“Eros and Thanatos in the Syrian Revolution” by Javier Sethness

At the eighth biennial International Herbert Marcuse Society conference, *“Critical Theory in Dark Times: The Prospects for Liberation in the Shadow of the Radical Right,”* held at the University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB) from October 10-12, 2019, one panel was called **Syria, the Eros Effect, and Pseudo-Anti-Imperialism.** Below is the text of one of the presentations from this panel.

Introduction

The Syrian Revolution, a mass-popular revolt against Bashar al-Assad’s Ba’athist regime that commenced in March 2011 during the wave of so-called “Arab uprisings” that began with Mohammed Bouazizi’s self-immolation in Tunisia in December 2010, and which now faces utter destruction at the hands of Assad, Russia, Iran, and Turkey, arguably has demonstrated many of the key features of the “Eros Effect” developed by George Katsiaficas from Herbert Marcuse’s metapsychological theory, built in turn on Sigmund Freud’s postulations. In this presentation, I will explore some of the myriad ways in which the Syrian people have instituted the “Eros Effect” during the Revolution, and discuss how the Assad regime’s democidal counter-revolutionary response, backed by Vladimir Putin, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hezbollah and other sectarian Shi’a militias, international neo-fascist movements, and—paradoxically—many Western self-styled leftists, represents a stark example of political Thanatos that recalls the crushing of the Spanish Republic by Franco, Hitler, and Mussolini 80 years ago.

Even so, amidst the extreme violence perpetrated not only by the Assad-Putin axis but also by U.S. imperialism, sectarian rebels, and the Islamic State (IS) in Syria during the past 8+ years, many leftists have unfortunately endorsed a pseudo-anti-imperialist approach to the Syrian people, whose struggles for emancipation are overlooked. Reflecting on the world’s inaction as the regime and Russia devastated Eastern Ghouta in 2018, the nurse Bereen Hassoun asks, “Do others know we actually exist?” (Hassoun 2018)[1] Syrian communist Yassin al-Haj Saleh responds poignantly in the 2018 documentary *Syria: The Impossible Revolution*: “They don’t see us. They don’t see our suffering.”

This is a highly troubling and demoralizing perspective for leftists to take, and I agree both with Theodor W. Adorno that the *"need to let suffering speak is a condition of all truth," and* with the Syrian-Palestinian hunger striker and Free Syrian Army (FSA) fighter Kassem Eid regarding the need for the stories and voices of those who suffer and have been martyred in Syria to be told and heard (Adorno 1973: 17-8; Eid 2018: xv).

Political Eros, the Eros Effect, and Syria

"The unfolding of the life instincts, Eros, requires social change, revolution; the revolution requires the instinctual foundation." (Marcuse 1980: 42).

"A revolution is an exceptional event that will alter the history of societies, while changing humanity itself. It is a rupture in time and space, where humans live between two periods: the period of power and the period of revolution." (Aziz 2013)
In *Eros and Civilization* (1955), Marcuse endorses Freud's stipulation of two "primary drives" in human beings: Eros, the life instinct, as against Thanatos, the death instinct. Affirming Freud's hypothesis about the existence of an interminable conflict between these two instincts, derived by the psychoanalyst at life's end following World War I and the deaths of his close friend Anton von Freund and daughter Sophie (Wallace IV 1976), Marcuse applies it to the metapsychological and political levels. For Marcuse, writing in 1968, Thanatos is seen in the "neo-colonial slaughter" of the Vietnam War, which manifests the dominant reality principle of global capitalism, whereas political Eros is found in the various struggles for a non-repressive society, such as those of militant students, workers, colonized peoples, and people of color (1968: 259; 1970a: 40-41). In this sense, while he claims that there exists a "biological basis for socialism" at the individual level, Marcuse believes Eros progresses collectively through social revolution: the 'Great Refusal' that rejects capitalism and domination (1969a: 7-10).

Alternately, appropriating Erich Fromm's framing in the wake of their estrangement following Marcuse's unjust criticisms of his counterpart as a "revisionist" in the epilogue to *Eros and Civilization,* Marcuse distinguishes between the radical character structure, whereby the individual is characterized by a "preponderance […] of life instincts over the death instinct," and the affirmative character structure, defined as suffering from a predominance of Thanatos. In parallel, taking from Rudolf Bahro, the critical theorist differentiates between emancipatory needs, or those which require social revolution for their satisfaction, and compensatory needs, which tie their subjects to the given system (2011: 208-211). He champions rebellions that embody "*existential revolts* against an obsolete reality principle," in which "the *whole organism,* the *very soul of the human being,* becomes political," reflecting the activation of Eros "*against organized and*

socialized destruction" (2011: 212; emphasis added). Marcuse anticipated radical anti-authoritarian movements that would break up centralized capitalist and State power into "economic and social units of autonomous control" (1980: 41-6).

