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Sami H. Atassi

Delusory Decolonization in a Syrian-American's Mind

When I first started writing this, I wasn't happy with my words or myself. I am still not happy with them. Over and over, I wanted to start all over again—a fresh start. But the same keys were tapped, the same words projected on the screen. So I started all over again, and still got nowhere, digging deeper in the same holes. I wanted to detonate the holes and uncover a mine of gold, or maybe more explosives, anything other than the same thing. I needed new information and needed to trash what was old and useless. But then I realized I was echoing the London of AD 2540: "Ending is better than mending" (Huxley 49). End what I have produced? End what has caused me to feel? How could that even be? This is my meditation on accepting what we assume should be ending. Nothing ends, even beyond *the* end. And nothing ever *is* beyond the original idea; the moment the idea is manifested is the moment it ends by its summation. Hence, to end something is as delusory as actualizing and immutable ideal. The theory and stories that follow should be read with absorption and criticism. Allow the words and ideas to colonize your mind. I have no answer to offer, but only the experiences my mind has taken and morphed. Take what you will and don't will. The mind can be colonized, but never conquered.

Delusory Decolonization

Under the general demand of slackening and for appeasement, we can hear the mutterings of the desire for a return of terror, for the realization of the fantasy to seize reality. The answer is: Let us wage war on totality ; let us be witness to the unrepresentable ; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name.

—Jean-François Lyotard, "What is Postmodernism?" (1983)

On 20 September 2001, President George W. Bush publicly denominated the Western hegemonies' imperial project of the early twenty-first century: the "War on Terror"—more

precisely, the Global War on Terrorism. As Kant realized, totalizing an illusion into a real unity—a *thing* that cannot be presented—requires a sublime *jouissance* triggered by terror (Lyotard 81). The antagonisms of terror thus justify and broaden the scope of consensus for supporting the “fixed,” positivist design of empire to resolve already existing conflicts that plague foreign lands and their peoples (Hardt/Negri 15). Two months after the 9/11 attack, who would have questioned Bush’s signing of an executive order to allow military tribunals against any foreigners suspected of having connections with terrorist plots? Other than Žižek, who noticed the striking similarities between the 9/11 and the 2008 financial meltdown speeches made by Bush (*First as Tragedy* 1)? Regardless of the principle that Americans and other peoples must protect themselves at all costs, the narrative of freedom has long been outdated (Lyotard 34). This is especially true since the subject of the narrative of scientific knowledge is the people (33). Each individual is a slate, inscribed upon and encoded with both hegemonic and anti-hegemonic signifiers. One imagines Damians the regicide in Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, as well as the Condemned man in Kafka’s “In the Penal Colony.” Like these offenders of civil order, the transparent circuit boards (citizens of postcolonial nation-states) of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have welcomed and rejected such printed codings in a frenzied state of positivist schizophrenia. This troubled consciousness requires a terrific spectacle in order to actualize and concretize an assumed ideology; as Spinoza averred, fear “engenders, preserves and fosters superstition” (*Treatise* 2). Watching the World Trade Center towers collapse on the TV screen made it possible for viewers to differentiate between the “reality TV shows” and the reality of the media machine (“Big Brother” 227), the antithesis and its presupposed thesis.

In the context of such technological, post-industrial societies, the perpetual process of delusory decolonization manifests itself within the community member’s consciousness and actions. Descartes’ hyperbolic doubt, pretending that “all things that had ever entered [his] mind were no more than the illusions of [his] dreams” (*Discourse* 33), lead him to the conclusion—*I think, therefore I am*—that propagates the recursivity of doubt, or, as I like to call, *ideological decolonization*. This is particularly true in nation-state societies resembling the structure of the Hobbesian monarchy; the citizen’s urge to decolonize ideas, and, in return, confess the ideas’ silenced antitheses, increases as the state-order totalizes alongside unstable, hybridized minorities. Monolithic systems of political power are, as Giddens notes, “founded upon cultural and social conformity deriving from the suppression of interest divisions” (297). This is where we can conceptualize Foucault’s saying that “power and knowledge directly imply one another” (*Discipline* 27). The “negative elements” within the state and/or individual, produced and then defined by the state power, are central to the transformations of discourses, a “technology of power,” which provides new knowledges for the power-machine to transcribe and store for later use (*History of Sexuality* 12). The basis of this social system, as Hegel noted, is

