslo, I was constantly pointed to people who were already living in Oslo prior to the uprising. This is because they were amongst the ones most visible in the community and known for their past engagement. As a result, among the 14 informants recruited for this study in Oslo, seven came to Norway between 1990s and early 2000s, while the seven others arrived after 2011. This is one example of how I needed to adjust my research design according to the challenges and realities I encountered in the field. Interviewing these people, however, added an additional perspective on how the uprising was experienced from outside and how their trajectories could not be delinked from the conditions, escalations, and spillovers of the uprising in Syria even though they engaged from abroad. In addition, some of them traveled to Syria in the time of the uprising and after, and were politically active before coming to Norway. As such, their experiences are much more complex to be divided according to inside/outside.

In Berlin, however, I mostly interviewed people who participated in the uprising from Syria. My decision to adhere to this criterion of interviewing people who were active in Syria was essentially motivated by the outcome of my interviews in Oslo. Early on, I noticed that those with experiences in Syria provided thick descriptions of their engagement because it involved more details, and for that I was able to understand and view their narratives and trajectories more holistically than those with experiences from outside. To ensure the generation of rich accounts of experiences with the uprising, and thus how these experiences play a role in shaping activist trajectories, I saw it best to focus on people who were active in Syria for my interviews in Berlin.

To understand the influence of different exile contexts over activist trajectories, I had in mind a key third criterion that I wanted to follow. This criterion specified that interviewees must be engaged in any form of action that relates more explicitly to Syria. At the time, I understood these actions to be performed through taking part in organizations. Inspired by Ragab et al., 2017 and their mapping study of Syrian organizations in Germany, I conducted a small mapping of Syrian organizations and initiatives that could be found in Norway. Because there exists little information about the organizational scene in Norway compared to

Germany, it was important to conduct this mapping to gain an overview of how many organizations are there and the nature of activities being done. I focused my search on the city of Oslo and used Facebook and the Norwegian official registry of businesses and organizations to identify Syrian organizations. I mainly used the keyword 'Syrian' in my search through which 6 organizations were identified. Most of these organizations were found to be either inactive or only active online, with no real structure or existence on the ground. From descriptions available on their websites and Facebook pages, these organizations seemed to focus on humanitarian assistance, community service, and to a lesser degree political advocacy.

Although my research design favored people involved in action targeting Syria and channeled through organizations with specific reference to Syria, this initial mapping helped me approach the field in Oslo with an open mind and adopt a flexible approach regarding whom I could interview. More specifically, I took prior involvement in the uprising as my starting point for recruiting people, which led me to a larger pool of informants involved in different types of action and in different ways. These experiences further shaped how I selected people for interviews in Berlin, where I prioritized prior involvement in the uprising as the key criterion for recruitment regardless of how they are engaging or what they were doing at the time they were interviewed. Even though it was expected to be relatively easy to find people in Berlin who engage with Syria through organizations, I chose to select interviewees the same way I did in Oslo to ensure a systematic approach and to aid with the comparability of trajectories. My experience in Oslo also showed that this criterion can be useful for ensuring that a diversity of trajectories and forms of engagement are captured in the sample, and as a result a deeper knowledge of how activist trajectories unfold. However, it should be emphasized that even though I tried to avoid recruiting people based on how they are engaged, doing interviews in the context of Berlin meant that I ended up interviewing people who are predominantly involved in activism associated with Syria.

Because I did not develop the selection criteria around individuals' backgrounds and characteristics, but rather around involvement in the uprising, my sample does not include people from diverse ethnic, sectarian, and regional backgrounds. In Syria, it has been widely argued and acknowledged both within academia and among political actors that people's experiences of and interactions with the uprising are spatially and regionally situated, and thus may differ according to the intersection of their classed, ethnic, and sectarian positionalities (Fourn, 2018; Ismail, 2018). As such, my sample does not represent the demographic range

found in Syria. Therefore, it should be acknowledged that some voices may have been excluded from my study, especially those whose experiences of activism may have been informed by their geographically and socially situated positions in Syria. As a result, the trajectories presented in this study should not be taken to represent the trajectories of Syrian activists in general, or those residing in Germany or Norway in particular. Nonetheless, the study offers insights into how activist trajectories unfold in time and across different places.

The recruitment process

I followed somewhat similar strategies for recruitment in Berlin and Oslo. First, as I conducted a mapping of organizations in Oslo, I started with contacting people who are engaged in these initiatives via their Facebook pages. This strategy was particularly effective as all the people I contacted welcomed to participate in my research. Second, I also sought out colleagues with networks in Oslo to put me in contact with Syrians who have a history of activism and are willing to participate. Third, I was able to recruit some informants through attending cultural and political events as informal conversations opened the door to knowing about them and whether they have a history of engagement before asking them for an interview. Together, these strategies gave me access to a larger network of people in Oslo through snowball sampling. Most importantly, snowball sampling proved useful in recruiting people who were away from the community and would not take part in organized events. In general, the help of people I had interviewed was crucial for referring me to other key informants who were active in the uprising. Relying on this strategy was also practical as I could not have known who has a history of activism and who does not unless through gatekeepers. This is also given the sensitivity of the topic, which meant that trust was essential to approaching and conducting interviews with these people. Thus, to avoid discomfort and ensure trust, I approached potential interviewees via people whom they already knew and were well acquainted with.

Unlike Oslo, I already had a former network in Berlin from previous research projects I conducted in that context. This network was pivotal in pointing me to informants with a rich history of activism. As spaces for the expression of dissent were far more present and frequently held in Berlin than in Oslo, I was able to approach and recruit people from protests, demonstrations, events, and even informal gatherings that occurred rather spontaneously. I often did so following a simple conversation through which I ensured that I was to interview

people with a history of involvement in the uprising. Thus, a large portion of the interviews was arranged through meeting people in the field. To reiterate, these strategies carried consequences for what kind of people I was to meet and interview. In other words, going to protests and events considered to be political meant that the people I was to run into are largely involved in activism connected to Syria, even though their current activism was not much of a subject of discussion prior to the interview. In many instances, I did not have an idea about whether informants were involved in activism or what kinds of activism would these be beyond, for example, participating or organizing protests.

A limitation that applies to both Berlin and Oslo is that I mostly had access to circles that are considered largely liberal and secular, which exerted a huge influence over who I recruited in my study. I was aware of this limitation the entire time I was in fieldwork. In Berlin, I tried to address this concern by going to protests organized by different people, hoping this could lead me to informants with different ideological orientations and lifestyle. Still, this was not enough to balance out the data. In Oslo, I learned about people from Islamist backgrounds whom I could interview but unfortunately could not reach or gain access to as the people who mentioned them did not feel comfortable to put us in contact with each other. Thus, as my study does not include activists' trajectories from diverse ideological backgrounds, its insights should not be generalized to speak of Syrian activists in general. Yet, it does indeed contribute to our understanding of activist trajectories across place.

As my research focuses on individuals and how their engagement has developed and transformed as they moved to different exile contexts, my aim was to have a sample that is qualitatively rich to allow for an engagement with the complexities of how such transformation occurs. This is characteristic of biographical research that places a huge significance on the thick descriptions that can be produced from the data (Blee, 2016). In this research strand, as sample size is dismissed in favor of depth, a small number of interviews is considered adequate for achieving a deep understanding of individuals' trajectories as we dive deeper into their motivations for their engagement and how this intersects, in being aided or constrained, with different contextual factors. Following this logic, I saw that 14 interviews in Oslo, and 20 in Berlin were enough to help me generate a rich data through which I could develop an understanding of all the different aspects involved in the subject at hand (Hennink et al., 2017), and given the limitations I have highlighted above in terms of being unable to reach people from different ideological backgrounds. I therefore reiterate that my data could have been further enlarged and subsequently deepened to capture a range of experiences had I

been able to recruit people from different backgrounds, but since I faced challenges in the recruiting those people, I considered it sufficient to rely on 34 interviews to capture a segment of experiences, especially as far as activist trajectories are influenced by the contexts of exile.

In-depth interviews

As the topic of study deals with the activist trajectories of individuals, I chose to conduct in-depth interviews. This form of interviewing is known for its ability to capture personal experiences, perceptions, meanings, and interactions within social movements (Della Porta, 2014a). I drew on two different kinds of in-depth interviewing as I progressed in my fieldwork in Oslo. Changing my interviewing methods along the way was impelled by the decision to enlarge my sample and include people who were not part of organizations. For example, as I was initially interested in the experiences of individuals involved in initiatives and organizations associated with Syria, I prepared a set of questions asking about their previous experiences with political activism, their current activities, motivations, their views of the Syrian community in Oslo and so on[1]. These interviews were very structured and directive and followed fixed questions. However, as I began to focus more on prior involvement in the uprising as the guiding criterion for sampling, I switched to a more biographical and life-history kind of interviewing to accommodate different kinds of trajectories. This approach proved far more effective than structured interviews as it elicited thick descriptions and rich elaboration on the part of participants. Most importantly, it allowed for the emergence of connections between motivation and action, capturing the ebbs and flows of activism, and situating individuals' experiences within broader temporalities and contextual transformations (Blee, 2013; Brannen & Nilsen, 2011; Corrigall-Brown & Ho, 2013; Della Porta, 2014b).

For these kinds of interviews, I did not have specific questions but rather key points and themes for guiding the discussion. These points were structured chronologically, dealing with their life before the uprising, their motivations for participating in the uprising, their experiences in the course of the uprising, their experiences after going into exile, and their lives now, including an emphasis on their current activist involvements, choices, experiences, motivations, and reflections. This approach, with its flexibility and openness, allowed people

[1] See interview guide in appendix.

to raise topics they viewed as important to their experiences, which helped uncover surprises in their stories. Following a timeline also encouraged them to take charge of their own narratives, guiding them in the direction they saw fit.

At the start of each interview, I would begin with an opening question, asking people to introduce themselves and how their lives went about before the uprising. For a lot of people, it sufficed to start with such a question before they took control of the interview, telling their stories in the form of a trajectory, while I followed with small cues like what happened next, what did you do after that, and so on. While this interview structure worked with the majority of people, it did not work with some people. On such occasions, I was forced to adopt a more structured style of interviewing, formulating the opening themes into questions to ensure an interactive setting to the comfort of participants.

Interviews lasted between one to three hours. The length of the interview depended a great deal on the time of participants, how comfortable they were, and how long they were willing to go. All but one interview was recorded following the prior consent of participants. On that one occasion, I relied on the notes I took during the interview and what I remembered after my meeting with the person. Most of the time people would not have a problem with having the interview recorded, but there were also times when they seemed a bit hesitant. In these situations, I would assure people that they would remain anonymous. In the table below, I provide important descriptive characteristics of interviewees[2].

[2]As I am doing interviews with a very specific group, especially in the context of Oslo, and given the small number of interviews, I chose to provide a table containing the overall characteristics of participants instead of providing information about each participant. This to avoid giving away information that might render interviewees identifiable and violate their anonymity.

Table 2. A summary of interviewees' biographical characteristics

Category	**Number of Interviewees**
Gender	
Women	15
Men	19
Age	
20s	8
30s	18
40s	4
50s	4
Ethnic Background	
Arab	30
Kurdish	2
Palestinian-Syrian	2
Religion	
Sunni Muslim	31
Christian	2
NA	1
City of Origin	
Damascus	14
Aleppo	4
Homs	4
Hama	5
Deir-ez-Zor	1
Idlib	4
Al-Hasakah	2
Time of Arrival	
Before 2011	7
After 2011	27
Geographical Location	
Berlin	20
Oslo	14

Participant observation

As I deal in my study with how individuals' experiences within the exile contexts shape their trajectories and forms of participation, it was important for me to engage in

participant observation to form an idea about the nature of activities and the activist milieus existing in each city. For this reason, I took part in a range of events, some more explicitly political, including protests, demonstrations, and public events, while others were more broadly embedded into the art and cultural scene such as music and dance events, art workshops, and exhibitions. I produced fieldnotes on some[3] of these events that included both descriptions of the setting, the content of discussion and activities, interactions among participants, as well as my personal experiences within these events, my own exchanges with people, and how I made sense and understood these events in relation to the larger context and its implications for activism (Emerson et al.,1995). Observations gathered from these events were crucial to 1) how I made sense of interviews in relation to what I saw in the field and 2) how I developed my understanding of the exile contexts and what it constituted and implied for engagement. Such observations affected to a great extent how I read, approached, and interpreted the data later in the analysis, without necessarily including them systematically in the analysis but rather as a background to it.

First, the protests and demonstrations I attended in Berlin involved dimensions of performance, emotions, and contestations that were closely shaped and reshaped by the situation in Syria. These dimensions were linked in some instances to how participants talked about their activism in the interviews. For instance, at my time in Berlin, Abdul Baset Al-Sarout, a very important revolutionary, yet controversial, icon died in a battle against regime forces. The people that I happened to interview around this time were deeply emotionalized by his death. As a result, paying specific attention to the responses triggered by his death either in the rallies organized to commemorate his memory or in online commentaries allowed me to make sense of how informants act within the context, while understanding their motivations for continuing activism on behalf of Syria.

Second, observations were also critical to gaining a deeper understanding of the particularities of each context and its characteristics. For example, in Berlin, I noticed that activist circles are much more exclusive, involving people with uncompromising attitudes against the regime in Syria and a stronger identification with the revolution. In Oslo, events and spaces seemed to be more inclusive of all Syrians interested in contributing and participating, regardless of their political standing on the regime or how they feel about the revolution or whether they are at all engaged in activism. These observations influenced my

[3] As I took part in a lot of events in Berlin, I could not take notes of every event I attended, but only those that I thought contributed to my understanding of the environment.

understanding of how interviewees interpreted their capacity to act in such contexts with such circles, especially in the context of Oslo. In particular, these observations made me view the context in Oslo as perhaps more prone to encouraging community-building efforts as a common non-conflictual ground of mobilization, which was later confirmed in analysis.

Data Analysis

I started the analytical process getting myself familiar with the data through listening to interview recordings, transcribing interviews, and reading interview transcripts in their final written form (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This initial phase of the analysis was conducted while still in the field doing interviews and generating fieldnotes based on participant observations and informal conversations. These fieldnotes were not incorporated in the analysis, but were essential to my understanding of the field and also helped inform certain entry points to the interview data and validate emerging themes.

I transcribed the data entirely in Arabic and translated only the parts that were inserted in the articles. I made a conscious choice not to transcribe the interviews in English because I wanted to stay true as much as possible to the informants' statements and expressions while coding the data. I believe that translating the transcripts would have limited my understanding of the material in this phase, and thus affected my analysis. In particular, if I readapted original utterances to fit the language of translation, I would have risked getting many of the meanings lost in translation (Gawlewicz, 2016). As a result, I kept the data in the original language, while of course made sure to generate the codes in English.

I followed the coding process of Charmaz's constructivist grounding theory in the analysis of my data. Grounded theory is usually used to generate theories and concepts 'grounded' in the empirical material (Charmaz, 2006, p. 2). Yet, I did not use grounded theory for the purpose of developing theories from the data, but rather for its detailed, step-by-step coding process which can be employed for analyzing thick descriptions generated by in-depth interviews. In doing so, I mainly used grounded theory as an analytical technique and not a comprehensive research strategy. This meant, for example, that the process of data analysis was constantly brought in dialogue with relevant literature, and thus never followed a linear path, while in grounded theory it is often emphasized that the researcher should maximize their distance from preconceptions prior to analyzing the data. Yet, I found line-by-line coding in grounded theory as an adequate strategy for topics that involve processual aspects, including fluctuations, progressions, ruptures, allowing the researcher to understand

individuals' choices and the meanings ascribed to these choices (Charmaz, 2006). This is particularly considered well-suited for studying aspects of social movement research such as emotions, experiences, etc. (Mattoni, 2014) that are at the core of my study.

In line with this process, I started assigning codes to the fragments of the data. After initial coding, I moved to axial coding where I started looking at the data as a whole, sorting and combining codes into broader categories, while linking these to relevant theories and concepts as I progressed in my fieldwork and analysis. Atlas.ti was used throughout the analytical process to organize the data, develop categories, and identify emerging themes.

Epistemological Reflections

One of the main concerns that has been always voiced by scholars in relation to personal narratives is its questioned validity and accuracy (Weiss, 1994). This is particularly the case for interviews that involve remembering and reflecting on the past. Participants may not be able to recall past events accurately. Their stories may lack consistency. They may tell these events through their perceptions of the present instead of reporting how it was lived exactly (Reissman, 2001). Their narratives of how they witnessed major political events may be viewed as imposed reconstructions of reality (Polletta, 1998). As past experiences constitute a fundamental part of my study through which activist trajectories are interpreted and understood, these questions represent relevant epistemological concerns and challenges.