In this sense, the Syrian Revolution provides remarkable illustrations of several of Marcuse's theories. When we think of Fromm and Marcuse's radical character structure in the Syrian context, we can think of its incarnation in the hundreds of thousands of *thuwar* ("revolutionaries") who courageously took to the streets in Dera'a, Douma, Homs, Rastan, Hama, Amuda, and Qamishlo to launch the uprising in March and April 2011 (Dagher 2019: 211-9; Daher 2019: 151-3). In Raqqa in March 2012, masses of Syrians similarly demonstrated their radical character against the regime's murder of the youth Ali al-Babinsi during his observation of the first anniversary of the Revolution, showing that, "[w]hen the people were the rulers, no one could stand against them" (Hisham and Crabapple 2018: 41-8). Conversely, the affirmative character structure is typified by the *shabiha* (regime-loyalist militias and paramilitaries), Assad and Putin, and their military forces. Indeed, the Syrian Revolution provides a stark example of the masses expressing their emancipatory needs—as summarized in the popular slogan, "The People want the Downfall of the Regime"—against the thanotic power of Assad's bourgeois-terror rule, which has taken the lives of over half a million people, and rendered homeless a dozen million more, since March 2011. Over these eight and a half years, the mass of Syrian oppositionists have activated "the[ir] *whole organism[s]"* in resisting the "*organized and socialized* destruction" upheld and perpetrated by the war-machines of Assad and his backers.

In areas liberated from regime control emerged hundreds of local councils and coordinating committees (*tansiqiyyat,* or LCC's) to provide humanitarian aid and ensure the observation of basic needs, as well as organize protests, document rights-violations, and coordinate civil and self-defense with rebels (Yassin-Kassab and al-Shami 2016: 69). The cause of the local councils was spurred by the Syrian exile anarchist Omar Aziz, who, upon returning to Syria in late 2011, saw a need for the protest-based movement to move toward self-organization through councils so as to collaborate collectively and press forward the Revolution (al-Shami 2013). Aziz helped to found several local councils in working-class districts of Damascus, including Zabadani, Daraya, and Douma, before being martyred in a regime military hospital in February 2013 (Yassin-Kassab and al-Shami 2016: 68-9). Doubtlessly, the *tansiqiyyat* had problems, including lack of participation from ethno-religious minorities and women, leadership that was imposed by self-selection rather than election in many cases, and a reconstitution of traditional social hierarchies (Daher 2019: 52-3; Abouzeid 2018: 154-5).

In a similar vein, unfortunately, the Syrian Revolution did not see mass-industrial strikes or many advances in workers' self-management, with the partial exception of the cooperatives and communes established in the Self-Administration of Northeastern Syria (SANES,

formerly Democratic Federation of Northern Syria [DFNS], or Rojava: Yassin-Kassab and al-Shami 2016: 61; Heval X 2016) following the Assad regime's withdrawal from northeastern Syria in July 2012. As such, the *tansiqiyyat* empowered by the Syrian Revolution could not match the historical power of *soviets* and other workers' and peasants' councils in history—in the sense that their power remained at the political and logistical levels, but did not, at least outside Rojava/SANES, include questions of labor, production, and distribution. However, the SANES may represent an exception, in light of claims that 80 percent of land formerly administered by the Assad regime has been expropriated and its management transferred to cooperatives, with 20 percent of the land remaining "in the hands of large landowners" (Knapp et al 2016: 199). As a reflection of the same, the Rojava and DFNS constitutions explicitly recognize the "right" to private property, and it would seem, as with many LCC's, that commune leaders—who in turn choose the leadership of the cooperatives—have often been appointed rather than elected (Daher 2019: 170-8). It remains unclear precisely how Rojava's supposed cooperatives differ from traditional, pyramidal enterprises (Knapp et al. 2016: 199-209). As such, at worst, these supposed cooperatives may well be little more than fronts for the the misleadingly named Democratic Union Party (PYD), affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which "inherited" Rojava from Assad upon the regime's withdrawal in 2012 (Daher 2019: 161).

Still, for all that, the *tansiqiyyat* and communes constitute(d) important experiments in popular self-organization and direct democracy that express(ed) the politics of the Great Refusal by promoting civil disobedience and rejecting sectarianism (Yassin-Kassab and al-Shami 2016: 59). They contain many lessons for future projects in self-management, given that, at their height, there existed some 400 *tansiqiyyat,* and not only in Damascus, Homs, or Hama, but also in Aleppo, Manbij, and Raqqa (Daher 2019: 46-52; Yassin-Kassab and al-Shami 2016: 76).