the complete concretion of (logical) knowledge, which has been constituted by the mechanisms of power. Therefore, the system of knowledge and its productions are the essence of the nation-state; the self-consciousness of the citizen must “manifest itself in light of rational Idea”—the *Idea* being the collective nature of the nation-state in the historical moment (*Reason in History* 12). Although actions are made “in light” (or under the gaze) of the nation-state, manifestations are not always acted in accordance with the established edicts of power. The abiding citizen (the sustainer of power), the invisible person (the transcender of power), the nation-creating hero (the subject of power), and the victim (the object of power) are the players (sometimes all attributed to the same person) within a nation-state, performing in reaction to the material and ideological constructs of the dominant power (see Hartman’s “Introduction” to *Reason in History*). Hence, an individual claiming his or her thoughts and actions are devoid of and against the hegemonic order is experiencing *delusory decolonization*. To act “against” is still a response to information that has colonized the mind. In other words, once the seed has been planted within the body and mind of an individual, he or she will act in reaction to what was planted, thus adding knowledge to the database of power. Those who experience delusory decolonization must come to realize that they are both the subjects and objects of oppression within the hegemonic world order. Though many like to believe the contrary, no action is independent from the influence of ideology that has colonized the mind. Fanon was right to argue that we don’t need a philosopher to tell us that we are caught in our own contradictions (*Wretched* 8).

If decolonization is “the replacing of a certain ‘species’ of men by another ‘species’ of men” (Fanon 35), what then is the difference between the natures of colonization and decolonization? Beyond nomenclature, there is no essential difference. Fanon describes decolonization as an unintelligible process in history: “Decolonization is the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature, which in fact owe their originality to that sort of substantification which results from and is nourished by the situation in the colonies” (36). The key to understanding the implicit duality in Fanon’s remark is the subtle use of the possessive pronoun “their.” Before, during, and after de-/colonization, the opposing parties gain identity and strength by setting themselves off against the other (Said 3), which implies identity is not the cause, but the effect following this binarised interaction (Butler 201). All identities, discourses, and procedures of power are too easily produced, fortified, and applied for the cost of the antithetical identity. To narrow the scope, this process occurs in every individual. Like the de-/colonized society, the oppressors/oppressed are plagued by a spliced subjectivity. In no way have we overcome the mutation of categorical binaries. The objective of the individual, which is elicited by the nation-state, is to implant an ideological “foothold in the world of perpetual change” (Iqbal 147). This is why the nation-state must “present its order as permanent, eternal,

and necessary” (Hardt/Negri 11). How else can one be given the necessary force to conduct “just wars” against the antithetical barbarians and rebels?

Each individual plays as a “colonial collaborator” dependent on “borrowing, copying, plundering, parodying the non-local elements” in order to breed local characteristics (Wing-Sang 538). Wing-Sang ascribed this term to undercover Hong Kong police in the 1980s; I, on the other hand, believe every individual in a de-/colonized context, or not, is a collaborator of dualities. Further, it is the subject/object of first-world control societies who is most heavily bombarded, on and off screen, with information (and its affirmation/negation duality) by marketers of the “business center or ‘soul’ of society” (Deleuze 320). In postcolonial societies, the consciousness of the individual has replaced the land and its resources. We must take Butler’s advice and not “take the ‘internality’ of the psychic world for granted” (xvi). Filling out a survey, “liking” a comment on social media, ordering boxes of Girl Scout Cookies, or not responding—as Sedgwick highlights, silence is as performative as *action* (*Epistemology* 3)—to any of the ploys of the psyche-colonizing market are performative acts accounted for in the regime’s system of social order. There is no doubt that the minds of the members of postcolonial societies are the subject and object of colonization; advertisements, news, laws, and other ideology-laden arsenals of information are projected onto the minds to be colonized. Therefore, all minds are colonized. Furthermore, to repudiate (attempt ideological decolonization) or accede (embrace ideological colonization) an imposing ideology is equitably necessary for the operation of the nexus of data collection and social control—“subversion,” intelligible or not, “carries market value” (Butler xxiii). Both actions are made in reaction to the colonial endeavor of the market, and the reaction (the deed) of the ideologically colonized individual (doer) constructs his or her identity, denoting her/his unitary term or place in the market.