The people I spoke with varied dramatically in their abilities to retrieve memories about their participation in the uprising. Some remembered details with incredible vividness and clarity, ready by the moment they were asked to pour out and relay their experiences. Others, however, were quite generic in their responses and had troubles remembering. The first example particularly applies to both people with traumatic experiences and those with cherished memories of the uprising. Aside from fallible memory and accuracy issues, as Reissman (2001) argues, it is not the researcher's responsibility to fact-check, but rather to understand narratives in context. Personal narratives are not only important because they offer a window into the past worlds of individuals, but because they allow us to understand the present through the way past experiences are emphasized or minimized in the process of narration (Reissman, 2001). In short, we learn a great deal about people's present and current positions through how the past is told and framed.

I draw on these insights in taking an interpretivist approach to activist trajectories and its contextualized understanding of social phenomena (Willis, 2012). I treat past experiences not as accurate representations of the past, but rather as reframed within the context of narration and in relation to people's realties. Thus, my research approaches these narratives as context dependent. For example, when people were asked to tell me about their participation in the uprising, many spoke fondly of their memories of the uprising and/or with outrage and sadness over the violence they endured. Instead of treating these expressions as independent from people's current activism or the practices in which they are engaged, I interpreted them as discursive acts of repositioning by which people evoked their experiences in a way that justified and spoke to their present situation. Treating past experiences as emergent and contingent in the context of narration enabled me to forge a better connection between these experiences and their experiences in exile and how the intersection of both plays a key role in shaping activist trajectories.

Positionality

Feminist traditions stress that knowledge is never objective, but situated and embodied and that researchers, with their positionalities in the field and the particularities that shape their encounters with research participants, are bound to produce a certain kind of knowledge (Haraway, 1988). This approach encourages the cultivation of self-reflexivity throughout the research process from the moment we enter the field to the phase we start interpreting the data. Discussions that illuminate reflections about the researcher's positionality in migration studies argue that encounters with research participants are shaped by relationally complex intersections that never place the researcher as fully insider or outsider to the community being studied (Carling et al., 2014; Nowicka and Ryan, 2015). Outsiders may find points of entry to the community based on shared experiences in other aspects rather than nationality, while insiders by nationality may feel distanced because of their classed resources, age, gender, or else. Researchers can assume different positions in relation to their research interlocutors based on a myriad of identities and experiences.

The category 'insider by proxy' can best describe my positionality in the field. For example, the researcher can be from a migrant group other than the one being studied. Sharing the experience of being immigrants or children of immigrants can foster a sense of communality between the researcher and research participants (Carling et al., 2014). My

background as an Egyptian, an immigrant, and Arabic speaker positioned me as an insider by proxy. For example, being from a country that also went through the experience of revolt was welcomed by some of my participants, stressing how they learned from the Egyptian experience when they were encouraged to revolt. Assuming that I share the experience of taking part in an uprising and being aware of the realities of living under repression, the participants were encouraged in many instances to reflect deeply on their past experiences and to provide detailed accounts of their participation. This may have come from the understanding that I would understand their experiences having experienced something not quite the same but akin to what they had been through. Being an immigrant may have also encouraged participants to share their views openly about how it is like to be active in the Norwegian or German contexts.

There were also moments when I was perceived as an outsider. To illustrate this point, I will use an excerpt that I wrote in my fieldnotes diary when I was trying to recruit a potential informant:

Today, I felt a bit uncomfortable being challenged by the potential informant when they criticized, although politely, my research focus on the experiences of participation in the uprising and how it is a bygone moment that does not define or reflect the realities of Syrians any more. My outsidedness manifested in my being challenged. Telling me to focus on something else meant that I was being viewed as an outsider, that I do not know enough about the situation because I am not Syrian, and thus I 'should' be advised what to research (Oslo, June 2018).

My role and positionality as a researcher was not viewed very favorably by a few participants. In particular, Syrians received requests for interviews all the time from researchers wishing to study their experiences of integration or mobilization. To be asked for yet another interview by another researcher, the participants expressed their frustration at being a constant subject for research and discussion. I had to position myself differently in this case, as someone wishing to study another angle of their lives and experiences. Also, there were concerns that being from a different background meant that I might not have the sufficient knowledge to research a topic of that complexity or understand the realities of Syrians as being activists and refugees who had horrific experiences. I had to capitalize on my positionality as someone coming from the same region to assure participants and address their

concerns and mistrust. These different examples reveal how my positionality shifted constantly in fieldwork, affecting my access to participants.

Ethical Considerations

The data included in this study has been produced and generated in line with the research guidelines laid out by the Norwegian National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and Humanities (NESH). The research was conducted following the approval of the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) and its recommended measures regarding transparency, anonymity, and confidentiality. In the following paragraphs, I address the ethical considerations involving research with activists in exile, including the question of anonymity and security risk and triggering traumatic experiences.

Anonymity and security risk

Ensuring the anonymity of research participants was particularly an uneasy task for a number of reasons. Dealing with activist biographies meant that certain biographical details mattered for understanding activist trajectories. Disclosing these details increases the risk of disclosing the identity of participants. These questions are further complicated by the fact that my research involves interviews with a very specific group, first as Syrian, second as activists, and third as residing in very specific locations that have to be identified and specified for activist trajectories to be understood and for the differences between the exile contexts under study to be accounted. In the case of Oslo, the risk of exposure is even higher due to the small number of people with an activist past, the small size of the community, and the visibility of people involved in activism. Thus, protecting the anonymity of participants while not undermining the analysis dependent on the presentation of rich data was a serious challenge. To deal with this issue and to limit the potential of having the identity of participants exposed, I deliberately altered or left out specifics of individuals' identity whenever it seemed irrelevant to mention (notably gender and city of origin) in the context of research. Meanwhile, I made sure to give pseudonyms to all participants.

In the case of Syrian activists, keeping the identity of participants confidential is not just about ensuring their right to privacy, but there are also potential security risks involved.

Doing activism in exile does not mean that activists are immune to risk in comparison to those active in authoritarian or conflict settings (Shahidian, 2001). It has already been documented how the regime in Syria enforced its repression transnationally against its opponents by harming or at least creating the perception of potentially harming the families of activists who are still remaining in Syria (Jörum, 2015; Moss, 2016a). A few times this concern was raised in interviews and how some participants feared for the safety of their families in Syria or acknowledged living in fear as a price that they have to pay for their activism. It is also widely acknowledged that in countries with significant refugee populations and ongoing mobilization, the activities of activist communities are closely monitored by institutions and networks working for the regime in Syria. Even in Oslo where the regime does not have an embassy that can be deployed as a tool of surveillance, I had some of my participants telling me that the regime has eyes there. These circumstances point to how using anonymized data is crucial in the context of research on activism in exile.

Triggering traumatic experiences

Another ethical dilemma connected to my research is the sensitive nature of the topic. A topic is considered sensitive judged by its potential consequences or the costs it poses for participants (Lee & Renzetti, 1990). The security risks that have been highlighted already allude to the costs posed by participation in research. This is further compounded by the interview process itself and how it might trigger traumatic experiences. In the context of interview, remembering and recounting personal events and experiences may bring back memories that are painful and emotionally distressing (van Liempt & Bilger, 2018). This is particularly the case for refugees and activists alike, as they were exposed to harrowing experiences in their countries of origin, during the act of migrating itself, and upon arrival in the countries of destination. Navigating interviews with activists while avoiding the risk of re-traumatization is therefore no easy task.

As I specified in the section on the interviewing process, my questions were quite generic, inspired by the biographical method that allows activists to take an active role in shaping their narratives. In this way, not only did I want to give my participants the space to articulate their experiences freely and to bring up whatever experiences they deem relevant to activism, but I also wanted to avoid the risk of retraumatizing them by bringing those experiences back to the interview. However, almost all my interviewees, except a few,

referred in one way or another to the traumatic experiences they endured while undertaking activism. Some were very detailed, while others glossed over the specifics of their experiences. While I expected this to happen, I never expected the intensity that accompanied the narration process. A significant number of my interviewees were overtaken by emotions that manifested either mildly or strongly as they were talking about their experiences. Whenever the process appeared to lead to a distressful reaction from my participants (tears, trembling voices, a sense of heaviness), I made sure to pause the interview and comfort them, after which we would take a break and talk about something else.

Therefore, while I tried to minimize this risk, it was difficult to avoid it completely, not to mention that engaging in a lengthy description of these traumatic experiences was sometimes a matter of expressing their identity as activists. For one, this placed them in a position of power, as they reexperienced a version of themselves as people who took risks and sacrifices in the realization of a better world (Rogers, 1987). As such, it may have been a source of empowerment and healing for them. I had a few participants telling me after the interview how they never articulated themselves the way they did in their encounter with me, as they were given the opportunity to reflect again on their participation in the uprising and why it was necessary for them to withdraw or keep engaged. In the context of Oslo in particular, three people expressed their appreciation for being approached for their role in the uprising rather than because they are refugees who are being asked for their experiences of integration. As they were tired of being reduced to refugees, they appreciated having the space to talk about a topic where they could assert their agency as people who took part in the uprising and made it happen under exceptional circumstances. Although one has to remain mindful of the risks involved with interviewing traumatized groups, it is equally important to emphasize the good that can emanate from these encounters and the benefits it can hold for the participants in terms of being validated for their history and feeling empowered.

5. Summary of Articles

This section provides a summary of each of the three articles that encompass this thesis and how each contributes to answering the overarching question of how Syrians' activist trajectories have unfolded across time and place. In each article, I adopt a dual focus, unpacking elements of time and place through analyzing the interplay between participants' past experiences of activism and the mobilizing structures of the exile contexts under study. The articles follow a sequence, where Article I draws on the cases of Berlin and Oslo together, setting the scene for each of the other articles to address each context individually and on a deeper level. While the primary aim of this section is to summarize each article, I will also focus on linking between all of them, while showing how in complementarity and sequentially they answer the main question of this thesis.

Article I:

Drawing on the 34 in-depth interviews conducted for this study, Article I examines the ways that Berlin and Oslo can be understood to have impacted the activist trajectories of participants. While most participants in Berlin are involved in organized action on behalf of Syria, this was not the case for most people interviewed in Oslo. The article unpacks the root of this divergence by following participants' trajectories chronologically from revolution to exile, paying specific attention to narratives about participation in the uprising and activists' interactions with their environments in exile. Theoretically, I draw on the concept of emotional resonance that builds on an interlinkage between memory and space, using memory as a category for describing individuals' experiences of past activism, while space for conceptualizing structures of mobilization and locating these in the presence of activist networks and sites for protests.

In the article, I underline the importance that the differences in the structures of mobilization between Berlin and Oslo have played in creating different environments for participants' experiences of past activism. In specific, the participation experiences that activists accumulated from the past left them with particular emotional needs that in the different environments of exile were met differently. The participants in Berlin highlighted how their participation in the uprising in Syria were marked by pleasurable experiences, along with nurturing a feeling in the rightfulness of their action. Upon exile, these experiences

translated into feelings of guilt and estrangement, as activists' ties with Syria and people on the ground were interrupted. In the spaces offered by Berlin, by going to demonstrations and connecting with other activists with shared grievances, participants were able to procure feelings of stability and balance, renewing their commitment to activism on behalf of Syria. In contrast, participants in Oslo placed more emphasis on having experienced activism negatively, associating it with futileness, while looking in protests and connections with activists and dissidents for feelings that can counter their predominant sense of hopelessness. The characteristics of these spaces, as ones they saw with low turnout and divisions, failed to impel the desired effect in them, encouraging their disengagement.

The article locates the (dis)engagement of activists across the two contexts in the different abilities of spaces of activism in Berlin and Oslo to resonate with the emotional needs of activists. It demonstrates that the quality of these spaces played a key role in shaping the extent to which exile contexts pushed for different interpretations in the worthiness of action in exile as activists looked back on their history.

Article II:

As established by article I that the majority of study participants in Berlin continue to engage in action on behalf of Syria, the endeavor of article II was to identify the ways in which they enact their continued commitment. Therefore, this article focuses on a subset of the data, namely the 20 interviews made in Berlin. Prevalent among the participants of Berlin was the tendency to take part in various lines of work. In other words, to do humanitarian work, along with advocacy and development-oriented, which I theorize as multifaceted engagement. Article II examines why is this the case and how the context of Berlin aids with this level of submersion. Drawing on the literature of repression and movement socialization, the article explores how experiences of mobilizing under repression in the context of Syria can be understood as relevant to the participants' patterns of engagement in exile.

The article reveals an intimate connection in the accounts of activism between the past and present and how activists talk about their participation between home and exile. Back in Syria, activists stressed how they had to engage in different forms of action in order to respond to repression. In doing so, they emphasized how independence from organizations was necessary to enforce this kind of extended engagement. In such circumstances, activists

also stressed that there were benefits to this level of submersion in terms of how it provided them with the space to learn in the absence of normality. Moving to exile, activists were found to continue to participate in different forms of action in order to make an impact, how they still prefer independence from organizations to keep in line with their preferences for action, and how activism continues to occupy a place of an educational value in their lives. The positionality of Berlin as one where the community is embedded through networks, organizations, and collectivities is argued to have enabled this mode of participation to take root in such an environment.

These findings demonstrate that experiences of mobilizing under repression assumed a socializing role in the lives of activists, introducing them to certain modes of participation that stayed with them as they moved to exile and to contexts that were favorable in their conditions to allow for this kind of participation to thrive. The article draws attention to the nature of experiences that can be created under conditions of repression and how these can have effects of different nature on activists, highlighting the positive influence of such experiences on commitment to activism.

Article III:

Article III is guided by the same endeavor of article II, except that the aim here is to unpack what constitutes disengagement. What does it mean when activists do not engage in action on behalf of Syria? Moreover, what do activists do when they live in contexts that can be characterized as small, judging by its Syrian community size and the infrastructure it has in connection to their cause? Focusing on the case of Oslo and on 14 interviews, the article shows the variety of ways that activists can continue to be committed, but to different causes and to the service of different aims. The article draws on the framework proposed by this study more explicitly, combining the biographical consequences of activism studies with an opportunity structure approach to shed light on the ways that past experiences of activism within the uprising can be anchored in such a small exile context.

The article shows that people reworked their past experiences in ways that spoke to the context of Oslo and its conditions. First, I found that some participants resorted to causes revolving around their identities as ethnic and sexual minorities. I analyzed their experiences through an inductively developed concept I called identity-based repositioning through which

I looked at how people who engaged in the uprising in the past as well as in causes related to their identities shifted their engagement over the time in favor of their identities while decoupling from activism considered anti-regime and in connection to Syria. I demonstrate how they were enabled by the established solidarity infrastructures of their causes in the context of Oslo to enforce this detachment. Second, other participants resorted to arenas of civic engagement and community support. They wanted refugees to learn how to lead a better life, volunteer in different activities, and advance in their education. Their narratives seemed to suggest that they were inspired by certain values inculcated by the uprising, including belief in the importance of empowerment, dialogue, and solidarity and by skills derived from previous participation. The state of their Syrian community as yet unestablished in Oslo and the salience of integration narratives encouraging participation in localized manners directed their effort and attention to these arenas.

The article demonstrates how participation trajectories can evolve in small contexts of exile in ways that favor locally embedded forms of participation, while providing a nuanced account of what disengagement means. It highlights the role that continuity can play in the transfer of ideals and skills embedded in previous experiences to new arenas of engagement.

7. **Concluding Discussion**

The research question guiding this thesis is *how Syrians' activist trajectories have unfolded across time and place?* In answering this overarching question, I argue that an understanding of activist trajectories cannot be achieved except through the inclusion of both temporal as well as contextual aspects. I also argue that experiences of mobilizing under repression can contribute to the political socialization of activists by fostering specific modes of participation later in life. Moreover, I show how past experiences of activism should count in discussions about integration. The experiences of Syrians as massively marked by repression, revolution, and war, displacement and exile, and heightened integration discourses make it necessary to highlight the impact that such aspects had in shaping the unfolding of their trajectories. Thus, the present study have important theoretical and empirical implications. In this last chapter, I will discuss these contributions and relate them to the research objectives and the identified research gaps. After that, I will end the chapter with some suggestions for future research and policymakers.