The Eros Effect in the Syrian Revolution

Building on Marcuse's avowal of a "new sensibility" developed through struggle, George Katsiaficas identifies a recurrent "Eros Effect" in history, defined as the "sudden entry into history of millions of ordinary people who ac[t] in solidarity with each other" to redirect "the world from war to peace, from racism to solidarity, and from patriotism to humanism" (2013: 10). According to Katsiaficas, the Eros effect expresses humanity's "instinctual need for freedom" (371). Upon its putative activation, "it seems the whole world is transformed," and humans' interpersonal bonds operate on the basis of love and community, as "[c]ompetition gives way to cooperation, hierarchy to equality, power to truth" (2018: 3; 2013: 372-3). Important dimensions of the Eros effect include "the sudden and synchronous emergence of hundreds of thousands of people occupying public space; the simultaneous appearance of revolts in many places; the intuitive identification of hundreds of thousands of people with each other; their common belief in new values; and suspension of normal daily routines" (10). The "People's power" sought by the Eros effect

seeks to undo society's pyramidal structures in favor of direct democracy through grassroots decision-making and autonomous self-organization (Katsiaficas 2013: 370; 2018: 4).

Applying the concept of the Eros effect to the Syrian Revolution, we see it fits well. How so?

For one, of course, the Syrian Revolution came within the context of the wave of upsurge known as the "Arab uprisings" or "Arab spring," which erupted in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Oman, Morocco, Libya, and Bahrain beginning in late 2010 (Yassin-Kassab and al-Shami 35-6). In this way, it is similar to the worldwide waves of uprisings from 1848, 1905, 1968, and 1986-1992 (in both Eastern Europe/former USSR and Asia) identified by Katsiaficas as historical exemplars of the Eros effect, as "[g]lobal oppositional forces converg[ing] in a pattern of mutual amplification" (Katsiaficas 2018: 8-26). The Syrian Revolution began with the popular indignation at the Assad regime's imprisonment and torture of teenage boys in the impoverished southern city of Dera'a, historically known as a Ba'athist "bastion," who had on the night of February 22, 2011, painted graffiti on a school wall saying *"Your turn, doctor,"* alluding to Assad's past as an ophthalmologist, as well as *"Leave"* (*Erhal,* a reference to the slogan used in the protests that toppled Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, and which now again are being used again General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi). It has also itself inspired courageous upsurge regionally, as seen in the flying of the Free Syria flag in Khartoum during popular protests in early 2019 to oust Omar al-Bashir, which began precisely upon his return from visiting the pariah Assad in Damascus in December 2018, as part of the attempt on the part of several regional authoritarians to "rehabilitate" the regime (Daher 2019: 40-2; *Middle East Monitor* 2018; *Al-Jazeera English* 2019a).

It is clear that the Syrian Revolution has embodied the "massive awakening of the instinctual human need for justice and for freedom" in its demand for the elimination of the ruling royal junta that has oppressed and terrorized the country for half a century (Katsiaficas 2018: 15; al-Haj Saleh 2017: 39-44). With the outbreak of protests in Dera'a in March 2011 among the defiant parents and local supporters of the imprisoned boys, the prevailing ban on public demonstrations mandated by Assad's "Emergency Laws" was broken: the "forms of social control ha[d] been ruptured" (Katsiaficas 2018: 15). In having overcome fear, Syrian protesters became imbued with the "spirit of freedom," inspiring them in their ethical and difficult struggle (al-Haj Saleh 2017: 33). Civilians would arm themselves and unite with defecting officers and soldiers to self-organize as the Free Syrian Army (FSA), dedicating themselves to the defeat of the regime and a democratic transition (Eid 2018: 78; Yassin-Kassab and al-Shami 2016: 85).

Let us specifically explore the activation of the Eros effect in the Syrian Revolution with reference to the five main criteria Katsiaficas presents.

The first two are: “the sudden and synchronous emergence of hundreds of thousands of people occupying public space” and “the simultaneous appearance of revolts in many places.” On March 18, 2011, unprecedented protests broke out in Syria to mark the “Friday of dignity” in the cities of Dera’a, Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Latakia, Raqqa, Qamishlo, and Baniyas (Daher 2019: 40-1). The Assad regime responded to the outbreak of these demonstrations with deadly force: despite his senior adviser and brigadier general Manaf Tlass’ call for conciliation, Assad considered all such protesters to be traitors akin to the Fighting Vanguard, a splinter group of the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan*) that had led an uprising against the reign of his father, Hafez, in Hama in 1982. Commanded by Hafez’s brother Rifaat and Manaf’s father Mustafa, the elder Assad’s reprisal against the people of Hama consisted in utterly devastating the city for over three weeks, through besiegement, indiscriminate tank and artillery shelling, mass-rape, and mass-executions, all of which took the lives of up to 40,000 Syrians (Dagher 2019: 225-39; Allouche 2018).