Let us consider an example: a man who walks past a group of Girl Scouts outside of Central Market, then walks inside and purchases Cookies n’ Cream Blue Bell ice-cream. He faces one colonizing ploy outside, and then faces many more inside. In the end, he is still swiping his credit card through “electronic informers” (G. T. Marx 208); the only difference is that he is replacing one purchase with another. Conversely, if he had purchased Thin Mints, he would have submitted to the Girl Scouts’ marketing, rather than that of Blue Bell’s (still successful) colonization of the mind. Either decision involves the colonization and delusory decolonization of material impressed upon the mind. Either choice creates sets of values that require the inevitable destruction of a body (Butler 177): cookie/ice-cream, bank account, health/identity, and so on; hence, de-/colonizing and being de-/colonized involve the ritualizing (or not) processes based on the foundation of ideological categories. Like the man, almost all of

humanity is “absorbed within or subordinated to the networks of capitalist exploitation” (Hardt/Negri 43). One may act as if he or she is decolonized, but she/he can only identify her-/himself as not decolonized. But does the deed not define the doer?

As you may be wondering like I do myself, why had I decided to denominate this phenomenon “delusory decolonization”? Why not delusory “deconditioning”, or “de-socialization”? Both appellations suggest an illusory attempt to eradicate, reject, and antagonize presupposed structures and ideological norms. In short, I believe we are all colonized colonizers, not programmed automatons, alienated from a sense of life and the desire for creativity, as outlined in Foucault’s idea of societies of control. We are colonized colonizers because there has been no quintessential paradigm shift in imperial system of control. Hardt and Negri differentiate between the justifications of past colonial and contemporary imperial interventions: “The activities of corporations are no longer defined by the imposition of abstract command of the organization of simple theft and unequal exchange. Rather, they directly structure and articulate territories and populations” (Hardt/Negri 31). Besides their processes (abstract justification versus direct imposition), do these methods of domination and control not lead to the same end (structure and articulation of territories and populations)? If anything, the exploitation at the hand of power is in many respects more brutal than before. The end of the dialectic of modernity has not ended the dialectic of exploitation (Hardt/Negri 43).

My hope in this writing is to evoke a reconsideration of past politics and ontological understandings (or lack thereof) in relation to nationhood and identity formation in the early twenty-first century. Before Marx, the rational mind preceded the “I am”; consequently, a Marxist analysis refigured the pre-structured “I” before the capricious psyche. Thereafter, political theorizing, as Hardt and Negri note, “pretends that the subject can be understood presocially and outside the environment” in order to “impose a kind of transcendental socialization” on the mind (and body) of the subject (*Empire* 354). Though I concur with this claim, I cannot submit to a framework with “a priority of Culture over Nature,” “Society over the Individual,” that “we all exist within the realm of the social and political” (Harland 9, Hardt/Negri 354). I refuse to accept—or, rather, delusory decolonize—a superstructuralist claim that Nature and the Selfhood are recent (seventeenth century) cultural constructs (Harland 9). All minds colonize and are colonized by social factors (the *agon* between *physis* and *nomos*), and decolonization of these factors is not possible, as stated earlier, because any act is a reaction to the imposition of ideology. Regardless, the construction and reformulation of the hegemonic order is a response to various struggles against machines of power (Hardt/Negri 43).