Movements do not exist in a vacuum. Social movements scholarship has been aware of how much the environments in which movements operate is important in influencing every aspect of their existence (McAdam, 1996; Meyer, 2004). But as far as the individual is concerned, there has not been sufficient engagement with the possibility that context might be just as important for individuals as it is for movements (Bosi, 2019). Recent arguments have been convincingly made in favor of contextualizing individuals' engagement, as their agency in negotiating these engagements cannot be fully understood without accounting for their structural positions within the contexts in which they live (Fillieule and Neveu, 2019). In the context of this study, what these arguments reveal is that we cannot understand the extent to which past experiences inform trajectories except when they are complemented by an understanding of structural conditions. As people move to exile, the conditions in which they anchor their participation also shift, lending some legitimacy to these arguments as in exile activists are scattered across different contexts with different structures. One of the objectives of this thesis was thus to study individuals in context, supporting calls for contextualization, while crystalizing the contextual elements that factor in shaping activist trajectories.

In line with this objective, I chose to engage in a comparison between Berlin and Oslo as cases that demonstrate differences in their structures of mobilization, reflecting different states and embeddedness for their resident Syrian population. I draw on an opportunity

structure approach (Tarrow, 2011) to identify and locate the ways through which contexts of exile can exercise influence over trajectories. Based on this, I move to addressing two insights that were enabled by a contextualized approach to activist trajectories before I elaborate later on how I address the other research objectives raised by this study and the conceptual contributions I add to the literature.

The first insight, perhaps a most obvious one, is that exile contexts different in structures for mobilization can contribute to shaping activist trajectories in direction as well as intensity, enabling those with dispositions and needs for continued engagement on behalf of Syria to do so, while those with doubts around this kind of participation to disengage. My contribution lies in showing how this occurs by demonstrating that spaces for activism, in the form of networks and sites for protests, in Berlin and Oslo responded differently to the emotional needs of activists. The characteristics of these spaces, as ones marked by scarcity in the context of Oslo, and by density in the context of Berlin, had different effects on individuals' rationalizations for engagement. We see how individuals in Oslo were encouraged to disengage from action on behalf of Syria based on the inability of these spaces to displace their hopelessness and deep-seated belief in the futility of action. In Berlin, these spaces contributed to activists' emotional journey of healing by minimizing their feelings of guilt and estrangement through offering avenues of connection with Syria, thus consolidating their commitment to Syria. My participants' narratives thus complicate the factors implicated in influencing their trajectories.

The second insight is that the ways that participation experiences are embedded in exile are shaped according to the specificities of exile contexts. Where there are structures of support in exile, past experiences are embedded in ways that mimic participation in the past, while in the absence of such structures, these experiences are reworked in alternate forms of participation that fit into the context. We see how community embeddedness in Berlin supports the anchoring of past engagements and the ideals that emanate from them without much adjustment due to Berlin's positionality that with its networks and the community's level of organization in that context allows activists to pursue engagement however they want and according to the way they have been socialized by conditions of repression in the past. On the other hand, the structures of mobilization in Oslo, manifesting in the state of the Syrian community as unestablished, the apparent fragmentation in the spaces that can be considered political, the existence of solidarity infrastructures in support of other causes, and the salient culture of volunteerism that expect individuals to be involved in civic engagement, allow only

for the incorporation of past experiences into new projects aligned with these structures. This highlights how participants had to deal with their past experiences through different strategies, with adjustment and adaptation in Oslo and persistence and replication in Berlin.

This key difference between the unfolding of trajectories in the two contexts has the implication of illuminating how past experiences transmit and crystalize as activists decide in favor of (dis)engagement within and in response to the conditions of exile contexts. Whereas continuity can be understood as a key channel in the transmission of past experiences when activists choose to disengage, it is the experiential aspect of being exposed to certain conditions in the past while undertaking activism that might encourage activists to adhere to particular forms of engagement and to the ideals intrinsic to them in exile. Thus, the thesis contends that strategies for negotiating engagement are not navigated in relation to the biography of participants alone, but should be understood as contextually dependent and place specific.

These findings contribute to research on processes of persistence and disengagement (Accornero, 2019b; Bunnage, 2014; Corrigall-Brown, 2011, 2012; Fillieule, 2010; Sawicki and Simeant, 2010). By paying attention to individuals' interactions with the structural conditions of their contexts of exile, while maintaining a focus on how their experiences of past participation are accommodated and embedded in such contexts, we are able to gain an extended view into why some individuals are motivated to continue activism as they move into exile while others are not. Echoing recent calls in the importance of contextualizing individuals' engagement (Bosi, 2019; Fillieule and Neveu, 2019), I argue that we must be careful not to ignore these environments if we are to have a nuanced understanding of how activist trajectories unfold across time and place and how biographical outcomes manifest over time according to the specificities of these environments.

The thesis also contributes with a framework for systematically analyzing the role of place in influencing activist trajectories. Inspired by work of diaspora mobilization and migrant transnationalism (Koinova 2017; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2002), I argue that an opportunity structure approach can be utilized in unpacking the specific ways that exile contexts can impact these trajectories. This approach is essential in illuminating why population size matters for mobilization (Müller-Funk, 2016; Shertzer, 2016), in terms of how it has implications for the level of organization of a community within a specific context and its density of networks in host contexts (Fennema and Tillie, 1999; Jacobs et al., 2004;

Michon and Vermeulen, 2013; Vermeulen and Berger, 2008; Tillie 2004). These were used to demonstrate how Berlin and Oslo are characterized by different degrees of community embeddedness and to empirically foreground this embededness in the existence of networks, sites of protests, and established access points for participation in organizations and collectivities.

Integration narratives are also important for individuals' engagement (Guarnizo et al., 2003; Østergaard-Nielsen 2002; Quinsaat, 2019). This particularly applies to the case of Oslo, where many participants conformed to the culture of volunteerism in Norway and its normative dimensions that measure integration by level of participation in local arenas. Drawing on activists trajectories made it possible to recognize the role that an aspect like integration narratives can have in shaping engagement and how it can be considered an opportunity for extended engagement when existing structures do not seem to support engagement in favor of Syria. An opportunity structure approach thus adds to our knowledge of how activist trajectories might unfold in uncharted territories like small contexts of exile (see Müller-Funk, 2020; Quinsaat, 2016).

Beyond place and its effects, one of the important objectives of this study was to shed light on participation experiences beyond liberal and democratic contexts (McAdam, 1988a, 1999; Corrigall-Brown, 2011, 2012). By focusing on experiences lived within the context of repression, the study further contributes with providing a wider perspective on how trajectories might unfold in light of these accumulated experiences. Although liberal governments can exercise some degree of repression depending on the movement mobilizing, it is not on the same scale of what happened in a context like that of Syria, where arrest, torture, forced disappearances, and indefinite imprisonment were intrinsic to the work of activists, while mass killings, ariel bombardment, and starvation were part of everyday life in opposition-controlled areas.

Article II tackles this important aspect and shows how experiences of mobilizing under repression had far-reaching consequences, and even had an impact on the engagement of participants in Berlin. It points to how participants' engagement in multiple activities, their organizational independence, and learning from activism can be traced back to experiences lived in Syria. By showing how experiences of repression played a key role in fostering specific modes of action among participants in Berlin as well as specific ideals as to how action should be enacted, I argue that it is important to understand experiences of repression

as part of movement socialization. It is thus essential to draw a distinction between liberal and repressive contexts when studying their impact on activist trajectories.

A final and core objective of this study was bring attention to Syrians' past experiences through the study of their activist trajectories that have been ignored by recent research on integration (see Bucken-Knapp et al., 2018; Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2019). The study contributes to this aspect by showing the different ways that experiences of participation in the uprising have been utilized in the formulation of new interests in exile. For example, the thesis shows how participants in Oslo became influenced by the salient culture for civic engagement existent in Norway, that they took ideals and skills they acquired from their participation in the uprising and invested these in projects that are largely embedded within the Norwegian culture. Through learning from their experiences of mobilizing for Syria by incorporating them into new projects, participants in Oslo become entangled in the infrastructures of engagement in their host societies, further contributing to their integration (see Bolzman, 2011; Erdal and Oeppen, 2013; Hammond, 2013). Thus, these findings illustrate why past experiences should be brought into scholarly discussions about integration.

Conceptual contributions

The impact of activism on individuals is an ignored aspect in the literature on social movements which tends to focus on institutional and cultural consequences (Giugni, 2008; McAdam, 1999). My study contributes with theoretical insights to this literature and introduce new ideas that can be used in the study of activist trajectories. First, I extend Pearlman's (2021) term of "organizational refinement" that describes the evolution of mobilization in relation to repression and introduce the term *multifaceted engagement* which I use to describe the engagement of individuals who become involved in several activities at once, including humanitarian action, media, lobbying, protest organizing, etc. My term adds with a perspective on how the relationship between mobilization and repression can be understood on the individual level. I argue that multifaceted engagement is the result of experiencing repressive conditions in the past that have socialized activists into believing that a crisis like that of Syria should be dealt with through an involvement in a variety of activities to be able to make an impact that matches the present level of calamity. By developing this term through

linking participants' narratives of the past and present, I highlight how people interpret activism and enact it across different stages and contexts.

Second, inspired by the literature on conversion which focuses on how individuals move from one cause to the other throughout their activist careers (Corrigall-Brown, 2011; Juhem, 2001; Leclercq, 2012; Tissot, 2005; Willemez, 2004), I develop the concept of *identity-based repositioning* that captures the role of identity and contextual factors in this process. For example, I used this concept to understand how and why people who were engaged in anti-regime activism as well as an activism connected to their identities in the past *repositioned* their engagement later in favor of identity-based activism. This concept helped capture how this process was foregrounded in Oslo in relation to the lack of networks supportive of activism in favor of Syria and the existence of strong infrastructures related to participants' ethnic or sexual identities. Thus, this concept has the potential of observing how overlapping activisms are disentangled from each other over time, and how this disentanglement is negotiated contextually. The concept thus helps uncover another angle into how continuities in engagement are negotiated.

Finally, I add to the conceptual usage of *emotional resonance* (Schrock et al., 2004) and use it comparatively to study activist trajectories. While original conceptualizations focus on the role of social movement framing in the construction of emotional resonance, my study contributes with a contextual perspective on how this process occurs. I use emotional resonance to foreground certain traits in the relationship between mobilization structures and individuals' experiences of activism. Where spaces of activism in exile *fulfill* activists' emotional needs, activists may be able to continue activism, but when such spaces lack such qualities, activists may be motivated to disengage from activism. This concept thus illustrates how contextual conditions creating emotional resonance may shape activist trajectories.

Suggestions for future research and policymakers

My research highlights the different ways that both participation in the uprising and experiences in exile have shaped how Syrians negotiate their forms of engagement in exile. These insights are important not only in relation to the study of activist trajectories over time and across place, but also have larger implications for the engagement of migrants and

refugees in the countries of reception. Below, I discuss the limitations of my study, while suggesting several lines of inquiry for future research.

One of the limitations of this study is its research sample, not in terms of quantity but the perspectives it lacks. As I have acknowledged in the methodology section and the recruitment process of my research participants, my study does not include people from diverse backgrounds, whether regionally or ideologically. While analyzing the data, I have noted the different remarkable ways in which people have experienced the uprising in Syria, not only across cities, but also within cities, towns, villages, and neighborhoods. I did not have the space to accommodate these insights and categorize experiences by city of origin or operation. This is a blind spot for future research to capitalize on, investigating how Syrians' activist trajectories develop not only according to the city of destination and its configurations, as I have done in my research, but also how experiences lived within a specific region or city impact the resources and identities of individuals in ways that leave divergent effects on how they choose to participate in exile. This can contribute to research on the biographical consequences of activism, shedding light on how conditions of engagement in the cities of origin can affect activist trajectories in exile.

Furthermore, as I mentioned earlier, ideologically speaking, most of my sample rests on people who are more secular in their orientation. I have explained in the methodology part of my thesis how this methodological limitation stems from the circles I had access to while doing fieldwork, which were mostly dominated by people of secular backgrounds. As such, future research should strive to include people of Islamist backgrounds, tracing how their activist trajectories have developed, and placing them in comparison with secular activists to compare and contrast if their trajectories converge or diverge. In specific, if the experience of engagement in the revolution led to different biographical outcomes according to the ideological orientation of individuals. Adding perspectives from non-Western contexts can enrich the scholarship on biographical outcomes that have identified outcomes across the political spectrum from left to right (Blee, 2016; Giugni and Grasso, 2016; Linden and Klandermans, 2007) but still lacks insights on political activism embedded in religion.

Second, my study does not draw and benefit from gender perspectives in its analysis of Syrians' activist trajectories. Females constitute almost half of my sample, but I did not draw on a gendered perspective of engagement to explore how activist trajectories might develop differently among women. There are examples in my research where male

participants engaged in self-representations of courage, selflessness, and fearlessness that they drew on to describe their engagement in the past. Some might argue that these are largely masculine understandings of activism that reinforce normative expectations of activists as selfless beings, working tirelessly for their causes (Bobel, 2007). Social movement scholarship has demonstrated how women can feel and do activism differently (Martin et al., 2007), but how this reflects on activist trajectories remains largely underexplored (see Blee, 2016; McAdam, 1992). More attention could be paid to the experiences of Syrian female activists within the uprising and how this can create different perceptions and ways of undertaking activism from male activists, which can immensely contribute to research on the biographical consequences of activism in respect to gender.

Lastly, and in regard to policy implications, my research foregrounds how experiences of activism are an important source of continuity that is essential to integration and an asset through which belonging to the city is negotiated in exile. In a context like that of Oslo or Norway where civic engagement is highly valued and constitutes an important aspect of participation, policymakers should pay attention to the kind of resources that refugees bring with them and how these should be looked upon as of contributory value to their integration. From that perspective, the experiences of refugees originating from countries of conflict should not be dismissed or viewed suspiciously, but should be recognized for their potential value in consolidating their integration, and how they can be drawn upon as resources when individuals try to make sense of their surroundings in exile.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Information sheet

Information for Participants

This is an invitation to participate in a PhD project exploring political mobilization among Syrians in a number of European countries. This study is part of IMEX project '*Imagining and Experiencing the Refugee Crisis*' which investigates the experiences of Syrian refugees and majority populations in Norway and Europe. The study aims at gathering insights into the experiences of political engagement among Syrian refugees in those new contexts.

Please note the following before giving your full consent to participating:

1) Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may at any stage end the interview without giving reason. Of course, this includes passing questions you do not want to answer.

2) The interview will be audio recorded. Indeed, your permission is needed before proceeding with the action. It is important to note that the audio material will be used only for transcription and analysis, and no one else except the researcher in charge will be entitled access to those recordings. All audio files will be deleted upon the submission of the project.

3) Anonymity is guaranteed if you wish to remain anonymous. All names or relevant information that might make it possible to identify participants will be removed. Pseudonyms or acronyms will be used instead. I am bound by an ethical and legal obligation to protect your privacy and right to anonymity.

4) There are no risks involved from participating in this project as established by the confidentiality clause. I will deal with any sensitive information with the utmost of care to ensure your best interests.

5) All interviews will be conducted in Arabic and may last anywhere between 45 minutes to a couple of hours depending on your time as well as level of comfort.

If you have any questions concerning any of these points, please do not hesitate to ask. I am happy to answer all your queries.

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in my research project. Your participation is highly appreciated.

Amany Selim

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Appendix 2. Preliminary interview guide

Interview Guide for Syrian Activists

Introductory Questions:

Can you introduce yourself? [Age, educational/professional background, city of origin, and possibly other elements too that they may wish to add but upon their own choice and without invoking any relevant question on my part].

When did you come to [Country of residence]?

What were your reasons for leaving Syria?

What is your role in the organisation?

Organisation-related Questions: First: Activities and Technicalities

Can you tell me a little bit about the story and process of how and why you came up with this initiative? And how would you identify the organisation?

Can you talk to me in detail about the organisation's membership and composition?

What is the ultimate goal of the organisation? Which issues are you focused on?

What are the core activities of the organisation? And is there a particular kind of activity prioritised?

Why did you choose to focus on these activities in specific? Is there criteria to define that? Do they change over time?

Whom are you targeting by your activities?

How do you engage the Syrian community? What activities are designed specifically for them? And how do you see dialogue in general as a mechanism for engagement?

How do you use social media in respect to your message?

When there is a major event going on at home, how does your organisation react or respond to that?

What is your future agenda and what issues do you plan to address, especially on the long-run?