Accordingly, Bashar sought to apply Hafez’s “Hama manual” of extreme violence to the protests—as was evidenced in the regime’s brutal assault on Tlass’ hometown of al-Rastan, a major hub of protest, in May 2011 (Dagher 2019: 221-4). Lieutenant Abdel-Razzak Tlass, Manaf’s cousin, would be one of the first military officers to publicly defect, as he announced on *Al-Jazeera* in June in response to the regime attack on Rastan, while Manaf Tlass would himself defect in July 2012 (Abouzeid 2018: 53-4; Dagher 2019: 264-70, 300-311). Their relative Suleiman Tlass was subjected to two years’ imprisonment in Assad’s “labyrinth of suffering,” otherwise known as a “torture archipelago,” out of guilt by association (Abouzeid 2018: 284, 358). The ferocity of repression directed at both protesters and the funerals of those killed *in* demonstrations, together with Assad’s uncompromising and conspiratorial public address on March 30, only intensified the geographical spread of the uprising, and paradoxically pushed it from advocating reform to revolution. On March 25, the second “Friday of dignity,” protesters in Dera’a governorate burned down Ba’ath party offices and destroyed public images of Bashar and Hafez (Yassin-Kassab and al-Shami 2016: 39-42). Anti-regime protests also broke out in the Kurdish-majority northeast, despite most Kurdish parties’ reluctance to support the uprising from the outset (Daher 2019: 151-4).

The people of Dera’a carried out a general strike on April 5, and on April 15 and 22, masses of Syrians who marched from Douma and nearby towns to converge on Damascus’ Abbaseen Square were ruthlessly shot down by regime security forces (Dagher 2019: 213-4). On April 18, popular efforts to transform Homs’ central Square, “New Clock Tower,” into a replica of Cairo’s Tahrir Square met with ferocious violence on the part of the regime, as the people’s joyous defiance yielded to the murder of approximately 200 protesters at the hands of regime authorities, who disposed of the bodies and their anti-Assad banners using heavy machinery, employing fire engines to wash away the blood before the coming of morning light (Daher 2019: 41; Dagher 2019: 215-8). Mass-protests in Hama, Dera’a, Deir-ez-Zour, Saraqeb, and the town of Moadimiya, outside of Damascus, would similarly confront the deployment of tanks and *shabiha* raids (al-Haj Saleh 2017: 5; Yassin-Kassab and al-Shami 2016: 44; Abouzeid 2018: 132-3; Eid 2018: 79). The working-class district of

Baba Amr in Homs became the Revolution's first "stronghold," defended by the FSA-affiliated Farouq Battalions, whose formation was announced by Abdel-Razzak Tlass in November 2011, "to protect innocent protesters […] and innocent civilians" (Abouzeid 2018: 92-93).[2] Assad collectively punished Baba Amr with the besiegement and relentless indiscriminate shelling that was infamously witnessed by foreign journalists Marie Colvin and Rémi Ochlik, whom Assad had killed in a targeted assassination in February 2012 (Abouzeid 2018: 63, 97-105). Civil protests in the country would continue for more than fifteen months, when they peaked in June 2012 at 700 weekly demonstrations, following another general strike in May 2012, this time in Damascus (al-Haj Saleh 2017: 10-13).

Hence, the Syrian Revolution definitely instituted the second criterion of the Eros effect, about simultaneous revolt "in many places," but statistically, it is unclear if it has observed the first criterion: although there have been uprisings in various cities and regions, have they involved "hundreds of thousands […] *occupying public space*"? Daher estimates that the size of the crowd present during Homs' Clock Tower Square massacre ranges from 10,000-20,000 (2019: 41), whereas Yassin-Kassab and al-Shami describe "thousands" protesting in Hama, Homs, Saraqeb, Raqqa, and Deir-ez-Zour on March 25, 2011 (2016: 39). The latter also estimate crowds of hundreds of thousands celebrating in Hama upon its popular liberation in July 2011 (2016: 51). Moreover, Eid reports 10,000 people demonstrating daily in Moadimiya in early April 2011 (2018: 63). Hisham and Crabapple, as previously stated, claim hundreds of thousands in Raqqa's streets in March 2012, and Dagher asserts "close to one million" protesters in Hama's Asi Square at the beginning of the uprising (2019: 261).

Undoubtedly, the Syrian Revolution as a whole has involved the participation of millions of Syrians striving to liberate themselves from the Assad regime, but the utterly brutal response of security forces against demonstrations—reflecting Assad's own authoritarian perspective, and the marginalization of Manaf Tlass' moderating stance (Dagher 2019)—served to discourage uptake of the "occupation of the squares" model in Syria. Assad's "iron-fisted" strategy was deliberate, taken to ensure that the historical examples of Eastern European peoples liberating themselves from the Soviet Union, and—indeed, in recent memory—the so-called Arab spring's successful overthrow of the Tunisian and Egyptian dictatorships, would not take place in Syria (Yassin-Kassab and al-Shami 2016: 47-9). The regime's ruthless commencement of the dropping of barrel bombs against Moadimiya in summer 2011, and of its bombing of bread lines in August 2012, served this twisted end (Eid 2018: 69; al-Haj Saleh 2017: 13).