One may rationalize that his or her decision is for or against colonization, but decolonization of ideas can never occur. Resistances are not marginal, but active at the center of

societies (Hardt/Negri 25). As well, decolonization of colonial structures has never taken place; take modern India and Algeria as examples. Hence, *decolonization* is *delusory*, only existing in the word and in the mind—decolonization makes itself present in the realm of the ideological. The individual’s will (to passion, desire, power), like the state’s, is to “become master over all space” (colonize) and “thrust back all that resists its extension” (technology of colonization, not decolonization) (*Will to Power* s. 636). As history has shown, liberal-democratic positivism for decolonization (revolution, etc.) only results in “readaptation, a few reforms on top, [and] a flag waving” in the “face of the colonialist’s personality” (*First as Tragedy* 8, Fanon 147, Foster 16). Therefore, if we are all colonized and seek to colonize, what compels us towards the fantastic idea of decolonization? What evokes a concrete narrative of decolonization? When are we driven to suspend history and “decolonize” ideas and bodies at all costs? We speak for ourselves, and when a spectacle of terror disrupts our understanding of the world order, a psychological decision must be made between two options: (1) colonize or (2) decolonize the *fact*; but, in practice, the mind has already been colonized and the response will be recorded and actualized. Every human being’s internal and external moral dispositions are commensurable only in the framework of Empire (Hardt/Negri 19). It is the will of the individual to further disrupt the colonial order. Revolution is not toppling one head to replace it with another. Revolution is the change of subjectivity. Let our minds be colonized so we may colonize and name ourselves.

Media’s Truths

BOOOM!”
“*Allahu akbar* went
the Media
Allahu ak— when
the Towers
touched
Down

—from incomplete, untitled poem

It wasn’t a bright cold day in April, but a dark moist one in September when static pillars of smoking and imploding *I*’s (painted on the wall by Descartes and reflected by Lacan) were projected on every television screen in Shadowbriar Elementary. I couldn’t comprehend a thing:

friends being picked up by their parents, reports of more explosions, my dad calling me to tell me to keep my mouth shut, me sitting by my Persian friend at lunch and telling him everything will be ok. There was no containable singularization in that milieu of what was happening, and what would follow. I think it would have made more sense if the president were reading at my school and not Booker Elementary. All I could depend on were the screens and speakers— independent thought was unthinkable. Believing what I was seeing was as hard as disbelieving what I heard, but the tremor on screen compelled a fascinated gaze. Whatever my beliefs entailed as an eleven-year-old sixth grader, and whether I knew it or not, I had to rely on and revel in the TV screens for the production of my conception of politics, pleasures, and populations (Nakamura 111). The headlines repeatedly impressed on the psyche-scape and histories read: “Freedom Under Siege,” “A New Day of Infamy,” “America’s Bloodiest Day,” “Our Nation Saw Evil,” “Act of War,” “Act of Evil,” “Terror Strike,” “Terror,” “Terror,” “Terror,” “We Will Never Forget.” These words were as tangible as the horrors witnessed on and off screen. Facilitated by the media, the evils plaguing the Middle East materialized into a concrete, which would inevitably crumble on its self.

After the Twin Towers were attacked, I have come to realize that my mind is the site of post-industrial colonization and delusory decolonization. Superimposing Foucault, Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and the September 11 attacks helped generate this epiphanic awareness—more specifically, using Foucault to synthesize the “Two Minutes Hate” programs by Immanuel Goldstein, “the Enemy of the People,” and the home-cave-videos periodically released by Osama Bin Laden, “America’s Most Wanted” (Orwell 13). In both fiction and nonfiction, the media is “a machine for altering minds” (*Discipline* 125)—a “technological sublime” erupting feelings and overwhelming reason in order to be recontained by the sense of “a permanent state of conflict” (Nakamura 112, *Discipline* 286). Like Bin Laden, the representation of Goldstein underlies all “crimes against the Party, all treacheries, acts of sabotage, heresies, [and] deviations” (Orwell 14). The faces of Goldstein and Bin Laden instill anger and fear into the minds of colonized spectators, and as long as the “Party” exists, the “heretic, the enemy of society, will always be there,” so that he can be “defeated, discredited, ridiculed, [and] spat upon” at every moment, each day (Orwell 221). Media projects real “representations and signs” of moral totalism, terror, and leader figures “in the minds of all” colonized viewers (*Discipline* 125). In each case, the state power shapes “pre-existing symbolic systems into a consolidated ideological basis of rule” in order to take control of cultural production (Giddens 299). All citizens are forced to “confront absolute questions and radical alternatives” framed by the nation-state (Hardt/Negri 20). Those who transgress the boundaries of the imperial endeavor, by acting on the will for the decolonization of ideas, are faced with coercive methods to suppress the dissidence. The effect of delusory decolonization produces

the deviant of the nation-state to define and contain, which, in turn, defines and justifies the authority of the state.