Questions on Syrian Diasporas:

Can you describe the Syrian community in [Country of residence] in terms of socio-economic, ethnic, and religious composition?

How do you see the community in terms of networks and relations maintained among its members?

Is the community politically engaged and responsive to your activities? How can you explain their engagement/apathy?

What do you think about the role of the diaspora in that regard? Both normatively and in reality?

Do you see a prospect for a strong community? If so, in what ways and in which areas?

Do you think integration politics has any impact on political engagement among diaspora members? For example, do you think it correlates rather positively or negatively with that?

Political Activism:

Do you identify as an activist? How would you understand the term according to your own experience?

Why did you become part of the organisation? In other words, why did you become politically engaged and what was your personal motivation? And what keeps you motivated now that Syria is entering its seventh year of conflict?

Have you been always politically active? If yes, how was it like back in Syria for you and what was the reason behind your engagement?

How did things change for you in terms of political engagement since you've arrived in [Country of residence]? Do you think it changed for the better? Do you perceive its impact as immense?

Did your view regarding certain political concepts or strategies change?

Did your choice of destination have to do anything with your political activism? Or was it rather arbitrary?

Did you have a particular imagination about how your role would be like as an activist in exile? For example, did you expect that your voice will be amplified?

What is your take on being a refugee as well as a political activist? Do you see any relationship between both?

How do you perceive your political activism in terms of gains and risks?

Do you think you will return to Syria? What would motivate you to return?

Questions to end the Interview:

Is there anything else you wish to share?

Would you mind following up with you in the future, if required?

Is there anyone else you think I should speak

Appendix 3: Final interview guide

General themes with a timeline focus

The person's background and their upbringing.

Their life before 2011 and how and why they became part of the uprising.

Their participation in the uprising and the extent of their involvement and how it developed.

Their life in exile and when they left and why they came to their specific locations.

Description of their involvement in exile and what they do.

Articles

Article

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"It gave us a thrill": Emotions, exile, and narratives of (dis)engagement among activists from Syria

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Abstract

Building on qualitative interviews with Syrians who participated in the anti-regime movement of 2011 and now live in Berlin and Oslo, the article unpacks the ways that these contexts affected participants' decision to continue or disrupt their activism in exile. By analyzing their activist trajectories from revolution to exile and drawing on the concept of emotional resonance, I reveal how Berlin and Oslo provided participants with different environments when dealing with their past experiences of participation. I show that while the mobilizing structures of Berlin provided spaces for activism that resonated with the emotional needs of activists, enabling them to continue activism on behalf of Syria, the mobilizing structures of Oslo failed to produce spaces that could respond to activists' needs, playing a part in their disengagement there. The article extends the concept of emotional resonance and adds to the study of Syrian diasporas and emotions in the Syrian uprising.

Keywords

Activist trajectories, Berlin, emotional resonance, memory, Oslo, Syrian uprising

Introduction

Emotions were a recognizable part of the Arab uprisings as mass demonstrations reflected anger, joy, and pride (Ayata and Harders, 2018; Coşkun, 2019; Pearlman, 2013). In Syria, emotions did not just play a marginal role but are argued to have been one of the main drivers of the uprising (Pearlman, 2013, 2016). Yet, we know little about the emotional implications of individuals' participation in the uprising after large swathes of activists have been displaced out of the country. Scholars of social movement studies have shown how emotions can enable, consolidate, and disrupt action over time (Gould, 2009; Wood, 2001; Yang, 2000), but few have examined how this occurs across space and different contexts (see Bosco, 2007 for an exception)—how emotions may influence action depending on the political environment in which individuals live. Answering Pearlman's (2013) call to follow what happened to the emotions that ensued from the Arab uprisings, this article looks into the emotional experiences of activism among Syrian activists in exile

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and adds to this emerging scholarship by investigating how emotions of activism travel in *time and space*. I use emotional experiences to refer to experiences of activism that are emotionalizing and laden with long-term emotions.

The article grounds the study of emotions in comparative perspective by examining how emotions influence the evolution of activist trajectories[1] across different contexts of exile. It draws on 34 in-depth interviews with Syrians who participated in the uprising of 2011 and are currently living in two different European cities, Berlin and Oslo. While Berlin is a city with a large Syrian community with access to an established organizational framework and a diverse activist milieu, Oslo is an example of a small-sized community that lacks supporting community infrastructure. Studies of Syrian diaspora activism have demonstrated how active mobilization in favor of Syria arose in host contexts with large Syrian communities and relatively favorable opportunity structures (Khoury, 2017; Moss, 2020; Ragab, 2020). There is less research on how such mobilization occurred or not in other contexts that do not have the same conditions (Selim, 2021). Comparing activist trajectories in two exile contexts of different characteristics, the article brings attention to the role that experiences of past activism may play in why some Syrian diasporas were able to mobilize while others could not.

To this end, I ask in what ways do the different sociopolitical milieus of Berlin and Oslo shape activist trajectories and how past experiences of activism are made relevant within these contexts? To answer this question and unpack the impact of emotions on activist trajectories, I draw on the concept of emotional resonance. Emotional resonance is defined as the "emotional harmony and/or disjuncture between collective action frames and the emotional lives of potential recruits" (Schrock et al., 2004: 61). I use this concept to link between individuals' experiences of past activism and the mobilization conditions of the contexts in which they live and focus on how individuals navigate the emotional weight of their participation memories in the presence of strong or weak networks and protests as spaces for activism in exile. By spaces, I refer to the specific features of networks and protests, looking at the impact of larger structural features such as community size and organizational framework. By memories of participation, I refer to recollections of experiences lived in the past in connection to activism. In particular, I investigate how different mobilization environments can be understood to contribute to different levels of emotional resonance when responding differently to individuals' experiences of participation. Linking memory and space through emotional resonance, I examine how individuals' emotional needs arising from past experiences of activism are supported or denied within the larger contexts of networks and protests in exile.

In the pages that follow, I discuss the social movement research on emotions and present an integrated theoretical framework of memory, space, and emotional resonance to understand how experiences of past action interact with spaces for activism in exile, creating conditions for emotional resonance. This is followed by a background on the contexts of Berlin and Oslo, a section on methods, and my findings in which I will present two activist biographies from each city. Finally, I conclude with new insights on emotions in the Syrian uprising, expanding our understanding of its role beyond the initial moments of mobilization. The article also extends the current conceptualization of emotional resonance by expanding its application to comparisons and suggesting contextual dimensions—spaces for activism in the form of access to networks and protests—as crucial to understanding how emotional resonance works. The article will close off with suggestions on why Syrian mobilization emerged or failed to occur in some contexts and not others.

Emotions and (dis)engagement in social movements

There are numerous theorizations for emotions that are rooted in sociology as well as biology (see Turner, 2009, for an overview). Following work on the sociology of emotions (Turner and Stets, 2006;

Bericat, 2016), I see emotions as "the bodily manifestation of the importance that an event in the natural or social world has for a subject" (Bericat, 2016: 493).

In social movement studies, emotions have traditionally been dismissed as far too constant or irrational to explain action until the cultural turn reintroduced emotions as essential to explaining the rise, continuance, and decline of movements (Flam and King, 2005; Goodwin et al., 2001). Emerging out of cognitive processes based on moral principles, judgments, and normative imperatives, moral emotions such as indignation and outrage over injustice have been particularly emphasized as key to understanding how people are motivated into action and how action is sustained over time (Goodwin et al., 2004; Jasper, 2011). In her study of the armed insurgency in El Salvador, Wood (2001, 2003) observes how resistance was continued out of moral outrage against the government and as a tribute to the forsaken in fighting for the cause. Pearlman's (2016) study of the Syrian uprising makes explicit how people were drawn into action by a sense of obligation at the sight of others enduring heavy repression. In revolutions, moral outrage is generally recognized as an important driver of collective action (Pearlman, 2013; Reed, 2004).

In addition to moral emotions, previous research also points to the role of joy, pleasure, and hope in the sustainment of action (Jasper, 1998; Pearlman, 2013; Reed, 2004). These emotions come to be particularly felt in the course of action as people experience the "pleasurable effects" of having a say through the act of protesting (Jasper, 1998). Such emotions can also arise in situations characterized by extreme violence. Wood (2001, 2003) highlights the role played by pride and increased self-esteem next to moral outrage, while Pearlman (2016) indicates the satisfaction and sense of agency prompted by participation in the uprising. Feelings of solidarity, camaraderie, and unity in sharing and fighting for a cause can cultivate loyalty and belonging among movement participants, which can in turn contribute to continued action (Bosco, 2007; De Volo, 2006; Gould, 2009; Jasper, 2011; Nepstad, 2004; Ransen-Cooper et al., 2018). Activism can be therapeutic for activists grieving loss (De Volo, 2006), a source of well-being under conditions of high risk (Nah, 2021), and an opportunity for self-fulfillment and "emotional achievement" in face of repression (Yang, 2000).

In contrast, there is less research on emotions in disengagement. Jasper (1998) hints at frustration as a potential cause of disbandment. Losing belonging, feeling irrelevant or disposable can also make disengagement seem logical (Kleres, 2005). Among refugees, ambivalence can inhibit and limit possibilities for action toward the homeland (Belloni, 2019). Furthermore, within post-revolutionary contexts, Accornero (2019b) and Matthies-Boon (2017) both argue how such contexts characterized by dashed hopes, undesirable political outcomes, and increased state violence elicit acute feelings of disillusionment, disappointment, and defeat that lead movement actors to retreat from politics. Thus, the stronger the feeling of disillusionment, the more activists are likely to be drawn to the choice of disengagement.

Memory, space, and emotional resonance

This section considers the combined role of memory, space, and emotional resonance in the formation of activist trajectories. Few scholars have examined how memory can influence action (but see Accornero, 2019a; Harris, 2006; Tang, 2021; Zamponi and Daphi, 2014). Accornero's (2019a) work makes a connection between emotions, memory, and activist trajectories, showing how anti-fascist activists perceived their struggle through the prism of the revolution, which affected their activist trajectories in behalf of continued and strengthened engagement. Similarly, Zamponi and Daphi (2014) conceptualize memories as an interpretive framework of reality. In their study of the anti-austerity movement in Italy, Zamponi and Daphi (2014) note that activists mobilize their memories of participation in the global justice movement in continuing and discontinuing certain

practices. Thus, their memories function as a lens through which they evaluate what works and what needs to be changed with their current mobilization.

Inspired by these works, I treat memories as a channel of participation experiences in the uprising. More importantly, I look at how individuals' experiences of past activism create present emotional needs and how these can have an impact on the perception, interpretation, and assessment of action in later stages (Jasper, 1998; Johnston, 2014; Pearlman, 2013). For example, Adams (2003) shows how experiencing being part of a movement may leave a sense of bitterness in its participants later when that movement ends, as in their participation individuals came to experience moments of joy and being part of a community and purpose. As a result, these emotional experiences in movements can lead to the generation of negative emotions of isolation and loneliness for which individuals may seek resolution by joining a new movement. Memories of past action are thus important as far as they are incubators or potential activators of emotional needs that can be important to the decision of (dis)engagement.

In the context of exile, whether these emotional needs can be fulfilled or not depends a great deal on the specific mobilization features of the cities in which participants live. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to activists' interactions within their physical environments. Linking emotions to space, several scholars have studied and conceptualized this dynamic relationship in different ways (Bosco, 2007; Brown and Pickerill, 2009; Guenther, 2009; Ransen-Cooper et al., 2018; Tang, 2021; Whittier, 2001). Whereas some focus on larger contextual aspects of relationships with the state, government institutions, and laws and how these create opportunities and constraints for emotional mobilization (Guenther, 2009; Whittier, 2001), others go down to the micro-level, examining activists' relationships with their physical surroundings and how feelings evoked and suppressed in such environments can foster activism (Bosco, 2007; Brown and Pickerill, 2009; Ransen-Cooper et al., 2018; Tang, 2021). In much of the latter scholarship, space is generally understood to incorporate networks of activists, supporters, and sympathizers (Bosco, 2007), sites of meeting and commemoration (Ayata and Harders, 2018; Tang, 2021), and practices of mourning and celebration (Gould, 2009).

These spaces do not often, however, offer equal levels of empowerment. Schrock et al. (2004) found that support groups could not fully meet the emotional needs of transgendered people, leaving them more susceptible to recruitment by social movement organizations as the latter framed activism to be the solution to their emotional problems. These scholars propose that what explains transgendered people's successful recruitment is emotional resonance—"the *link* between targeted recruits' emotional lives and the emotional messages encoded in SMO framing" (Schrock et al., 2004: 62). This definition is built on the concept of frame resonance, which focuses on how social movement framing, their discourse, values, and rhetoric, connect with targeted recruits and members to ensure their recruitment or persistence (Snow and Benford, 2000). Emotional resonance explores the emotional aspect of framing, analyzing how organizations respond to the emotional needs of members and recruits, potentially offering an emotional resolution to negative feelings of shame, alienation, or powerlessness and/or an enhancement of positive feelings such as solidarity and belonging (Schrock et al., 2004).

In this study, I borrow substantially from emotional resonance in its original conceptualization, but my framework goes a step further as to developing a comparative lens to investigate how different spaces of activism across different contexts of exile may influence (dis)engagement. I examine how participation memories create emotional needs that may be met or left unmet by protests and networks of activists in exile, creating different levels of emotional resonance depending on their strength or weakness, while contributing to (dis)engagement.

Context

There are significant differences between Berlin and Oslo in terms of the population size, migration history, and more importantly mobilization levels and organizational landscape. Below, I briefly address some of these differences.

Germany is Europe's largest recipient of Syrians, with a total population of 867,585 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2022). Although Germany adopts a highly decentralized policy of refugee dispersal (Katz et al., 2016), Berlin is home to the largest Syrian community in Germany, with an estimated number of around 47,075 (Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg, 2021). These numbers are largely attributable to Germany's initial open door policy, which promised protection for asylum seekers irrespective of the Dublin regulation.

Even from before the uprising, Germany was Europe's first destination for Syrian migrants who came for work, studying, or in escape of political persecution. They established their own organizations that prioritized issues of integration and culture and avoided political mobilization. With the eruption of the peaceful movement in 2011, mobilization in Germany was first focused on supporting the uprising, but soon shifted to meeting the increasing humanitarian needs generated by displacement and conflict developments (Ragab, 2017).

The arrival of more activists who experienced the uprising from Syria revitalized the landscape in Germany, re-shifting focus to political issues (Ragab, 2020) including advocacy campaigns and transitional justice (Stokke and Wiebelhaus-Brahm, 2019). For example, capitalizing on the principle of universal jurisdiction, multiple diaspora groups have successfully managed to bring Syrian officers implicated in war crimes before German courts. In addition to humanitarian relief, much of the ongoing mobilization in Germany also became centered on helping and empowering people and organizations inside Syria by funding them and increasing their capacities in the areas of education and media (Ragab, 2020). For example, many of the people I interviewed are active in this arena, with projects extending help to people inside Syria, which also enables them a virtual connection with their cause. Therefore, much of their social media engagement is devoted to coordinating these projects.

Protest activities are also organized regularly and by multiple groups to express solidarity and increase attention to different kinds of political happenings in Syria. For instance, next to the anniversary of the uprising that is commemorated and celebrated by hundreds of participants each year, rallies are often called upon whenever the regime escalates its campaign against a particular area in Syria. These protest repertories and linkages with Syria were enabled upon the networks that were enlarged and formed with the arrival of activists with experiences, resources, and skills from Syria. This wider mobilization might have been also aided by the political ground in Germany that is more established for homeland claims-making (see Koopmans and Statham, 2003).

In contrast, the size of the Syrian community in Norway is small when compared to Germany. According to official statistics, around 39,897 Syrians live in Norway (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2022a), of which 3958 live in Oslo (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2022b). Like Germany, Norway also follows a policy of refugee distribution, which favors the dispersal of refugees all over the country so as to avoid a possible concentration in Oslo.

The community that existed before 2011 did not exceed 1500 people (Tønnessen et al., 2020), which limited possibilities for community mobilization. Nonetheless, when the uprising began, many people started organizing to express their support for the movement in Syria, both in the physical space in Oslo and online. In particular, online mobilization characterized most of the existing efforts at that time. Much of this mobilization quickly waned, however, before picking up again in 2015 as many people coming from Syria sought asylum in Norway, creating a momentum for mobilization. Although such efforts led to the creation of some activities on behalf of the

uprising, it did not endure due to internal disagreements, thus limiting advocacy and the formation of robust linkages with Syria.