The third through fifth criteria of the Eros effect are as follows: "the intuitive identification of hundreds of thousands of people with each other; their common belief in new values; and suspension of normal daily routines […]." Daher remarks on the inclusiveness and pluralism of the Syrian revolutionaries' program in the early years of the uprising, emphasizing the dominant perspective as being for the "unity and freedom of the Syrian

people and against sectarianism," whether ethnic or religious (46-8). Similarly, al-Haj Saleh describes the Revolution as a collective "experience of self-renewal and social change," an uprising of Syria's "common people" against elitism, internal colonialism, and authoritarian modernism (2017: 29-38). Abu Azzam, a poet-commander of the Farouq Battalions, describes his time fighting in Baba Amr as the *"happiest time"* of his life, for the armed men struggled against the regime in defense of the people, who "welcomed them, fed them, and offered them moral support":

All of Baba Amr felt like one family. I felt like the warrior poets I'd read about […]. I was convinced that I was working against a tyrannical government that was killing all these people. My duty was to stand with the people who were my family and my friends' families (Abouzeid 2018: 64; emphasis added).

Yassin-Kassab and al-Shami observe in parallel how "[m]any Syrians speak of their first protest as a moment of personal liberation" (2016: 55). Eid explains that he felt "on fire" when seeing the first demonstrations, remarking on the "new purpose the protests had given me, and I know that a lot of young men felt that way too" (2018: 62, 70). The FSA fighter Basil declared in 2012 that he is "crazy with happiness!"

You know, I only picked up this gun because I was sick of hearing something called 'peaceful' while our people were being killed. I felt it was impossible to beat Bashar peacefully. Weapons were a tool, but our strength came from our community (Abouzeid 2018: 142).

Similarly, Omar Aziz wrote in October 2011 that

The Revolution [had] transformed individuals themselves to broaden the horizons of their own lives once they ensured that the conflict was their means of liberation […]. They were able to discover their newly defined capabilities of innovation and invention, of rich social engagements and assorted colors, that were different than what they had initially entrusted while being restricted under a single tyrannical killer for half a century (Aziz 2013).

Significantly, the Assad regime not only ruthlessly repressed and refused to recognize the initial protests organized by young civil activists in favor of political rights, but also released Salafi-jihadist prisoners to corrupt the oppositional movement precisely because of its fear of the great subversive potential the uprising represented (Yassin-Kassab and al-Shami 2016: 45-6). The regime's *strategy of tension* in this sense is symbolized starkly by its mass-liberation of hundreds of members of the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan*) and al-Qaeda from Sednaya prison and the infamous "Palestine Branch" in May 2011, following Assad's proclaimed amnesty for *Ikhwan* affiliates, and the prison's subsequent filling with protesters, tens of thousands of whom would be tortured, disappeared, and murdered (Abouzeid 2018: 76-9; al-Haj Saleh 2017: 11-15; Yassin-Kassab and al-Shami 2016: 76).

Thanatos and the Syrian Revolution

"If the Revolution fails, my life and that of my whole generation would be devoid of meaning… all that we have dreamt of and believed in would have been mere illusion." – Omar Aziz (cited in Hassan 2013)

Despite the courageousness of the masses of Syrians "radically changing themselves while struggling to change their country and emancipate their fellow Syrians" (al-Haj Saleh 30), nearly all of this revolutionary effort has been destroyed in recent years by regime-axis forces. Besides the Kurdish-majority northeast, administered as a one-party statelet by the Democratic Union Party (PYD); and the northwestern region, including Afrin, which is occupied by Turkey and its affiliated chauvinistic militias, both Arab and Turkmen (Knapp et al. 2016: 241-3); the entire country has now returned to being subjected to Assad's jackboots, with the exception of Idlib province, where regime-axis forces have been pressing a devastating assault for months. Over half a million Syrians have been killed in this war, half of them civilians, and more than a hundred thousand others remain disappeared in Assad's concentration camps (Syrian Network for Human Rights 2018). The Assad regime is responsible for 98% of the 336 verifiable chemical-weapons attacks perpetrated in the war, and has "consistently prioritized striking population centers" as part of an "overall war strategy of collective punishment of populations in opposition-held areas" (Schneider and Lütkefend 2019).

