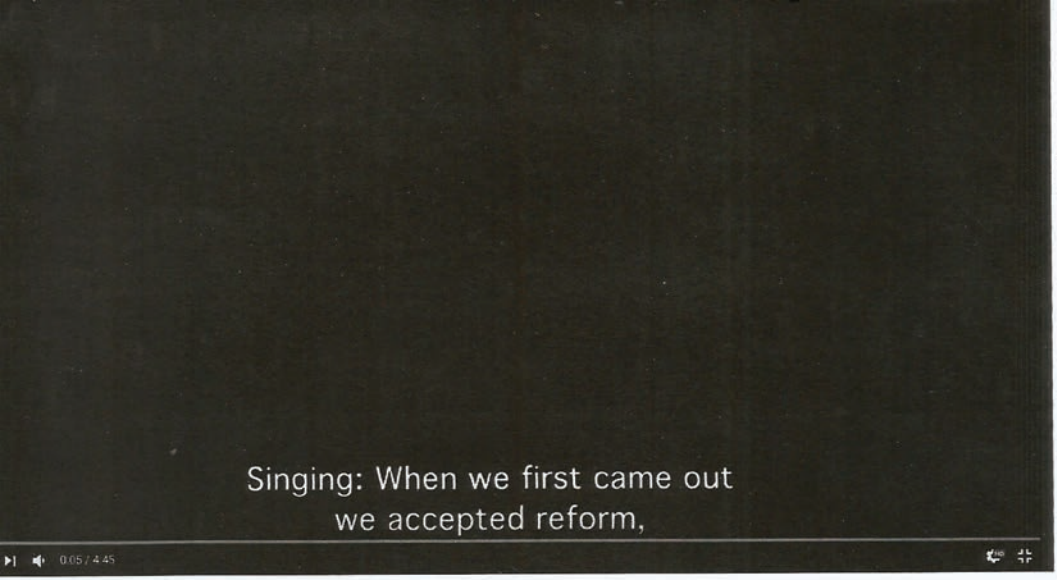
Qamishliye
El Hasske
Raqqa
Euphrates
River
Deir ez Zor
Meyadin
Qual'at es Saliibiye
Abu Kemal
SYRIA

SYRIA

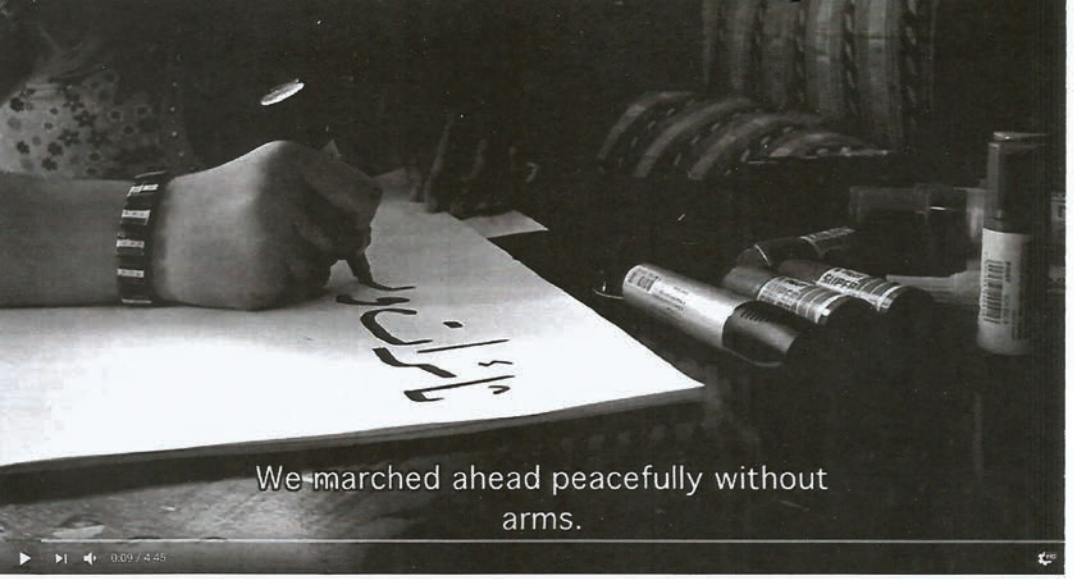


~~A civil defense member holds an injured girl in a site hit by what activists say was a barrel bomb dropped by forces loyal to Syria's President Bashar al-Assad, at Aleppo's Saif al-Dawla district on May 7, 2015. Photo by Hosam Katan/Reuters~~

Amid the visible destruction of the Syrian war, the country has also witnessed a less-publicized transformation: democratic structures have arisen in places controlled by militant organizations.

Where rebel groups have taken over areas previously held by Bashar al-Assad's government, local residents have begun to organize councils to provide basic functions for their communities, who now enjoy freedoms that were prohibited by Assad. For the first time since the Ba'ath party gained control of Syria in 1963, democratic elections for appointments to local and provincial councils have taken place.