Protests and solidarity activities are also not organized on a regular basis, but are rather sporadic and attract fewer participants, reflecting the lack of necessary networks for achieving homeland mobilization. Currently, the activities organized by Syrians in Oslo focus on student life, culture and art, integration, and civic engagement. Much of this mobilization is influenced by Scandinavian traditions and their emphasis on volunteerism and increased participation as a measurement of integration (see Djuve, 2011). Moreover, former activists' online engagement is limited to making comments on timely political happenings instead of grassroots mobilization (see Pantti and Boklage, 2014 for an example). There are thus two distinct landscape for mobilization and activism across the two cities of Berlin and Oslo.

The study

This study is part of a larger research project called "Imagining and Experiencing the Refugee Crisis". It draws on a selection of 34 interviews conducted for a part of this project, looking at how Syrians' trajectories of activism have evolved in exile. In particular, the study aims to examine how exile contexts affect activist trajectories by contextualizing individuals' experiences of past activism and their biographies within the wider contexts of exile and their conditions for mobilization. Therefore, this research employs a "most different case" approach, which means selecting cases based on how different they are in order to examine the particular ways in which different external variables lead to different outcomes (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Thus, the cities of Berlin and Oslo, with their different activist milieus, landscape for mobilization, and Syrian community size, provide contrasting cases as differences in structural features can be used to understand and specify how (dis)engagement occurs in exile.

Informants were selected for interviews based on having a history of participation in the uprising, which I used as a starting point for comparison. By history of participation, I refer to the practices and actions which my research participants named in describing their involvement in the uprising. These include but are not limited to protest organizing, humanitarian activities, reporting news, documenting abuses and so on.[2] I located these individuals through events I attended during fieldwork, through snowball sampling, as well as Facebook browsing. The dataset is diverse both in terms of people's past involvements and current occupations. For those who are still involved in activism related to Syria, some do so through engaging in visible sectors including humanitarianism, development, political advocacy, media, while some others enact their activism in informal ways through protest organizing and fundraising. Those who have disengaged are involved in broader fields of action (see Selim, 2021). In terms of histories of activism, half of the people I interviewed in Oslo are diaspora dissidents who were living in Norway before 2011 and were engaged in anti-regime mobilization from abroad. In Berlin, I mainly interviewed people who were active in Syria before coming to Germany as it became a popular destination for many activists after 2011. The sample thus captures different participation trajectories, from people protesting in repressive settings, to others engaging online or through loose collectivities in their countries of reception. Table 1 below provides a description of the interviewees' characteristics in terms of gender, age, location, and migration time.

Interviews followed a biographical line of questioning (Brannen and Nilsen, 2011) and a timeline focus. I began by asking for a little introduction about their background and why and how informants participated in the uprising. The stories were centered around key events including revolution, leaving Syria, and exile. The intention was to map motivations for participating in the

Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of interviewees.

Category	Number of interviewees
Gender	
Women	15
Men	19
Age	
20s	8
30s	18
40s	4
50s	4
Location	
Berlin	20
Oslo	14
Migration time	
Before 2011	7
After 2011	27

revolution, how such participation progressed and developed throughout the course of the movement, and finally why and in what ways they remain or refrain from being active in exile. In this sense, interviewees were encouraged to share their experiences without too much guidance and take an active part in the narrativization of their biographies. In migration and social movement studies, in-depth interviews are encouraged as a tool of interviewing as it allows individuals to foreground their agency vis-à-vis forceful political events (Corrigall-Brown and Ho, 2013; Eastmond, 2007). In addition, this method allowed thick descriptions of participation memories to emerge. All interviews were conducted in Arabic, which aided in creating a situation where participants felt comfortable to speak, articulate, and elaborate on their experiences. Excerpts used in the article were translated verbatim by the author.

Research with refugees and exiled activists often poses ethical dilemmas (Shahidian, 2001), the most concerning of which is the risk of re-traumatization. These groups go through massive traumas that include experiences of persecution, imprisonment, forced displacement, personal losses, and more. As these groups are asked to share their experiences regarding activism, immigration or else, it is important to ensure that the interviewing methods are designed in a way to reduce the potential of re-traumatization. During interviews, I avoided direct questions that point to any traumatic experiences, but usually started and followed with generic questions that involved cues to how they were generally involved in activism or any activities throughout their activist trajectories. Whenever activists alluded to a traumatic event in their lives and reacted in tears or distress upon remembering those events, I would stop the interview to check for their well-being, after which I would shift the conversation to a different topic. However, some interviewees chose to speak in length about their traumatic experiences, as they are constitutive of their identities and affirming of their decision to stay engaged or leave activism. These instances are often attributed to the readiness of interviewees to come forward about these experiences, as they spent years prior to the interview processing and healing from them (Shahidian, 2001).

Emotions were not part of the original research design of this project. I did not approach the field with the intention of observing and documenting the role of emotions in activism. Yet, emotions emerged in different remarkable ways during interviews that it was hard to ignore its presence and potential influence over trajectories. Some interviewees spoke with trembling voices while

others cried openly while recounting certain life-defining moments in their lives. Some stated directly how they felt and named certain emotions, while others had emotions underlying their tone and speech throughout the interview. These expressions manifested differently across interviews, with some interviewees more emotionalized than others. In particular, those with experiences in Syria seemed more emotionalized than those with experiences from outside, and those who continued activism as even more so than those who have disengaged from activism. These variations warranted a deeper analysis.

I used Atlas.ti to code the data systematically according to the principles of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). In this process, I kept in mind how emotions are culturally constructed, and thus can influence how participants tell their stories about activism (Gabriel and Ulus, 2015; Kleres, 2011). This approach helped me go beyond the surface meanings of the data. For example, when informants described in incredible detail the activities they organized in the early days of and during the uprising, I coded this as an underlying expression of pleasure. With this approach, I proceeded to map emotions onto the trajectory described in each interview from revolution to exile. As I was coding different emotional expressions ranging from pride, excitement, and fear during the revolution to relief and disappointment in exile, it became clear that emotions capture a central and prevalent theme across the entire material and trajectory. Most importantly, I found an important tendency in the data: participants' experiences of activism in the uprising are framed through emotions, indicating its long-term effect and potential role in influencing action over time.

Furthermore, moving to the exile part of the trajectory, I started to notice how certain emotions were being expressed in connection to each of the studied contexts. I started doing a more systematic comparison between the two contexts. In this part of the analysis, I focused on a fewer number of interviews (around 20) to allow for a deeper investigation of the emotional impact of the context. As I was analyzing how participants feel about doing (or not doing activism) in the places they live, the pattern of the difference between the two contexts became very clear and a new analytical perspective was gained: emotional resonance was introduced as a conceptual link between individuals' experiences of past activism and opportunity structures in exile.

Therefore, to best capture the complex position of emotions in the narratives of research participants, I present the data through four biographies. The selected biographies are used to show the intersection of time (previous emotional experiences of activism), and place (exile locations) and display different trajectories. Research on activist trajectories often resorts to this way of presenting empirical data as it best meets its research goals, which is exploring how people's political inclinations, motivations for participation, and paths to (de)radicalization evolve, shift, and change over time (Blee, 2016; Bosi and Donatella, 2012). In this article, the biographies selected highlight important variations in the data. These variations include migration time, genders, and different conditions of engagement, and emotional expressions of varying levels of intensity that summarize the main narratives in the data. In order to ensure participant safety and anonymity, all original names have been replaced with pseudonyms. Also, all identifying information that might render participants known has been removed.

Activist trajectories and emotional resonance in exile

The Berlin cases: strong spaces for emotional resonance

Growing up in a refugee camp in a family that suffered from social exclusion and physical dislocation for generations, Hatim talked in length during the interview about how these circumstances shaped his political consciousness and relationship to authority. With a deep sense of

grievances, Hatim became involved in cultural activism before 2011, and later more actively when the uprising began, doing a range of activities from protest organizing to service provision and media activism. As he continued to mobilize in subsequent years during which the uprising was militarized and violence escalated, Hatim expressed a range of feelings experienced during that time, from persistent outrage in sight of massacres being committed, to hopelessness and incredible sadness in response to the violations committed by rebel factions, and a growing sense of obligation toward people enduring bombing and displacement. As shown in previous research (Pearlman, 2016; Wood, 2001, 2003; Yang, 2000), Hatim also expressed a sense of exhilaration, pleasure, and empowerment in being able to defy the regime and live the extraordinary, even amid great violence:

> This clamor and the moment we were living in created a feeling or even released chemicals in the body akin to pleasure, which made us not think about the future. It made us experience this state without fear, without being concerned with the future. When you live in the moment of "now," it directs you. When Homs was under siege and there were a lot of problems there, I tried as hard as I could to go there. Human beings are supposed to have this instinctive avoidance of danger, but to throw yourself at danger is difficult to understand. To throw myself into a besieged area or be on the verge of starvation, none of that makes sense but it happened. It gave us a thrill.

Hatim almost describes a state of ecstasy derived from enacting and realizing oneself (Wood, 2001; Yang, 2000) and an exhilaration in being "swept away" by the "revolutionary state" without much reflexivity or minding of the dangers involved at the time. This expressed sense of pleasure was so dominant in Hatim's narrative of how he experienced activism.

After the situation became more complicated over time with rising rebel factionalism and foreign intervention, Hatim started to feel estranged from the surroundings and the movement and lost the sense of belonging that was fueling him to operate under such conditions. In response to the estrangement he felt, Hatim decided to leave Syria and go to Germany. His experiences of participation, however, soon confronted him with an emotional struggle:

> I came here hoping I could heal from what I lived through, from pain, from the wounds that have been inflicted upon us. But when I arrived, it felt the opposite. I had this nostalgia and yearning from the very beginning. I did not want this normal situation. It was normal back there, not here. This normal situation was painful to me. True, there are no sounds of shelling, no state of fear, no blood, but it continues, and I see it and I know it is still there and has not ended. Meanwhile, you are supposed to have a normal life, so there was no balance. Part of me is there, and the other part is forced to be here. There was a separation between whether I am here or there. It is either I forget about there and live here or have my mind there and be isolated from reality. I couldn't have a balance between the two sides and that's what leads to depression and lots of psychological problems. It was all pressure, pressure!

Hatim's emotional experiences of activism, and the sense of belonging and purpose it bestowed, kept hunting him, creating feelings of nostalgia, guilt, and estrangement as his connection to Syria, activism, and the people with whom he shared a cause and common suffering were ruptured by going into exile. As these emotional experiences produced negative feelings, adding to his pain, Hatim had to seek a resolution through which he could put an end to this emotional dilemma:

> I thought I had to let go and live a normal life to recover, but I discovered that that is the worst thing I could have done because it is wrong. I belong to the people who are still there, those who have been displaced and tortured and some of whom made it here. So, the only thing that makes me at ease is to stay in this revolutionary state of mind that I was in, so in fact I can't give up. I can't take off this suit and change the way I am. I am still part of the revolution; I have to remain part of it because we started it and have to go

> with it until the end. So, I returned to protests and everything that has to do with the revolution. Doing anything that can help and everything in my capacity is what helped me achieve a bit of balance in my life. From protests to doing projects inside Syria, there is nothing I did not work with. And to that day, these are the people that I belong to and I am trying to the best of my ability to remain part of them by the thing I am doing.

Through protests and projects, Hatim shows how he was able to feel better and restore balance in his life. His case illustrates how emotional balance was achieved through the continuation of activism as it could enable him to respond to the sense of obligation and belonging he feels toward people inside Syria. Similar to the emotional framing of activist organizations and how it spoke to the emotional needs of transgendered people (Schrock et al., 2004), spaces of protest and networks in Berlin and their promised emotional benefits of comfort and balance also resonated with the emotional needs and experiences of Hatim by showing that not only could the continuation of activism end and trump his feelings of guilt and estrangement and fulfill his sense of obligation, but it could also offer him something closer to the "thrill" he felt back in Syria:

> All the clamor and momentum the revolution gave us, I was learning something new every day. But the day in Germany is boring, it makes you feel bored, so I go to any event I can participate in. I take part in anything, for me happiness is to do something. We did that event you attended, and at the same time I cooked the food there. I did everything, you get me. And if I had had time, I would have also taken part in the discussion. That's the enjoyable part of life, that you be part of every beautiful story and the thing you love. In Syria, the state of mind was much more enjoyable because you were part of something. Besides taking part in changing the regime, you were experiencing a unique state of mind that was impossible to experience again, so everything was enjoyable with all that danger.

Taking an active part in the building of these spaces enables Hatim to relive the pleasurable experiences of participation, providing him with an emotional impetus to continue activism. As activism continues to lend Hatim the emotional benefits of being connected to people inside Syria and his past, it represents an important source of well-being in his life by contributing to his larger emotional journey of healing (Nah, 2021) and bestowing a sense of continuity as a way of coping with the trauma of displacement and political violence.

Unlike Hatim, Mona's participation in the protests in her hometown came as a response to the violence that people were met with in Daraa[3] where the uprising first began. The sense of moral duty and outrage motivated Mona to protest and continue to participate along the way through taking part in different kinds of activities (Pearlman, 2016), more specifically, humanitarian activities. Mona's narrative of participation was dominated by underlying expressions of anger, sadness, and grievances as a close family member was arrested without knowing anything about his fate. Leaving Syria early on to avoid imprisonment as a result of her activities, Mona described an incredible amount of sadness as she was forced to leave rather abruptly. When she moved to a country close to Syria, she got involved in humanitarian activism again as a way of dealing with the sense of guilt and estrangement prompted by her premature departure:

> I honestly felt guilty that after the revolution began and two years of making sacrifices and having people getting arrested and killed . . . It was not my choice to leave Syria, but there was no any other solution because staying meant dying. So, I wanted to keep going to do something that can keep me connected to the country and the revolution and make me feel I haven't disappointed the people who are still inside Syria. This work that I was part of made me very happy even though there was a lot of pressure.

Mona describes how she utilized activism early on as a strategy for addressing feelings of guilt to those left behind and premature exile by keeping a connection with Syria. Expectedly, as Mona left

for Germany because of personal issues, these feelings of estrangement were renewed as her connection to the family and Syria was interrupted once again:

> When we first arrived, you know this feeling of alienation, of being removed completely . . . I felt like a tree in the desert, with roots in that desert, I couldn't move, I couldn't live, I couldn't do anything. It was a very difficult feeling. Like seriously I used to cry [those days] and what made it even more difficult is that I had a child who was really attached to my family and the surroundings, so [they] could not cope as well. So they used to cry and I'd cry with them too [laughing]. It was really difficult in the beginning. I used to feel like a feather taken in different by directions by the breeze. There was no stability at all. But what made us pull it together were the protests. There was almost no protest we did not go to. We go and shout and feel that we are in a safe place; same feeling we had in the first protests we went into in the beginning of the revolution in Syria. This feeling made me feel a little bit safe that there are still people going out to call for those who are still back in Syria. So from there I continued in this field and got to know activists and people active here in Berlin and take part in activities taking place here.

Mona points to feelings of alienation and instability that emanated from being uprooted from the revolutionary sphere where she exercised activism and felt more connected to Syria. Her statement puts into sharp perspective how she was able to overcome negative feelings by resorting to protest activities and activist networks in Berlin and how these enabled her to deal with feelings of estrangement and seek emotional comfort through keeping a solidaristic connection with people inside Syria. Even though Mona is critical of how fragmented these spaces are in Berlin: "it is sad this fragmentation and factionalism because we are supposed to have one cause which is supporting the Syrian revolution," she recognizes the emotional value of participating in protests and being part of a group: we are all alike, people who have been harmed by the regime, so we are just trying to work hand in hand for our cause. Thus, the strength of spaces in Berlin does not derive from how united they are but from how, in having a large community of activists with shared emotional experiences, individuals are able to find the groups that can provide them with the emotional support they need to continue activism.

In addition to fulfilling needs of mitigating guilt, the continuation of activism also allows Mona to express feelings of outrage that are embedded in personal grievances, loss, and present circumstances:

> All we can do is raise our voice, tell our stories of personal suffering and what we had witnessed. I know that it is never enough, but if you can leave an impact, even if simple, and make a change, even if among your neighbors . . . I did not come to Germany as a refugee just to receive money from the Job Center and spend this money on my personal pleasures. I came here to create a better life for myself and my family because my country is being ruled by a dictator who killed, displaced, bombed, and destroyed the country and made it unlivable.