Axis military forces, including *shabiha,* have taken the lives of thousands of Syrian children in their counter-insurgent campaigns, including more than three hundred children killed among the more than one thousand civilians murdered in the offensive on Idlib province this year (Reinl 2019; Hagedorn 2019). The ongoing assault has involved the targeting of markets and more than two dozen hospitals, leading to the displacement of more than half a million Syrians north toward the Turkish border, leading an estimated 40,000 of them to develop the tropical disease leishmaniasis, amidst catastrophic conditions (*Al-Jazeera English* 2019; *The New Arab* 2019, 2019a). It was thus no exaggeration when the French ambassador to the UN, Nicolas de Riviere, accused Russia of "currently carpet-bombing Idlib" before Putin and Xi Jinping vetoed a ceasefire resolution for the province proposed at the UN Security Council in September 2019 (Reinl 2019a).

This double-veto marked Russia and China's thirteenth and seventh times, respectively, wielding their veto power to defend the vicious Assad regime at the Security Council. Such refusal of accountability for war crimes and atrocities reflect Putin and Xi's interests in continuing to exploit the Syrian people and their resources—including the Tartous naval base, in Russia's case, and Syria's phosphates, over which Russia is competing with Iran, as well as arms sales and investments in both Russia and China's cases (Daher 2019: 189-99) —together with denying any precedent that might lead to further scrutiny and action on their own atrocities in Xinjiang, Tibet, Chechnya, and Syria proper. They mirror unconditional U.S. support at the UN for Israel's crimes in Occupied Palestine (Yassin-Kassab and al-Shami 2016: 200; Daher 2019: 191). The disproportionate power that Russia and China have in propping up Assad's state-exterminationist regime, on the one hand, and that the U.S. uses to protect Israeli settler-colonialism, on the other, reflects the lamentable

reality whereby the UN Security Council represents an oligarchical power-structure imposed on global politics (al-Haj Saleh 2018; al-Haj Saleh 2017: 26).

The immediate fate of the Syrian Revolution—to be stamped out—is encapsulated in the *shabiha* slogan, "Assad or we burn the country!" Now, the country has burned, and the neo-sultanic Assad presides over its ruins: "A people who dared to demand freedom received annihilation instead" (Yassin-Kassab and al-Shami 2016: 225). Like the Spanish Revolution, the Syrian Revolution was drowned in blood. Internally, despite the bravery of oppositionist civilians, defectors, and rebels who defied the regime, the neo-bourgeois classes sided with Assad, viewing the regime's opponents with 'bourgeois coldness' as "backward" peoples and surplus-populations whose mass-suppression and -killing was of little consequence (Adorno 1974: 74; al-Haj Saleh 2017: 9). Beyond the initial repression, rebel communities have been targeted by the Assad regime with indiscriminate artillery shelling, aerial bombardment, SCUD missile and chemical-weapon attacks, and starvation sieges (Yassin-Kassab 2016: 99; Eid 2018: 89-91, 157-161).

Externally, Russia and Iran provided the regime billions of dollars in credit to finance monopolistic arms and oil sales, before Putin intervened decisively militarily to prevent the regime's collapse in September 2015, overwhelmingly targeting FSA positions at first, rather than the Islamic State, as Russian State media's "war on terror" propaganda had claimed (Daher 2019: 190-8; Yassin-Kassab and al-Shami 2016: 223). In 2016, an average of just one-quarter of Russian air strikes targeted IS, relative to rebels. In this way, Putin served Assad's thanotic goal of 'reducing' the Syrian war to a binary choice between himself and IS (Daher 2019: 192). For its part, besides ensuring the survival of its client state, Russia has "gained" from its intervention in Syria in that it has been able to ghoulishly test "around 300 types of weapons" on Assad's opponents (*The New Arab* 2019b), as well as train hundreds of thousands of troops in the ways of scorched-earth warfare.

Nevertheless, the U.S., Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey, disingenuously known as the "friends of Syria," also bear responsibility for the thanotic resolution of the Syrian Revolution. Both the U.S. and Saudi Arabia discouraged rebels in Dera'a and Ghouta from uniting to march on Damascus in early 2013 (al-Haj Saleh 2017: 15), and the $500 million dedicated in 2014-2015 to a CIA program to "train and equip" opposition forces was expressly directed against IS, not the regime (Daher 2019: 210-11). In fact, in July 2012, FSA rebels from Moadimiya were repulsed from liberating Damascus due to a lack of adequate firepower (Eid 2018: 86-8). Furthermore, Barack Obama's unwillingness to observe the "red line" for military intervention he had previously announced over chemical-weapons use in the wake of the regime's August 2013 sarin gas massacre in al-Ghouta and Moadimiya—which took over 1,400 lives—both demonstrated the "criminality at the heart of the current international order" (Eid 2018; al-Haj Saleh 2017: 19), and signaled to Assad that he had free reign to use weapons of mass-destruction in his reconquest campaign, as he would go on to do more than three-hundred times thereafter

(Schneider and Lütkefend 2019). Obama's lack of response to the Ghouta massacre arguably empowered the jihadist rebel groups within the opposition that were supported by the Gulf and Turkish states as well as private donors, greatly exacerbating sectarianism against Kurds, Alawites, Christians, and Shi'a (Daher 2019: 119-31; Yassin-Kassab and al-Shami 2016: 122; Knapp et al. 2016: 222-41; Abouzeid 2018: 147-9). Beyond this, the Obama administration refused to supply anti-aircraft missiles to the FSA, thus leaving intact the regime's main military advantage in the wake of its destabilization due to mass-defections to the rebels: that is to say, its aerial superiority (Daher 2019: 210-1).