A year before the attacks on New York, I was watching every news anchor in Syria cry on live television for the loss of their president for the past thirty years, Hafez al-Assad. Interrupting the sobbing on screen, I could hear the slums kids of the street outside, playing a game of fantasy World Cup. I stepped out onto the balcony of my grandmother's porch and yelled "Hafez al-Assad died, Hafez al-Assad is dead" to warn the players to go inside, watch the news, and mourn for the loss of their president. Next thing I knew, my aunt pinched me by the ear, dragged me inside and told me, "You're going send the family to jail with your loud mouth." As confused as always, I asked my grandfather what I did wrong. He told me I didn't do anything wrong. He said the government was corrupt, that the president didn't want people thinking for themselves; and if anyone did, the dictator's army would come out to play. At first, I couldn't believe my grandfather, since I couldn't comprehend the situation, but, then, here we are today... and it still makes no sense. After that pinch on my ear, after 9/11, after every time I read a new update on Syria's "Civil" War, I have absorbed hatred—hatred of tyrants, of criminals, of others, of sinners, of saints, and, especially, of myself. Anzaldúa had a point: "Hatred, anger and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape" (Borderlands 19), which extends into the mindscape. While I boot my MacBook Air, I look away from the black screen reflecting rage and shame. Even when I look in the mirror, it's to shave the face or tweeze the bushy eyebrows that somehow remind me where I'm from and who I am. But who needs a mirror when the media is there to tell you? Me, I'm either on the side of Bashar al-Assad's government (supported by Russia and Hezbollah), the al-Qaeda terrorists (supported by NATO and the CIA), or the innocent victims. Every time I see "Miley Cyrus" listed on my news feed, floating above news on "Syria" (if it's mentioned that day), I wish to myself that I could straddle a wrecking ball naked and knock down concrete walls, instead of watching fuzzy images of Syria crumbling into dust.

Musics' Lyrics

Five hundred years ago the world was covered with greenery,

And no observer to turn it into scenery.

Things were more of a mystery than they are today,

But then some say we had more knowledge in those days.

And people in tall ships would say

“Man, we just sailed back from a land where people walk on their hands”.

No one could understand them because there was no Discovery Channel,

The boats were powered by paddles, and words were purged in battle.

—Harry James Angus, “Underground” (2011)

Unfortunately, Miley Cyrus—who has referred to herself as “one of the biggest feminists in the world”—was not around when I was drudging through middle school. But I do remember the first time I heard Freddie Mercury’s voice projected from my friend’s speakers while we were playing pool. Above the stereo system was a framed 2004 issue of *Time* magazine’s “Person of the Year”. I still can’t (and won’t be able to) erase the image of George W. Bush singing “I Want To Break Free” from my memory. Song after song, game after game, that chimera evolved into Bush gyrating and prancing around the pentagon with half of a mike stand between his legs. Had my friend’s dad known what my mind was mustering, he would have definitely told me to bite the dust.

In middle school and early high school, music had taught me more about myself than anything else—Queen, The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, Grateful Dead, Elton John, Ratatat, Paco de Lucía, and the show goes on. They have always been there for me, to help me make sense of myself within this world. Andrés Segovia flirts with Bach while I rasp and tap along me keyboard; Billy Joel’s got his arm around my shoulder, beer in hand, while belting “Piano Man” at the top of our lungs. These days, an Australian psychedelic ska and jazz band, The Cat Empire, has been joining me in my Toyota, as I cruise through Houston’s humid days and mosquito infested nights. “The Chariot” opens with a snare roll and trumpet sounding an immanent war. According to Felix Riebl (vocalist and percussionist), the song “came upon [him] one night, when the news had been telling [him] about one more war and one more fight.” A declaration to his friends and the battle cry of the band, “The Chariot” has clarified that I don’t necessarily have to blow myself up or strap bombs to my ferret, Loucie, let alone hurt anyone or anything, in order to fight against and repudiate war and injustice:

Our guns

We shot them in the things we said

Ah we didn’t need no bullets

Cos we rely on some words instead

Kill someone in argument

Outwit them with our brains

And we'd kill ourselves laughing

At the funny things we'd say

The burning battlefield must be waged in the minds, not on the lands and innocent bodies. To conquer is to educate, to colonize and drown minds with ideology on justice for the multitude. But who will be the speaker? Who will play the Spinozist prophet? Who will organize the multitude? Should we take Socrates' advice and have philosophers as our rulers? Maybe some kind of Übermensch... definitely not the "tricksters and hipsters and prophets in the sky" ("Prophets in the Sky"):

The end of the world is canceled,

Jesus gone to the Bahamas

With Mohammad

They're gonna try to sort some shit out

Prophet to prophet, leave the common people out

'Cause the common people bleed and the common people burn

From another man's war and a another man's words

These Jackson, Jackson (side band by one of the members of The Cat Empire, Harry James Angus) lyrics come from the terribly bizarre and highly experimental "Angel Dust", a song about an immanent apocalypse coming from the underground. Following every verse is static and buzzing from the speakers, simulating mobile phone interference. Harry is trying to record a track about the end of the world, while his band mate, Jules, keeps calling Harry back to let him know that the end of world is near. By the end of Harry's recording, he calls "bloody Jules back", which leads Harry to an automated message: "Hey you called Jules. I can't come to the phone right now, and ah, never again actually. I'm finished with phones. I'm finished with television. I'm ready for the bigger and better things. Space!" Jules follows with an awkward, paradoxical verse about leaving planet Earth because "[our] concepts are whack, [our] rhymes are whack". It is paradoxical that, despite Jules having left Earth, his rhymes are as "whack" as they were on Earth. Like Jules, Freddie couldn't escape metaphor in "Don't Stop Me Now". Though Freddie sings he is a "shooting star[...] defying the laws of gravity", he resorts to the mundane, comparing his speed to "a racing car passing by like Lady Godiva." Certainly, the melodies,

subjects, and lyrics of songs have changed over time (and some attempt to go beyond the temporal and corporal), but they are still grounded on worldly experience, history, and ideology, as articulated in Jackson, Jackson's "The Future is the Past":

It's evident to anyone with half a brain that things change

That's why books have more than one page

That's why me and my grandfather aren't the same age

[...]

But the more things change, the more they stay the same

Same old girls, same wars, same games

Sure, there's climate change and there's terrorists and AIDs

But we used to have the Nazis

And that was way way way worse

If the future is the past, if ideas have remained in and of themselves over time and space, what then is the alternative? How do we decolonize past ideologies? The end of the four repeated verses of "The Future is the Past" offers a portentous, metaphysical alternative: we will experience a new reality when there is "no sound, no matter, no light, no television, (no air)." However, Jackson, Jackson does not provide a route to decolonization of ideas, but only a shift in subjectivity based on the elimination of the corporal.

The Cat Empire's "East" is a brilliant expression of the current crisis in the Middle East, juxtaposing Middle Eastern instruments, images, and sounds with a brutal hard rock of the West, evoking war and chaos. The song begins with a whimsical tone, with Harry's voice (accompanied by a drum and castanets), describing "the summer in a little green leaf." The summer he is describing is a summer in Australia, the East Down Under, not the Middle East; however, the song quickly changes its focus and pace after Harry reflects: "I think lucky me because this East is still the West / I got no bombs fallin on me chest." The tune then shifts to a kind of mesmerizing snake charming, which explodes into horns blaring, drums banging, and base thundering:

And in the East I see fun I see sun

But in another East I hear bombs I hear guns

Some good people they run run run

And we put them in the cage, let them burn in the sun

We just let them burn in the sun

What's to be done?