Having the ability to do something, however small, enables Mona to counter feelings of powerlessness and have a sense of control by acting in line with her feelings of moral outrage. By doing so, continued activism becomes as intertwined with well-being as in the case of Hatim for its therapeutic properties of not only facilitating healing (Nah, 2021) and easing pain in the grieving of loss (De Volo, 2006), but also for allowing the redemption of a sense of self-worth against a reductive discourse about refugees.

Coming to Berlin with emotional experiences of activism embedded in feelings of moral outrage and pleasure, activists felt guilty and estranged in having their connection cut off with people inside Syria and their past. In spaces of protests and networks, activists found the answer to their emotional difficulties, as feelings of safety, stability, and balance generated in these spaces mitigated feelings of guilt and estrangement by increasing possibilities of continuity and

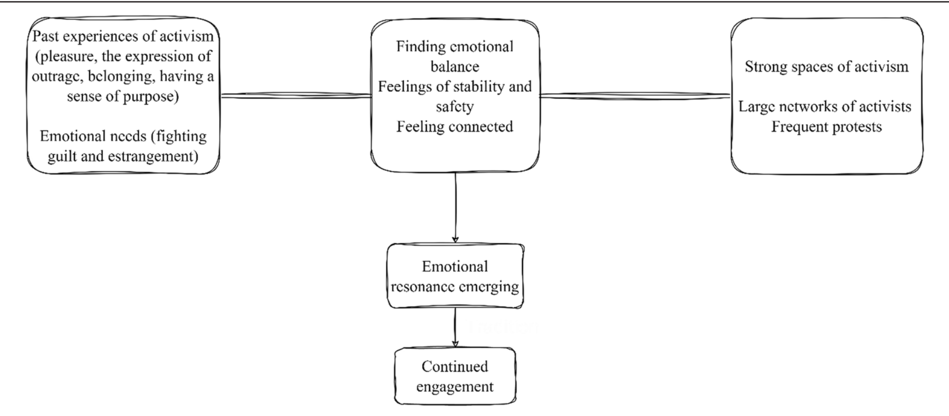

Figure 1. Summary illustration of emotional resonance and continued engagement.

connectedness with Syria. In doing so, these spaces fulfilled activists' emotional needs, leading participants to continue activism on behalf of Syria and associate its continuation with their own well-being as the emotional intensity of the past and the need to connect with people in Syria is addressed through such a link. Thus, emotional resonance was successfully established thanks to the strength of these spaces, as they ultimately helped activists negotiate a resolution to their emotional needs, trumping negative feelings while enhancing reinforcing ones. Figure 1 provides a summary of this process.

The Oslo cases: weak spaces for emotional resonance

Coming from a family of means, Ali explains how he was initially influenced by the discourse of the regime accusing protesters of being terrorists or foreign agents seeking to destabilize the country. As he was exposed to the narrative of people coming from revolting cities to his hometown, hearing about stories of the violence committed against them, Ali changed his perspective and became fully active in support of the uprising. Ali was, too, motivated by a sense of obligation and duty to participate in the uprising in response to the violence he found unacceptable (Pearlman, 2016). He began smuggling medical supplies to revolting areas. Because of his activities, he was arrested and stayed in prison for a while. He was particularly traumatized by the time he spent in prison and spoke in incredible length of the torture, starvation, and inhuman conditions he was subjected to. When he came out of prison, he was filled with outrage over what he witnessed and experienced in that brief encounter with imprisonment:

> When I looked at myself in the mirror I thought I was seeing someone else. I was an entirely different person. I came out of prison another person than the one I knew. I could not recognize myself. In that moment, I became more vindictive against the regime. I spent few days with my family and then went to the liberated areas.

Ali's feelings of anger over the horrific experiences he endured in prison were so overpowering that he had to avenge himself by upscaling his engagement. Instead of redirecting him away from action, the experience of prison pushed Ali to continue his fight against the regime. Leaving to rebel-controlled areas, Ali was more hopeful in the beginning that a change can be made, but his

initial sense of optimism was soon defeated by the state of affairs and how rebels turned out to be mercenaries, preoccupied by making money, splitting spoils, and establishing dominance. As a result, he became so disillusioned by the whole situation:

> There was nothing left to make sacrifices for. The people I was willing to make sacrifices for were gone, so I decided to leave.

Ali too like Hatim did not see a point in continuing action from rebel-controlled areas seeing as how their movement was hijacked by opportunists. In consequence, exiting Syria became the decision best aligned with his assessment of the situation.

After coming to Norway, Ali was overcome by a deep sense of disillusionment and hopelessness over his experiences of what he witnessed in rebel-controlled areas. In order to put an end to these feelings, seeing an opportunity to make a change from outside after it became so difficult to do that from inside Syria, Ali tried to resume activism:

> I started to check who [from activists] came to Norway and Germany, and started getting in contact with people here. In the beginning, we organized some activities, including protests, sending aid, whatever we could do. We started organizing protests with other groups in Europe where we would all go and protest at the same time. We would go out and take part, but few people showed up. After a while of taking part in those protests and not seeing enough engagement from people here in Norway, especially that it is a cold, to protest in a weather of -10 or 20 degrees is difficult, I became convinced that this regime [in Syria] is not such that anyone can bring down. This regime is backed by big countries. It is an occupation in the form of a dictatorship. When I reached that conclusion, I started to lose morale little by little. There is nothing to work for. We did so much in the past with no avail. I figured that's about enough. So, I stopped all revolutionary activities here in Norway and I haven't been doing anything since.

As Schrock et al. (2004) point out, transgendered people were able to derive some relief from their participation in local support groups, which however was not enough to fulfill their emotional needs. By expanding his networks and going into protests, he was able to briefly do so, but was unable to derive the emotional support needed to carry on. The spaces he attempted to create did not fully meet his emotional needs of wanting to end hopelessness as it did not attract the amount of attention and engagement desired, leaving him with a feeling of loneliness and without much emotional energy to continue. In exacerbating these negative feelings while ineffectively responding to existing needs inherited from before, these spaces failed to create emotional resonance, which made Ali became more and more disillusioned (Accornero, 2019a; Matthies-Boon, 2017) and relate more to experiences of hopelessness in evaluating the continuation of activism as illogical.

Unlike the others, Bushra left Syria for Norway before 2011. Describing her time in Syria, she was dismayed by nepotism, ideological indoctrination, and the inability to choose a path not preordained by the regime. To address her frustrations and channel her energy, she turned to humanitarian volunteering. Thus, when the uprising began, Bushra was motivated to become engaged from outside in its support, doing online advocacy and going in protests. However, because of how the situation was turning in Syria, rendering action rather futile in her view, Bushra started to experience hopelessness:

> After a while you discover as a helpless Syrian citizen, no matter how much we talked and wrote on Facebook that we are not against anyone and that we are okay with whoever wants to stay in power so long as there is reform and there is no one-party rule . . . personally, I am not against anyone, if Assad wants to

> stay in power, ok, but he has to make reforms. So the people who are like me and I attempted to spread this awareness. We never expected things to go that way, that there be a war, or that the revolution would escalate that much, we did not know that we would get to that point. After a while, you find out that there is no point because the game is beyond us, beyond that platonic and romantic vision we had. So you just lose interest.

Not only was Bushra losing hope, but also her attitudes toward the regime have changed over time as a result of how the uprising turned into a game beyond the control of ordinary people. When she compares herself to people who experienced the uprising from Syria, she refers to grievances and how she thinks that she suffered less compared to them: "Those people who have lost everything because of the regime, it is hard to imagine [. . .] I did not go through what they had been through, so I understand." Drawing on her position as an outsider, living the uprising from outside, Bushra alludes to how she did not acquire the emotional intensity that others have acquired from operating in Syria. Her emotional experiences were thus marked more by hopelessness as she was exposed to conflict-related trauma from a distance without experiencing the effects of participation in Syria but rather how action from outside was becoming more and more useless.

With the arrival of Syrians in the following years to Norway, Bushra described how she was somewhat encouraged by that moment to revive her engagement, hoping that their arrival could lessen her disillusionment about the benefit of taking action. Soon however, not only was she disappointed by the impact that war left on people and how she could not identify with them, but she also could not find a place for herself within the larger activist network in Oslo:

> We are a very diverse society in Syria, so every time I go into a protest, it is organized by a different person. Even though all of those people were from the opposition, they disagreed with each other. I couldn't identify with anyone even though we all had the same goal in terms of being against what was going on, but at the same time there was something belying the general goal. It felt strange to me at least. So I stopped participating in protests.

The protest activities in Oslo could not respond to Bushra's need of fighting hopelessness, which is characteristic of her experiences of participation and how they are marked by the feeling that action is futile. Unable to relate and affiliate with people organizing and present in these spaces undermined her attempts at countering feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness by cultivating belonging and regaining energy. By failing to suppress hopelessness while instead making her feel more estranged, these spaces did not resonate with her emotional aspirations of minimizing hopelessness, making disengagement appear as the more logical choice in view of increased disillusionment.

With participation experiences rooted in a general perception that action is futile in light of circumstances in Syria, participants were overwhelmed with feelings of hopelessness and disillusionment. These presented challenging emotional needs that participants sought to resolve through joining spaces of networks and activists to procure feelings that could counter their overall feelings of hopelessness. These spaces, however, failed to promote the desired feelings of togetherness, belonging, and faith that action matters. As these spaces could not meet activists' needs and left them with exacerbated feelings of isolation and estrangement, they increased their sense of disillusionment instead of speaking to their demands. Unable to have their emotional demands accommodated by these spaces for the continuation of activism, participants chose to disengage from action on behalf of Syria. Below, Figure 2 starkly contrasts Figure 1.

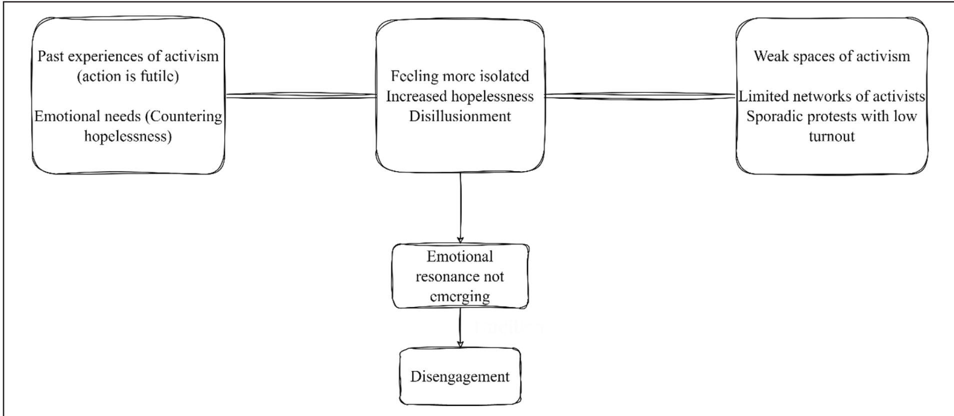

Figure 2. Summary illustration of emotional resonance and disengagement.

Discussion and conclusion

In this article, I have investigated the ways in which the exile contexts of Berlin and Oslo created unequal spaces of emotional resonance for the emotional experiences of activists. Unpacking participants' narratives from their experiences of participation in the uprising, through exit, and into exile revealed that activist trajectories were shaped and defined by how exile contexts resonated with activists' emotional needs arising from action in the past experienced as pleasurable, rightful, or futile. The context of Berlin provided strong spaces for organizing protests and developing activist networks. This, I found, dampened feelings of estrangement and guilt and replaced them with a sense of togetherness and safety that were critical to the continuation of activism. In contrast, Oslo produced protests of unsatisfactory turnout and small networks of divided loyalties that were unable to mute feelings of hopelessness or strengthen belonging to support engagement. Thus, differences in spaces of emotional resonance, in specific, the ability of networks and practices to create positive emotions and trump negative ones, played a key role into why trajectories played out so differently between activists in Berlin and those in Oslo. Based on these insights, I contribute to existing literature in three ways.

First, I add to Pearlman's (2013, 2016) work about the role of emotions in the Syrian uprising by showing how emotions of activism traveled in time and space. By paying specific attention to actors' experiences of participation as it translates through their memories, my analysis has shown how activists' emotional needs that arose in exile essentially originated from how they experienced action in the past. Thus, opening up the inquiry to individuals' experiences of activism in exile enabled an insight into how emotions of past activism affected individuals, leading to a series of key emotions as time progressed and activists moved geographically to other countries.

Second, this study adds to our understanding of how emotions shape action across place (Bosco, 2007) and extends the concept of emotional resonance (Schrock et al., 2004) through the comparative analysis of Syrians' activist trajectories in Berlin and Oslo. I highlight what kind of contextual elements are important for emotional resonance to emerge, while emphasizing how the lack of these particular elements can hamper its emergence. For emotional resonance to arise, activists have to secure access to spaces that can be *fulfilling* of their emotional needs in a way that can support activism. This means that these spaces have to provide vital networks of activists and sites of

claims-making, including protests that are strong enough to act as vehicles for deriving emotional energy and cultivating a sense of belonging. When these means are available, activists may be able to resolve their emotional needs and feel more emboldened to continue activism. In contrast, when the context of exile lacks spaces where networks of activists are scarce or divided and protests are sporadic or fragmented, emotional resonance is less likely to emerge, leaving activists with an increased sense of disillusionment and a leaning toward disengagement. In this way, my take on emotional resonance takes it beyond its initial conceptualization of how social movement framing speaks to the needs of potential recruits (Schrock et al., 2004), specifying contextually the particular elements that can make emotional resonance work or not work. The study therefore reveals the utility of context and physical space as an important avenue for examining emotional resonance and suggests *spaces for emotional resonance* as a conceptual frame that can be utilized for a better understanding of how emotional resonance works and how that can affect activist (dis)engagement across different contexts.

Finally, this study may generally contribute to diaspora mobilization studies by generating insights on how some Syrian diasporas became active in support of their homeland cause while others did not. It contends that to understand how diasporas develop strong political mobilization in their infancy, it is important not only to look at opportunity structures in host countries as conventional wisdom goes, but it may be also crucial to pay attention to actors' experiences of activism in the past, especially in the context of revolutions or other major political upheavals.

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Notes

1. Defined in this article as the progression of activism and how it grows, evolves, or halts throughout the life course.
2. In authoritarian settings and revolutions, activism acquires a particular significance, pushing activists to get involved in different kinds of action on multiple fronts in their fight against authoritarianism.
3. The uprising was sparked by an incident in the city of Daraa, southwest of Syria, where teenage boys were arrested and tortured following the appearance of a graffiti mocking Bashar Al-Assad on a school wall.

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“I Turned to Things That Mean More to Me”: Unpacking the Activist Trajectories of Syrians in Oslo

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ABSTRACT
The article examines how Syrians’ activist trajectories have evolved in exile contexts of small Syrian communities and limited mobilization structures. Based on in-depth interviews with Syrians in Oslo, I argue that the specific features of integration narratives, lack of community structures, and presence of solidarity infrastructures have produced locally embedded forms of activism. The participants reorganized their experiences of the uprising and antiregime activism into identity-based activism and acts of supporting community members. The article contributes to the emerging literature on Syrian activism in exile, concluding with conceptual pointers on the study of activist trajectories.

KEYWORDS
Biographical consequences of activism; opportunity structures; Syria; uprising; exile; integration

Introduction

The Syrian uprising of 2011 inspired the people in Syria and abroad to become involved in politics and activism to create social change. Yet as the initial peaceful movement evolved into a prolonged war, mobilization became largely diasporic, with the displacement of millions of people and thousands of Syrian activists to neighboring countries and Europe. Like many other countries around the globe, Norway has experienced a sharp increase in the number of Syrian refugees since 2015 (Tønnessen et al., 2020). In total, around 3000 Syrians are reported to be living in Oslo (Dzamarija, 2018). Inhabiting spaces that are invisible in the geographies of Syrian diaspora communities, the Syrians in Oslo provide an interesting case for examining what has become of individuals’ participation in the uprising and antiregime activism and how people took their participation experiences to the small contexts of exile. I define exile contexts in terms of community size and organizational structure. Thus, the context of Oslo is considered a small exile context because it includes a small Syrian community that has limited organizational ties to Syria and within the receiving context. I also define antiregime activism as any kind of action taken with the purpose of opposing the regime and supporting the uprising inside or outside of Syria.