Under Donald Trump, the U.S. has abandoned all pretense to seeking Assad's ouster, besides highly spectacular attacks following the regime's chemical-weapons attacks in Khan Sheikhoun and Douma in April 2017 and 2018, respectively. Having cut off the remaining anti-Assad rebels and White Helmets and guarded silence amidst the offensives on Dera'a and Idlib, Trump shows just how much he has clearly been coordinating with Putin on Syria, as on much else. Rather than express compassion for Syrian refugees, he has all but blocked them from entering the U.S. for asylum. Furthermore, the U.S.-led Coalition killed at least 1,600 civilians in its bombardment of Raqqa, the city IS declared its "capital" after having opportunistically taken it in January 2014 from the FSA and Islamist rebels who had liberated it from regime control in early 2013 (Hisham and Crabapple 2018: 124-5; *Middle East Monitor* 2019).

Salafi-Jihadi Reaction

Lastly, the revolutionary movement itself disconcertingly was decimated by the regime's devastating reaction, and Salafi-jihadists—many of them having been liberated from Sednaya prison and Palestine Branch by Assad's amnesty—opportunistically came to dominate the opposition to the regime axis, undermining the Revolution's democratic aims. Coming to resemble yet another reified power—the Revolution's Thermidor, if you will—Islamic fundamentalist groups such as the formerly exiled Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, Ahrar al-Sham, Jabhat al-Nusra, and Jaysh al-Islam—the latter of which, among many other crimes, forcibly disappeared four civil activists, including Samira Khalil, al-Haj Saleh's partner, in Douma in July 2013 (2017: 22-3)—repelled Syria's ethnic and religious minorities by presenting sectarian framings of the uprising not dissimilar from those pushed by IS, further sabotaging the Revolution's original aims (Daher 2019: 112; Abouzeid 2018: 130-1). Besides this, these extremist currents promoted the systematic social exclusion of women: for Ahrar al-Sham, supported by Qatar and Turkey, the Taliban had represented an ideal "Islamic project" (Daher 2019: 122).

On his show, the *Al-Jazeera* host Faisal al-Qassim openly considered whether genocide is the most appropriate means of resolving the "Syrian Alawite question" (Daher 2019: 119),

thus concurring with the hegemonic, neo-fascist visions of Salafi-jihadism—reminiscent, indeed, of the Fighting Vanguard[3]—that dismally came to predominate as the democratic opposition was outgunned, underfunded, and ultimately crushed. Abouzeid reports that the Farouq Battalions had effectively dissolved by summer 2013 due to these problems in the face of its many-fronted war against the regime, al-Nusra, IS, and "all those trying to 'force Islamist beards on the revolution'" (2018: 214, 257).

The *Ikhwan*'s centrality within the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces greatly alienated Kurds in particular, thus inhibiting the possibility of a joint Arab-Kurdish revolution against the regime, as envisioned by Meshaal Temmo, among many others (Daher 2019: 117; Yassin-Kassab and al-Shami 2016: 46). Competition both among the rebels and IS, and increasingly between and among themselves, eclipsed the Revolution's initial goals of democracy, equality, and social justice (Daher 2019: 144; al-Haj Saleh 2017: xvii; Hisham and Crabapple 2018: 125-33, 167, 187).[4] Jihadist groups would increasingly compete over rent-seeking opportunities through the exploitation of the Syrian masses, particularly through human trafficking, after dismantling their *tansiqiyyat* and imposing *sharia* councils and other reified institutions (such as religious police), in parallel to how rebels would fight internally—rather like mafias—over foreign funding, territory, and monopolization of border-crossings (Yassin-Kassab and al-Shami 2016: 72; Daher 2019: 112, 132-9; Abouzeid 2018: 171, 335).

For example, in Raqqa, al-Nusra protected banks from looting, and in Douma, Jaysh al-Islam installed itself as the single employer, while Nusra sought to assassinate FSA fighters as supposed "apostates" from Islam in their fight to control rather than liberate Syria (Abouzeid 2018: 191-202, 255-69; Daher 2019: 132). Al-Nusra even overran the bases of the Hazm movement, the US-backed reincarnation of the Farouq Battalions, in 2014 and 2015, and, according to a former aide to Abu Mohammad al-Jolani (Nusra's founder), the organization had planned to entirely wipe out the FSA upon the fall of the regime (Abouzeid 2018: 313-9, 348).