We just let them burn in the sun

And what is to be done? It's the same "[s]tuff you read: in the track of the sun", as Joyce made clear (*Ulysses* 50). The Middle East is: "Dead: an old woman's: the grey sunken cunt of the world", and we know this, we watch it unfurl (54). When I read these lines, I think of my stubborn grandmother, sitting alone in her house on the top floor of a concrete complex in Homs, ashamed of everyone who has abandoned Syria, and I hate myself. Even when she dies, she'll still be there.

Literatures' Scripts

In our late modern world, it is no longer just a question of being on guard against the 'barbarians' but how to deal with their increasingly visible (and audible) presence in 'our' midst. The cognitive and behavioural patterns, however, remain the same: 'we ourselves' are in danger of becoming the barbarians whose presence 'we' are so afraid of.

—Jean-Jacques Weber and Kristine Horner, *Multilingualism* (2012)

Arabic is my first language. I was able to read and write Arabic before I entered elementary school. English, on the other hand, I did not learn to read and write until the summer before the first grade, and my grades reflected it. Quickly, English became the dominant language in my household, but my brother and I still went to Arabic school every weekend to learn about our religion and practice our language. Year by year, I became less and less interested in my religion, language, and culture. As a matter of fact, my nationality unofficially changed when I was eleven-years-old. After the Twin Towers were attacked, my father told me that "if any asks you where you are from, tell them you are Italian. Don't tell them you are Arab." I asked him why, knowing the answer. He repeated the same words. Later that month, my parents decided to withdraw my brother and me from Arabic school, which we were totally complacent with. Arabs were weird ones in school anyway. Regardless, to this day, that was the closest I have been to the process of decolonizing ideas. Now, I'm paying the price for such a futile, violent move.

Before 9/11, I had my Syrian background to differentiate me from other people. After 9/11, I was an Italian that wasn't Italian. I didn't know what I liked because I didn't know who I was. My parents wouldn't answer my questions and I couldn't trust the news, so I turned to books. Since my brother and I didn't have Arabic school anymore, my mother would take us to the library for a few hours every Saturday and Sunday. I remember my first time stumbling upon ancient Greek mythology: I opened a massive textbook and turned to Cesare da Sesto's painting *Leda and the Swan*. After reading the myth, I never trusted swans again, and rightfully so. Greek mythology became my escape, and I read more than any pre-teen should have. And then there were the great tragedies. Euripides taught me that "Dionysus, Dionysus, not Thebes, / Has the power to rule me", because he had already torn one of my limbs and I knew my head could have been next (83). The Mythos, the Logos, and the tragedy of reality intertwined.

Reading the story of the deterioration of the Compson family, while I was a junior in high school, implanted my fixation on literature and literary studies; however, being Middle Eastern, pursuing a professional career other than medicine was ludicrous, and I believed it, until I felt the banal misery of studying chemistry at UTD. After my first year as a Neuroscience major, I changed my major to Arts and Humanities (a major that no longer exists at that university) and freely relished in the infinitude of literature. I met Faulkner again, and got to know him better. The second time around, he taught me how to drink. And then there was Dante—the politics, the astrology, the theology, the mythology, the geometry, the poetry, the hate, and the love. Dante guided me through the labyrinthine heavens and hells of subjectivity. Why did he love the city that sent him into exile? What did he have to prove? Why not eradicate his past and start anew? I did it ten years ago, and I was only eleven. For two years, my thoughts were sunk beneath these waves of leaves and beer. But, then, whenever my parents would call, they would mention Syria. They said there was protesting. They said a couple kids were imprisoned and killed for writing graffiti on a concrete wall. They said people were dying, which the media confirmed. And then I started receiving emails from my cousin: *I don't know if I'll wake up an orphan tomorrow or not, I don't know if all my life's work is about to be crushed into pieces or not, I don't know what the future holds. This isn't fiction. It's not something you mix up in your head. It's real life, real flesh. Real blood is being shed.*