Analyses of Syrians’ participation trajectories and diaspora activism highlight different paths. For example, in countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, several studies have observed a shift from antiregime collective action to professionalized humanitarian assistance (Abiyaghi & Younes, 2018; Elvira, 2018; Fourn, 2018; Khoury, 2017). The central argument of these studies is that the dire living conditions of Syrian refugees in these countries, combined with their proximity to Syria, donor policies, and securitized environments, have made humanitarian work the predominant mode of action. In the West, different yet similar paths have been observed in the activism of Syrians. In addition to humanitarian work, there is work being done on

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political advocacy (Moss, 2016; Ragab, 2020; Stokke, 2016), transitional justice (Stokke & Wiebelhaus-Brahm, 2019), and community-building and integration (Ragab, 2017, 2020). These studies indicate that different kinds of activism have flourished thanks to the large community presence and preexisting organization. Here, I wish to examine the paths in contexts of exile that lack these characteristics to understand how both the sociopolitical context and past experiences of activism can shape action.

Following this, the current article asks how activism has evolved among Syrians in contexts of exile where the community is small and the organizational infrastructure is very limited. How have their trajectories of activism developed in such contexts, and in what ways are these trajectories influenced by the past and the context in which the participants live? To answer these questions, the present study utilizes in-depth interviews with 14 Syrians in Oslo who have varying levels of previous involvement in the uprising. Using an analytic frame that bridges the concept of identity-based repositioning with the literature of the biographical consequences of activism and an opportunity structure approach, I analyze how Syrians living in Oslo developed their current engagements through their experiences of the uprising and interactions within the context of exile. I show that the participants reorganized their involvements around identity-based activism and translated their experiences of the uprising into practices aiming to help and support community members. I argue that their past experiences were adjusted and transformed into locally embedded forms of activism because of the conditions found in the context of Oslo. The participants linked their engagements to a lack of networks, integration narratives, the state of the Syrian community, and the presence of solidarity infrastructures in connection to other causes.

The current article begins with an overview of the literature discussing Syrian diaspora activism, which is followed by an analytic frame to analyze activist trajectories in relation to opportunity structure. I then provide a background on the Oslo context and a description of the data and methods. After that, I foreground two main trajectories of activism: identity-based activism and helping community members in a variety of ways. I end by stating my contribution to the literature on Syrian activism in exile, highlighting the benefits of the concept of identity-based repositioning while binding the macro and micro aspects in the study of activist trajectories.

Syrian activists, political environment, and changing activism

As stated, there has been an emerging trend in research documenting Syrians' activism in various contexts of exile. Moss (2016, 2020) highlights how Syrian activists in the UK and US focused on political advocacy and lobbying when the rebels were advancing in Syria. Along with this form of activism, they acted as brokers, connecting people at home to potential donors and policymakers, appearing in Western media to speak against regime practices and improving the journalistic skills of people in Syria. These efforts were facilitated by the political support they found in the host countries and the preexisting Syrian institutions through which they could communicate their demands.

Studies focusing on activism in neighboring countries map the paths taken with the displacement of activists to these countries. As previously mentioned, these studies have found that activists have focused on humanitarian action because it ensures a number of benefits (Abiyaghi & Younes, 2018; Elvira, 2018; Fourn, 2018). Specifically, humanitarian action has offered activists the chance to stay engaged by enforcing their vision for social change through service provision. In addition, it has helped them fight precarity by having a source of income and realizing the goals of the revolution without being threatened by local forces loyal to the Assad regime.

Further north, Ragab (2020) draws a more diversified geography of the activism taking place in Germany. Like elsewhere, the space for action in Germany is humanitarianized because of better opportunities for funding and growing humanitarian needs generated by conflict developments. Yet there is also a huge mobilization around advocacy issues because the clustering of activists conversant in grassroots activism coupled with an atmosphere receptive to diaspora

mobilization has enabled the continuation of action on behalf of Syria. A distinct shift toward integration is also observed among activists to facilitate the settlement of newcomers into their new environments.

In contrast, Pantti and Boklage (2014) argue that the inhospitable conditions found in Russia have not allowed for mobilization to emerge and develop as in other Western contexts. The close relations between the Syrian regime and the Russian government exposed activists to danger, and the limited freedom of expression ensured an uneven access to established media institutions. As a result, activists have retreated from visible action to being more engaged in online commentaries.

Trajectories of activism and opportunity structures in exile

Generally, trajectories of activism are understood to be about the progression of individuals' engagement, from recruitment and persistence to disengagement and post-activist lives and how these phases are influenced by organizational forces, individual motivations, and biographical changes (Corrigall-Brown, 2011). In this article, the aim is to explore post-revolutionary/activist lives, bringing together the literature on the biographical consequences of activism, the concept of identity-based repositioning, and the opportunity structure literature into one framework. Through this analytical frame, I analyze trajectories of activism by looking at how the participation experiences in the uprising and antiregime activism inform and inspire individuals' current engagements and how the sociopolitical context of exile plays a role in shaping these engagements through the experiences and interactions of individuals within that context.

Starting with the biographical consequences of activism,[1] previous research has discussed the enduring effects that movement participation leaves on individuals, from their professional careers to private lives. Compared with nonactivists, movement participants have been found to be more likely to engage in altruistic activities, artistic expression, or social and academic sectors because these fields make room for social change and the alignment of one's ideological orientation with career options (Fendrich, 1974; Giugni & Grasso, 2016; McAdam, 1989; Nassi & Abramowitz, 1979; Neveu, 2019; Pagis, 2011; Sherkat & Blocker, 1997). Activists have also been found to experience changes in their family relations, friendship circles, gendered perceptions, and parenting style thanks to the principles they learned from movement participation (El Chazli, 2020; Lambin, 2016, Maynard, 2018; Schwarz, 2021; Whittier, 2016). For example, child rearing can be an arena for putting one's adopted worldviews into practice by raising children to have agency (Maynard, 2018) and choice (El Chazli, 2020).

Previous participation in movements may also open up new spaces for engagement and creativity. The notion of conversion[2] describes this process and how individuals may shift their engagement from one area to another by investing the organizational skills, ideals, and knowledge they acquired into new activities and causes (Corrigall-Brown, 2011; Juhem, 2001; Leclercq, 2012; Tissot, 2005; Willemez, 2004). For example, after the decline of communism, former communists turned to cultural, urban, humanitarian, and antiracist work because it could accommodate their struggle for equality and social justice (Juhem, 2001; Tissot, 2005; Willemez, 2004). Similarly, militant activists have moved to social and community activism as a way to maintain continuity with their past while disengaging from violence and reintegrating into civilian life through serving their communities (Bosi, 2019; Gayer, 2019). Instead of drawing distinctions between these different forms of activism, the aim of this stream of the literature is to delineate how commitment to social change is continued in different ways throughout the life course. Thus, continuity is emphasized as a mechanism through which past activism is connected to present endeavors, revealing how previous movement participation comes to impact individuals' choices for engagement.

Drawing on this literature, I attempt to crystalize how individuals' previous experiences in the uprising and their antiregime activism can influence their engagement in exile. Specifically, I look at how their engagement in helping and supporting community members is linked to

the ideas and values they acquired from participating in the uprising. I build on the idea of continuity as a link between their current practices and their past involvement in antiregime activism. In addition, I examine how this continuity is reconfigured and established in their interactions with the specificities of the exile context in Oslo.

Drawing on ideas of conversion (Juhem, 2001; Leclercq, 2012; Tissot, 2005; Willemez, 2004), I develop the concept of identity-based repositioning to analyze the trajectories of individuals engaged in activism that is associated with their identities. As mentioned earlier, conversion suggests that people may switch between causes in response to different circumstances. Here, I introduce the concept of identity-based repositioning to help articulate the break-up of two overlapping activisms. I define identity-based activism as advocating and promoting the rights associated with a particular identity, while antiregime activism is defined as engaging in behaviors against the ruling regime. Thus, I coin the term identity-based repositioning to unpack the disentanglement between antiregime activism and identity-based activism and how a full-repositioning toward the latter can be achieved in response to the conditions found and brought about by the context of Oslo. This process resonates with moving from collectivist collective action to individualized collective action (Micheletti, 2002), that is, moving away from collective work against the regime, channeled through movement collectivities, to individualized action grounded in the preferences of individuals.

Although it is important to emphasize the agency of individuals and how they utilize their previous experiences in developing new areas of engagement, it is equally important to look at the context in which people conduct their engagement and how this might influence their trajectories (Bosi, 2019). Thus, adding a contextual perspective to studying the trajectories of activism is essential for understanding engagement in exile. Following this, I build on the concept of opportunity structures. Traditionally, an opportunity structure has been defined in reference to the conditions that facilitate or constrain homeland mobilization in the receiving context (Tarrow, 2011). These conditions relate to the environment in which the migrant community is rooted, including reception and integration policies (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2002) state relations (Koinova, 2016), and local solidarity infrastructures (Quinsaat, 2016). Factors internal to the migrant community are also crucial for mobilization to emerge and become sustained, including size, resources, organizational capacity and structure, and networks, which—when combined—refer to community embeddedness (Müller-Funk, 2016; Quinsaat, 2016) and how the community is anchored within a specific context (Koinova, 2012).

Thus, the context of Oslo, with its lack of such community embeddedness, constitutes a case of a small exile context because the Syrian community is small, new, and lacks an organizational representation and structure in connection to Syria and Oslo. As Vogel (2007) argues, individuals' motivation to become engaged is influenced by the opportunity structures they meet in the society of reception. The resources of individuals, meaning their past experiences and skills, together with opportunity structures, shape motivations for participation. In line with this, I analyze the impact of the exile context on individuals' forms and practices of engagement through their interactions within the context of Oslo. By interactions, I mean how individuals position their action in relation to the state of the Syrian community, integration narratives, the absence/presence of supportive networks, and solidarity infrastructures regarding other causes, as a way to better understand how these factors shape their engagement.

Context

The Syrian community in Norway is fairly sizable, constituting around 30,000 (Tønnessen et al., 2020). Before 2011, the community had no significant weight or presence in Norway, but it grew substantially after 2015. This situation heightened existing rhetoric around how refugees need to be activated to work, volunteer, and contribute to society (Djuve, 2011).

In the beginning of my research, I conducted a small mapping of Syrian initiatives and organizations operating in Norway to determine the landscape of Syrian activism in Oslo. Using

Facebook and the official registry of businesses and organizations in Norway, I was able to identify a very small number of organizations, of which many seemed to be registered but not operating. Some others seemed to have an online presence on Facebook with no on-the-ground activities, structure, or premises. As such, the structure of activism concerning Syria was very limited.

Prior to 2011, the informants spoke of attempts at organizing social events and gatherings to revive a sense of community, which, however, failed because of fear of potential surveillance and a lack of trust among Syrians. With the start of the protests in 2011, political rallies were organized in support of the uprising back home. Those with a supportive attitude toward the uprising in Syria started to get in contact with each other and discuss the possibilities for collaboration. This support was also reflected online in the creation of Facebook pages that were sympathetic to the uprising, as well as offline in attempts at lobbying. More established Syrians also engaged in cross-border humanitarian efforts, which culminated in the wake of the refugee situation in 2015, by providing assistance to newcomers. The arrival of Syrians in large numbers constituted a window of opportunity in creating a more collectivized enterprise. A community front was established to support the needs of the Syrian community in Oslo and the ongoing uprising in Syria by organizing local events and social gatherings and functioning as a front that could be consulted on matters related to the situation in Syria. The front operated for a year but soon went into hiatus for multiple reasons regarding the inability to reach consensus, the community's format, and the busy schedule of the members. The collectivity eventually disintegrated, and its members and founders parted ways.

There are, however, activities that are organized in collaboration with Norwegian and international organizations. These include cultural and social events that serve as political spaces in the absence of a more politically organized environment, such as public seminars, film screenings, art exhibitions, and even events involving food and dance. This selection of events is restricted to a core of interested artists, intellectuals, and students. Recently, student events have begun to be organized to serve the growing community of Syrian university students. In the past, the official opposition[3] used to have a running office in Oslo and facilitated meetings between established community members and opposition figures. Many Syrians also joined the LGBT movement, which is very active and organized in the Norwegian context and known for its support of queer asylum seekers (see Akin, 2017).

The Kurdish community is also highly mobilized in Norway (see Weiss, 2020). Because this community is bounded by a collective identity based on trauma and a collective struggle for statehood, it is more organized and vibrant, being anchored through a string of cultural and political organizations. Rallies connected to escalations in the northern part of Syria and other Kurdish parts are often met by large demonstrations in Oslo. Thus, the emerging activist scene among Syrians in Oslo is diffused across different causes and interests.

Methods

The current article is embedded in a larger project entitled *Imagining and Experiencing the Refugee Crisis* (IMEX). The analysis presented here is based on data collected as part of a study looking at the activist trajectories of Syrians in Berlin[4] and Oslo. The current article focuses on the Oslo case and utilizes a sample of 14 interviews. The pattern of activism in the empirical material collected from the context of Oslo prompted a separate analysis because of its embeddedness in the local context.

The interviewees were recruited through Facebook browsing, community events, and snowball sampling. Some of them were more identifiable because they frequent relevant events and spaces, and some others I had to reach via trusted contacts because they were isolated from these spaces. In the beginning, I relied on a neatly prepared interview guide based on selection criteria that initially favored individuals who were involved in Syria-related initiatives and their roles within those initiatives. As I recruited more informants who were not part of such collectivities

but were engaged in a more informal and broadened form of activities (e.g., minority rights activism, community organizing, etc.), I adopted a biographical approach (Brannen & Nilsen, 2011) to capture the participants' activist trajectories and how their activism has shifted in time and space. Thus, my choice of methodology constituted a mix of biographical interviewing and semi-structured interviews considered the most suitable for interviews with activists (Blee, 2013). This approach allowed for a varied data set, with some interviews focusing on collectivities and others on activist biographies. Furthermore, this shift in focus enabled greater insights into the ways activism has been altered and grounded in the local contexts of exile.

The Syrian uprising was diverse from its onset, and it united (and divided) people at home and abroad in mobilizing for the revolution. Hence, the sample includes participants who were living in Oslo before 2011 and others who came following the mass refugee exodus to Europe in 2015–2016. The extent of previous activism has varied accordingly: from people who were active in war zones, media, and humanitarian activism to those who engaged with critical events in Syria from afar through protest organizing, online campaigning, and lobbying. Currently, their roles also differ: there are community organizers, humanitarian volunteers, minority rights advocates, and so forth. Table 1 provides a general description of the participants' basic characteristics. With these varied histories, the study is well positioned to examine how people draw on their past experiences in configuring their current engagement. Although a sample of 14 interviews is small because of the small number of people in Oslo with a history of activism, it generates context-specific insights into how activist trajectories have evolved in a context of small Syrian community with limited internal organization, by foregrounding the contextual elements that matter to the adjustment and translation of past experiences.

I used Atlas.ti to code various forms of activism following a grounded theory approach for analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Following coding, I categorized the codes by patterns. I divided the data into two groups according to the pattern displayed. Codes for which identity figured explicitly in the practiced activism were grouped together. The second group was formed based on practices that connect more generally to helping, volunteering, organizing activities, and so forth. Below, I present two biographies selected for discussing this pattern related to identity, showing how repositioning occurs. These biographies reflect different identities, histories of activism, migration history, and examples of how repositioning toward identity-based activism was achieved and mixed with antiregime activism in the past. For the second pattern, I present examples drawn from the larger data.

Unpacking Syrians' activist trajectories in Oslo

Identity-based activism

In this section, I reconstruct the trajectories of two informants currently involved in different movements close to their ethnonational and sexual identities, respectively. For these informants, this kind of activism is not new but was practiced along with antiregime activism during the uprising and was uncoupled from it in exile. I call this process repositioning, whereby activism is repositioned in alignment with identity and further away from antiregime activism or other previous entanglements. I draw on the concept of identity-based repositioning to unpack this process through two different examples in which antiregime activism and identity-based activism were mixed and uncoupled at different stages. While the first story reflects the trajectory of an informant who came to Oslo before 2011 and is affiliated with the Kurdish movement, the informant in the second story sought asylum in Norway after 2011 and is involved in LGBT activism.

A long time before the uprising started in 2011, Faten left Syria to escape the difficulties and repression she encountered as a result of her involvement in Kurdish activism. In her exile in Oslo, she continued her opposition against the regime through her support for and involvement

Table 1. Descriptive Characteristics of the Interviewees.