Beyond this, most of Idlib's Christians fled the city as it was falling to Ahrar al-Sham and the al-Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra in March 2015, recalling IS' despoliation of churches in Raqqa beginning in 2013 (Daher 2019: 142; Abouzeid 2018: 209), while al-Nusra instrumentalized the lives of thousands of Shi'a minorities in the towns of al-Foua and Kefray in Idlib province, besieging them for three years to press for the release of prisoners held by the regime (*Al-Jazeera English* 2018). This followed the brutal occupation of eleven Alawite villages in Latakia province carried out by Islamic State, al-Nusra, and Ahrar al-Sham, among others, in summer 2013, which resulted in the murder of nearly two hundred civilians and the kidnapping of several more (Abouzeid 2018: 222-233, 290-2; Daher 2019: 142).

Tellingly, a formerly high-ranking commander within Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS, the latest incarnation of al-Nusra) in September 2019 denounced its practices of corruption, extortion, and extraction, together with its leaders' apparent apathy toward preparing defenses against regime assault *(The Syrian Observer* 2019). Indeed, it remains unclear to this date whether HTS sold the tanks and other heavy weapons it seized from Ahrar al-Sham in January 2019 to the regime, or hid them: they were certainly not in use in the defense of Khan Sheikhoun in southern Idlib province, which fell to the regime axis in August 2019 (Al Nofal 2019).

Conclusion

Now, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has just begun invading northeastern Syria east of the Euphrates River, having been suddenly given a green light to do so after negotiating with Trump for the withdrawal of U.S. troops who had been supporting the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Considering the brutality of the Turkish military occupation of Afrin since early 2018—assisted by Ahrar al-Sham, among other groups (Daher 2019: 115)—as well as its ongoing crimes in Occupied North Kurdistan, this newest development ominously raises the specter of widespread war crimes against Syrian Kurds, Assyrians, and other ethnic minorities, as well as the forging of a potential alliance between Assad and the SDF, bolstered by the PYD-affiliated YPG, against Turkey and its allied militias (Faidhi Dri 2019). Operation "Peace Spring" has commenced through the aerial and artillery bombardment of civilians by Erdoğan's military (McKernan 2019). Since the incursion began, the Turkish-backed jihadist militia Ahrar al-Sharqiya has been accused of ghastly atrocities, including the summary execution of Havrin Khalaf, the Secretary General of the Future Syria Party, on the highway between Manbij and Qamishlo, in addition to the murder of at least three medical workers from the Kurdish Red Crescent Society in Gire Spi/Tel Abyad (Lynch 2019; Rudaw 2019).

In sum, then, besides the horrendous oppression to which the Syrian people have been subjected by Assad, his ghastly backers, and regional and global authoritarians—including Turkey, the Gulf states, and the U.S.—for over eight years now, the self-destructiveness of the Syrian Revolution itself can arguably be seen in its "deviations from" the Eros effect: the reintroduction of ethno-religious and class hierarchies contradicting solidarity and cosmopolitanism, and the opportunistic reification of power on the part of reactionary and sectarian oppositional forces, amidst a marked lack of international support and solidarity for the Revolution among progressives and leftists. Both internal and external forces determined that the fate of the Revolution would be its destruction. As such, the fate of the Syrian Revolution mirrors that of the Russian and Spanish Revolutions. In this light, we can only hope to learn from the past and organize toward a better future. In particular, the destiny of the Syrian Revolution illuminates the importance of inclusive and humane perspectives, and of "restarting the revolution." As Hisham and Crabapple observe with reference to the people of Raqqa, summarizing well the meaning of the Syrian struggle:

Liberators would storm the gates, and residents would place their hopes in the change these new men with guns might bring with them. Liberators would turn oppressors. New liberators would come and do the same. Through it all, they, the residents, would keep, with unreasonable defiance, placing their hope in change (2018: 197).[5]

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1Compare the questions posed by Ruha's aunt Noora, as their city of Saraqeb in Idlib is bombarded by the regime: "Why isn't anyone helping us? […] Why doesn't anyone care?" (Abouzeid 2018: 219).

2The Farouq Battalions received financing in part from the Saudi-backed Lebanese billionaire politician Saad Hariri, seeking to counter Hezbollah's intervention on the regime's side (Abouzeid 2018: 101).

3In August 2016, some groups in Aleppo named the brigade with which they sought to break the regime's siege after Ibrahim Youssef, the founder of Fighting Vanguard (Daher 2019: 143).

4Suleiman Tlass saw "only business, personal benefits, personal cliques, and corruption" among many Syrian oppositionists in exile: "Very few of them had a conscience" (quoted in Abouzeid 2018: 296).

5Compare William Morris: "[People] fight and lose the battle, and the thing they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other [people] have to fight for what they meant under another name" (cited in Bookchin 1982).