Syria has been physically haunting me since 2011. If only I were Italian. What pride is there in being Syrian? What history is left? But who cares? And why do I care about my *self* while hundreds of thousands of Syrians have perished in the matter of two and a half years, while over six million have sought refuge from the bloody chessboard, while my aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandmother are still playing as pawns in the game? What am I doing here to help? What can I do? What can we do, *now*? Hate the stasis and ineptitude of justice. Watch, and

become our own enemies? Riddle social medias with grotesque images that nobody wants to see? Yes, that’s what I’ve done. My weapons are my words, against others and myself, so I created a Twitter account to log the daily development of my hatred towards this era’s mode of injustice and towards my pathetic self. So I began “Syria’s Elegies” on 13 July 2013. The project is an epic poem in the format of what I call “twitza sira”, a pun on Twitter, Syria, and terza rima. The rhyme scheme (chain rhyme) follows terza rima, but there is no set meter and the first two lines have nine metrical beats, while the final line is in pentameter. This was due to the word restriction of Twitter; regardless, this restriction has managed to evoke a sense of rushed anxiety after each nine-beat couplet, which ends with a final punch with the line in pentameter. As well, each stanza I write is influenced by a news article concerning Syria that was posted that day. These are the first three posts I composed (and links to the respective articles below) from the 13th to the 15th of July:

Biasantini sarraceni

From bisantini, and, now, lira—

“Asses to ashes,” showspoke the TV—

Prints of kings flip doubled seas, Noura

dreamed, dazed from split-screens. She knew Israel

watched fascists schism lands as Syria

waits for U.S.Aid, the Russian heel,

al-Qaeda car bombs, the Holy Ghost’s

return, or Fates spun in the Chinese wheel.¹

Coins’ Embossings

¹07/13/13: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/07/201371310630457364.html>

07/14/13: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/07/13/israel-air-strike-syria/2515095/>

07/15/13: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/15/world/middleeast/no-quick-impact-in-us-arms-plan-for-syria-rebels.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

What is truth then? A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which have forgotten are illusions: they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense” (1873)

The year Hafez al-Assad died, my grandfather gave me his coin collection, which had well over four hundred coins from around the world. None of them were American though. There were coins from the turn of the twentieth century, and coins from when Syria and Egypt were one nation under the United Arab Republic. Most of the coins' embossings were showing signs of fading. (They have continued to fade as the years have passed by.) In return for his collection, I promised my grandfather that I would collect and bring him back the quarters periodically released during the “50 State Quarters” program issued by the United States Mint. The next time I visited Syria, I brought him over a dozen different quarters. He had collected a few banknotes from around the Middle East and gave them to me in exchange for the quarters. After that summer in 2005, I started collecting more quarters for my grandfather. Whenever a new quarter would be released, my dad would give me one for my grandfather and one for myself. A couple years passed and I collected nearly ten new quarters. A week after the Wyoming quarter was released, my dad was driving me to school in the morning, while The Beatles' “Because” was playing on the car stereo. While The Beatles were singing in an ominous harmony, my dad told me *jiddo* died the night before. All I could think was “Because the sky is blue, it makes me cry.” But I didn't see or feel the blue in the sky and I didn't cry. I was lost and could only hear and feel the harmonies coming from the speakers.

That day in school, and the days after, I kept imagining the world without him. What difference would it make? I only saw him every four years or so. My brother didn't seem phased. My mother never dropped a tear. Two weeks passed and then two months. I still had no answer. My dad came into my room while I was reading *The Things They Carried* and gave me the new state quarter (Utah). He told me to keep up the good work and left the room. And that's when it hit me. My grandfather's collection was never going to be finished. That was the first time I cried from the loss of someone. The loss was real, now: Syria would never be the same. But I told myself that my collection would continue to pile, until it was my turn to pass it down in exchange for new coins. As Harry sings in “The Banker”:

I think I could turn this whole city around
I know I was put on this earth
To change pounds into dollars and yen, and back again
I guess that I miss you, but we'll meet again
Sometimes I get homesick when I go to bed
And when I can't sleep
I turn on my screen
And the numbers flicker like fairy dust

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