Category	Number of interviewees
Gender	
Women	5
Men	9
Age	
20s	4
30s	4
40s	2
50s	4
Migration time	
Before 2011	7
After 2011	7

in the Kurdish movement in Oslo. Describing how she was part of the movement in Oslo before 2011, Faten explains:

> We were larger in numbers than our Arab Syrian fellows. We had our own associations and activities since we were calling for the rights of Kurds in Syria. We were active politically as well as culturally. As Syrian Kurds, we were the only opposition to the regime in Oslo, objecting to the regime's arbitrary policies against Kurds. We organized more than one demonstration in Oslo, and we had meetings with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the parliament under the name of the Kurdish Syrian community. We were organized into many associations and organizations.

Faten elaborates on how she opposed the regime from Oslo through her advocacy for the rights of Kurds in Syria and how this activism and opposition to the regime were mutually reinforcing. She serves as an example of how identity-based activism was deeply intertwined with opposition to the regime from pre-uprising times and during her time in exile. As such, when the uprising began in 2011, Faten became highly active in the uprising from her new location in Oslo, taking part in rallies, talking to policymakers about the situation in Syria, and coming together with the Syrian diaspora elsewhere in the establishment of representative entities. These efforts were coordinated within loose networks that were enabled by the momentum of the uprising. At that point, her opposition to the regime was primarily manifested and channeled through support for the revolution, while Kurdish activism was continued in parallel,[5] combining the two forms of activism together.

The turning point for the repositioning of identity-based activism in lieu of antiregime activism was when Syrians arrived in large numbers in Norway in 2015. At first, Faten saw this as an opportunity that could be seized upon for the expansion and reactivation of Syrian mobilization in Norway: "By 2015, we had a good mass of Syrians, so we were still excited that the revolution can produce something." Accordingly, Faten participated in community efforts to aid the revolution in Syria by creating an organization that could represent these interests. However, the organization did not persist or lead anywhere:

> I did not see any enthusiasm from them [members]; there were no capacities nor was there a plan, and so I couldn't just work alone.

Disappointed by the outcome that she blamed on the inability to organize and "having her faith in the Syrian revolution shaken" by the expansion of Islamist extremist groups in Syria, Faten grew more convinced that it was more worthwhile to redirect her attention to Kurdish activism:

> It is their revolution.[6] We, the Kurds, have our own platforms to ensure our rights in the future […] Right now, I am more inclined to serve my nationalism, not all Syrians in general here in Norway. As Kurds, we have our own associations and some good activities, and we are trying as much as we can to preserve this.

Faten's trajectory exemplifies what I conceptualize as identity-based repositioning in terms of disentangling antiregime activism from her Kurdish activism and having the latter repositioned at the heart of her ongoing engagement because the two could not be continued in parallel.

This identity-based repositioning was facilitated by her established position in the movement and presence of platforms through which she could continue to channel her activism. This can be seen through her repeated emphasis on how organized and established the Kurdish community is in Oslo.

I move now to the story of Reema, who came as an asylum seeker to Norway a few years after the uprising began. Like the first story, Reema was politically active prior to the start of the movement, taking an interest in human rights and party politics within the parameters of what was permissible at the time in Syria. Thus, when the protest movement began in 2011, she became immediately involved in the uprising as a media activist and in the coordination committees[7] of her hometown. She coordinated protests and covered, documented, and edited the news of the movement in her local surroundings. Along with these tasks, Reema wrote in defense of LGBT rights:

> One of the things I became active for in Syria and talked about was LGBT rights. I used to write for a magazine about Syrian LGBT persons, under a pseudonym of course. I was also in contact with a couple of LGBT activists. I used to write, not articles, but more like thoughts about the situation of LGBT persons in Syria.

Here, Reema's involvement in antiregime activism paved the way for an equivalent kind of involvement in LGBT activism, almost as if the moment of political awakening encouraged her to draw attention to the unjust situation of LGBT persons because "the regime contributed to the demeaning view of LGBT persons in Syria" (Interview 8). Her example shows that the two activisms were joined in complementary ways to each other.

When Reema was forced to flee Syria, she moved to one of the neighboring countries where she briefly engaged in humanitarian work to make a living but was forced to stay away from LGBT activism to stay safe and not contravene the principle of neutrality enforced by international NGOs. When she came to Norway, she could not pursue activism linked to Syria because she could not find the encouragement needed in her circles to act as an established point of access to antiregime activism[8]: "I don't have the same circle to encourage me to work and be creative again"; this quote summarizes the role played by the absence of activist networks over her trajectory. Later, Reema decided to get involved in LGBT advocacy in Oslo as a continuation of the LGBT component, here activated by her participation in the uprising. In her view, it is important to defend the rights of sexual minorities, which tends not to be on the agenda of Syrian activists:

> I disagree with Syrian activists who say women and LGBT rights are not a priority because people are still dying. But the right to life is the first right of human rights. What is the purpose of living if I cannot be the way I am? I cannot live in a prison. One should be free, no? Freedom is very important, [and you should] be able to express your gender or sexual identity.

Here, identity-based repositioning is encapsulated in the act of disembodying identity-based activism from antiregime activism. The marginalization of LGBT voices from the discussion on Syria led Reema to reposition her engagement in connection to her identity as a queer person. Thus, even though her activism is no longer about being active against the regime, there is an element of continuity between fighting for human rights in the past by exposing the violations of the regime and narrowing down her focus to the rights of LGBT persons. Because Reema is currently a member of an organization that cares for LGBT persons in Norway, her membership testifies to how she capitalized on the established LGBT movement structures in Oslo as an incubator of an activism more embedded in her past (Quinsaat, 2016).

Helping and supporting community members

The second trajectory prevalent in the data manifests in the translation of previous experiences gained from participation in the uprising into various practices of supporting and helping

community members. Translating such experiences takes place in response to the specific conditions found in Oslo. This can be observed in the account of Lubna. She participated in protests in Syria and was later involved in development programs for refugees. Now, she is working to provide Syrians with the necessary tools to be part of the public space in Oslo:

> The goal that is really underpinning our work is to preserve those principles and values launched in 2011 [with the uprising] […] To understand more from Norwegians, to invite them to come and tell us what the entry points are into influencing the public space, not just the parliament. I mean you can take part in what is going on in this society on so many levels […] And also to have a component of this training on how to write opinion articles and how to make an influence. Like introduce a catch up about how one can take part in the society because, unfortunately, in this introduction program, the whole focus is on how to write a CV, how to apply for a job just to make money and pay taxes. I feel like this definition of integration is too narrow. Just because you started paying taxes does not mean you are integrated into society. For me, being an active person in this society is much more than working and paying taxes because you can work and pay taxes and still live in your own bubble.

Lubna's statement reveals a continuity between what she calls the principles of the uprising and helping Syrians access the public space in Norway. Her work can be read as an attempt to invest in the principles learned from participation in the uprising into work that can challenge integration narratives and help young Syrians be active participants in Norwegian society. Embarking on this particular practice was mediated not only by ideas of empowerment and social transformation linked to the uprising, but also by the refugee introduction program in Norway, which is too focused on work–life contributions in her view.

Similarly, Rahim is a community organizer who used to organize protests in solidarity with the uprising and communicate with local politicians about the uprising in Syria. As the community started growing larger, he describes how he switched to meeting the needs of community members:

> There is now a community here and a lot of people; it is important to see what their pain, concerns, and issues are. Here, too, the goal has changed along the way, especially when things became more complicated in Syria. We have to focus on our efforts on people coming here; they need work, accommodation, Arabic lessons for their kids, social networks, and so on. So things have changed although the main political goal remains in the background […] That's why I helped a number of young men and women to be part of voluntary organizations here. This kind of experience and education also makes one aware of their role in society because we also have a role toward this society. I think this kind of experience is very good to learn.

For Rahim, supporting community members find their way in the Norwegian system and society and helping young people volunteer speaks to "the political goal in the background," in terms of responding to the situation and being helpful, be it through showing solidarity in the past or accommodating the social needs of the community at the present moment. Meanwhile, switching to this practice also conforms to integration policies in Norway, which place a large emphasis on volunteerism and that measure the degree of integration by participation in associational activities (see Djuve, 2011).

Some other informants reincorporated the ideas connected to their past activism into forms of artistic expression and the cultural field in Oslo. Samer, for example, expressed his participation in the uprising by taking writing as a means of opposing the regime and advocating for the mass protests and values of freedom and democracy through organizing participatory forums for dialogue. After coming to Norway, Samer became interested in issues of intercultural dialogue and how this can improve the lives of newcomers:

> I encourage dialogue … I am interested in art and culture through which we can spread the culture of dialogue. I use poetry, film, and theater to build cultural bridges between cultures and use dialogue to solve problems […] So I am interested in changing [people's] way of thinking, how to think differently, and how to lead a better life. I organize seminars on these matters, coaching on how to live your life in a better way.

Samer sees building "cultural bridges" as a space for widening the horizons of newcomers, helping them think differently about what they can make out of their lives in exile. His experience made him appreciate the importance of dialogue as a launching pad for facilitating integration in Norway. As such, engaging in intercultural dialogue derives not only from his experiences in the uprising, but is also translated to match and appeal to the discourse of integration governing the presence of Syrians.

Likewise, after an engagement in protests from Oslo and with a lot of experience in cultural advocacy, Karam envisions cultural activities as a space that can accommodate the aspirations of political mobilization:

> I specifically work in the cultural field because it can be a vessel for channeling my political vision and ideas. The cultural vessel can be an aspect and vision of changing the climate through offering answers and questions in terms of creating a minimum of cooperation and intellectual harmony among the population of Syrians in Oslo, specifically for the purpose of building the tools and structures that we hope can be built and developed. Here comes my role as someone with a vision, ideas, and notions for how to build these structures and tools through which I can tell my vision […] I focus on the cultural aspect that has to do with organizing seminars and lectures.

For Karam, cultural organizing can help the community organically emerge and develop, potentially mobilizing around a more political agenda in the future. His assessment of the state of the Syrian community as yet unestablished made him mobilize on his interest in cultural advocacy as a space that can provide an opportunity for achieving consensus.

On the other hand, some other informants reenact their legacy of participating in the uprising through situations encountered in everyday life. They are interested in spreading awareness among their immediate circles through conversations and political socialization. For example, Ali, a humanitarian activist back in Syria, proudly shares his political history with his children:

> I feel like there is something I can tell my kids, and I already tell them a lot […] that I participated in that stage that the country went through and wasn't just neutral […] we are in pain when we left our country. As you see here, there is snow and how we are far away from everything that we question what kind of life is that. We have a comfortable life here, but this isn't what we wanted.

Raising children is often highlighted as a basis for embedding revolutionary ideals in everyday life (El Chazli, 2020; Gayer, 2019; Maynard, 2018). Thus, the act of Ali shows how he is engaging in intergenerational transmission that is essential to the formation of the political subjectivities of younger generations (Schwarz, 2021) and how in light of the felt distance from Norway and expressed lack of support to hinge on for activism, socialization becomes a means for him to inculcate a narrative that can potentially contribute to the collective identity of the community in exile.

Likewise, Mariam believes in the power of small conversations as a site of renegotiating her past activism into ideas that relate to the everyday life of Syrians in Norway:

> I turned to things that mean more to me. If I sit with someone [with a different orientation] and I am able to give them hope by sharing my experience with them, I believe I can win over any politician; it is more important than entering politics itself. When I support someone to get back on their feet and live and achieve their role as a human being in this society, I believe I can beat any politician sitting behind a desk and driving a Mercedes accompanied by bodyguards. Because of all what happened with me and all the accumulative experiences I had until that moment, I believe that psychosocial support regarding the issues that pained us for so long matters more to me. If I make people understand that you are not wrong if you are [different], if I am able to create this awareness one way or another, me as a person, I believe I am able to triumph over any politician speaking in public. That is my vision […] I believe that if I help someone with learning the [Norwegian] language, support them one way or another, study with them, or do anything, I am showing Norwegians and Europeans that I deserve to be alive, I deserve a second chance, and in that way, I am supporting my political cause with that very small act.

Mariam seeks to make a change through her interactions with community members by helping them learn about their rights, overcome their vulnerabilities, and advance their education. Her

act of care can be linked to her experience within the uprising, which revolved around fund-raising and service provision for the displaced communities. This experience made her believe in the value of psychosocial support that can be achieved through rehabilitating and mutual support in the context of Oslo. Being a newcomer herself, in the process of rebuilding her life in exile, made something like helping people learn the language the act of care most aligned with her past and the most meaningful to her.

Conclusion

I began the current article by asking how Syrians' activist trajectories evolved in exile contexts with a small and new Syrian community and with undeveloped organizational ties to Syria and the receiving context. Drawing on interviews with Syrians in Oslo with a background in activism during the uprising, I argued that the participants' activist trajectories evolved in a locally embedded manner. The participants have integrated the context in reinventing their engagement by challenging and conforming to integration narratives, recognizing the lack of resources to support the action related to Syria, capitalizing on infrastructures related to other causes of their interest, and evaluating the state of the Syrian community as in need of structural support. They establish continuity with their past activism by *repositioning* their engagement in alignment with their identity and incorporating the values and ideals of empowerment, dialogue, and solidarity acquired from the past in various formal and informal practices of helping community members. Therefore, the present study demonstrates that activist trajectories are embedded in both past experiences and the specific sociopolitical context of Oslo.

In this manner, I contribute to the growing literature on Syrian activism in exile (Abiyaghi & Younes, 2018; De Elvira, 2018; Fourn, 2018; Moss, 2016, 2020; Ragab, 2020) by adding insights into how activist trajectories may develop in exile. Shifting the focus from contexts with visible populations and structures to those that lack these advantages has illuminated the wider aspects of engagement rooted in identity and community support. Although Ragab (2020) already highlights an extensive diaspora mobilization among Syrians in the area of integration and community-building in Germany, she does not take individual experiences into account. In my study, I show that one's past experiences of participation in the uprising and antiregime activism cannot be delinked from current engagements. Thus, it is important to account for both contextual factors and past experiences to better understand how engagement is shaped in exile.

This point relates to my second contribution. The literature on the biographical consequences of activism focuses on past experiences without accommodating the mediating effect of sociopolitical contexts in shaping individuals' engagement in the present (for an exception, see Bosi, 2019). By bridging this scholarship with an opportunity structure approach, I systematize the relationship between past experiences and the context of exile. Although the literature on Syrians' activist trajectories articulates the impact of exile contexts such as Lebanon and Turkey on leading activists to engage in humanitarian activism (Abiyaghi & Younes, 2018; De Elvira, 2018; Fourn, 2018), it does not do so systematically. I argue that an opportunity structure approach can add an important layer to studying activist trajectories because it allows for the specification of the opportunities and constraints existing in the context of engagement, thus contributing to a better understanding of how they can interact with past activism in influencing trajectories. For example, an opportunity structure approach has been useful in highlighting the impact of integration regimes and, therefore, in showing how they might influence individuals' engagement.

Finally, I also extend the literature on conversion (Leclercq, 2012; Tissot, 2005; Willemez, 2004) by introducing the concept of *identity-based repositioning*. I coined this term to label the overlap between antiregime and identity-based activism in the past and how these two became disentangled over time as identity was repositioned as the locus of engagement. Drawing on the trajectories of two informants, the concept highlights individuals' experiences with a lack of community structures in Oslo and how it contributed to their decision to disengage from

antiregime activism. The favorable conditions in Oslo in connection to Kurdish and LGBT rights activism further enabled the enactment of repositioning around identity. In this sense, this concept can be utilized to scrutinize how activist trajectories evolve over time and in exile, taking into account both individuals' involvement in the past and the opportunity structures in the context of exile. Although I alluded to the circumstances in Syria as important to the act of repositioning, I did not expand on it in my analysis. Future research can establish a better relationship between the factors at the sending and receiving contexts and how the interplay of both can shift and shape the process of repositioning and activist trajectories at large.

Notes

1. Defined by Giugni (2008) as the "effects on the life-course of individuals who have participated in movement activities" (p. 1589).
2. Known as reconversion in the French literature, but I choose to translate it here as conversion.
3. Known as the Syrian National Coalition (SNC).
4. I address the activism of the informants in Berlin in another article.
5. Such as organizing protests in solidarity with the Kurdish-inhabited areas in Syria and being a member in several Kurdish organizations.
6. Speaking of Arab Syrians.
7. Local groups mobilizing for the uprising that sprang up later as the protest wave spread across the country.
8. In an unpublished article, I elaborate more on that point in terms of how the lack of emotional spaces (mainly protests and networks) in Oslo contributed to the disengagement of activists from organized action on behalf of Syria.

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