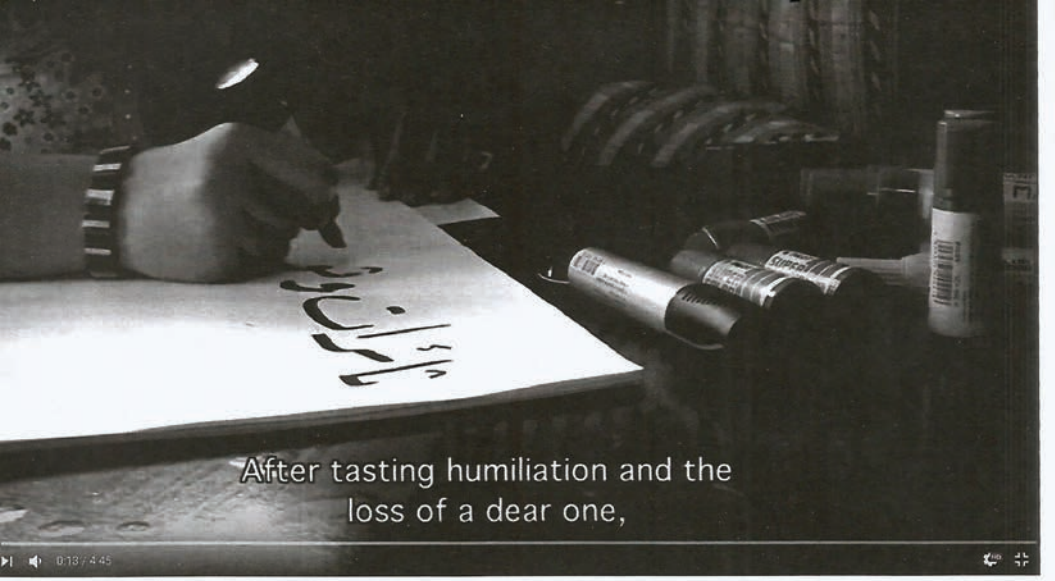
Robin Yassin-Kassab and Leila Al-Shami, authors of "Burning Country:



Syrians in Revolution and War," met with Syrians who fled to Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan to learn more about the details of the local councils and their structure. They spoke with NewsHour Weekend about the roles of these organizations and the challenges they face.

In Syria, what functions do local community councils provide for people who are still in the country?

Al-Shami: The local councils are in liberated areas where the regime has completely withdrawn or has been pushed out. Now basic administrative units are functioning there, so they're responsible for the provision of all social services, and they're responsible for water supplies, electricity supplies. They often work with external donors to distribute humanitarian aid, or aid which they've collected from the local community. They're providing support to the makeshift hospitals, makeshift education facilities. In some areas they've also been responsible for growing and distributing food, specifically in communities which have been under siege, such as Darayya. And in Darayya they've

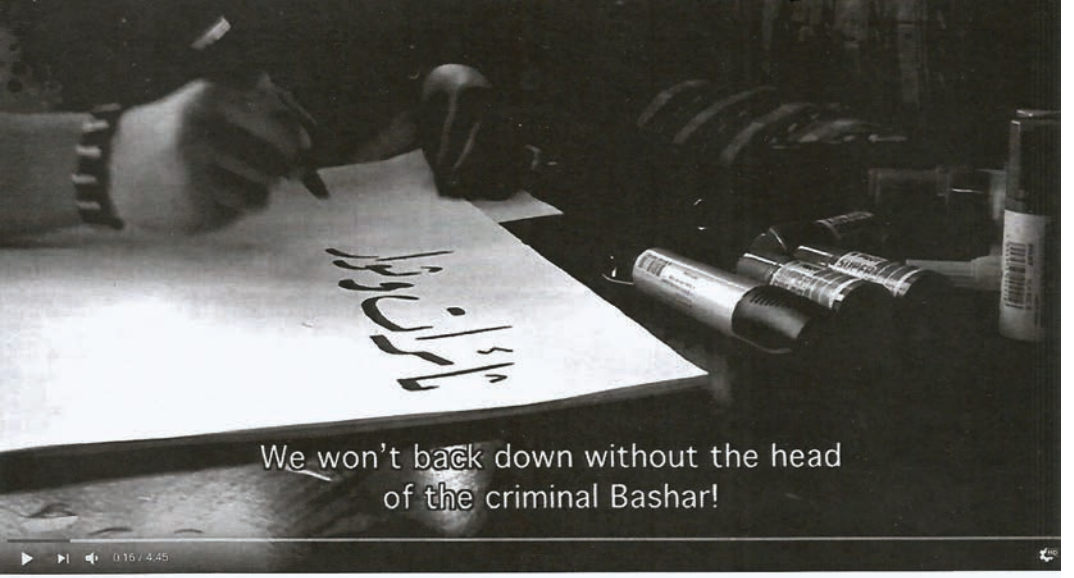


set up a fantastic local library, and they also have legal services. They also sometimes operate security services or community police forces. It depends on their size and capacity.

Yassin-Kassab: They are, of course, in survival mode, and that's that sad thing. They're dealing with the day-to-day, trying to keep life going under bombardment, under siege.

Are they in less of a survival mode in places controlled by more moderate rebels?

Al-Shami: The level of survival sustenance they have is in relation to how much of a target that community is for the regime and for its ally Russia. Some of the communities which have been most under attack by the regime are communities which have had very successful local councils and have had very successful experience in building these grassroot structures, such as Darayya. It seems that these democratic structures are precisely what has

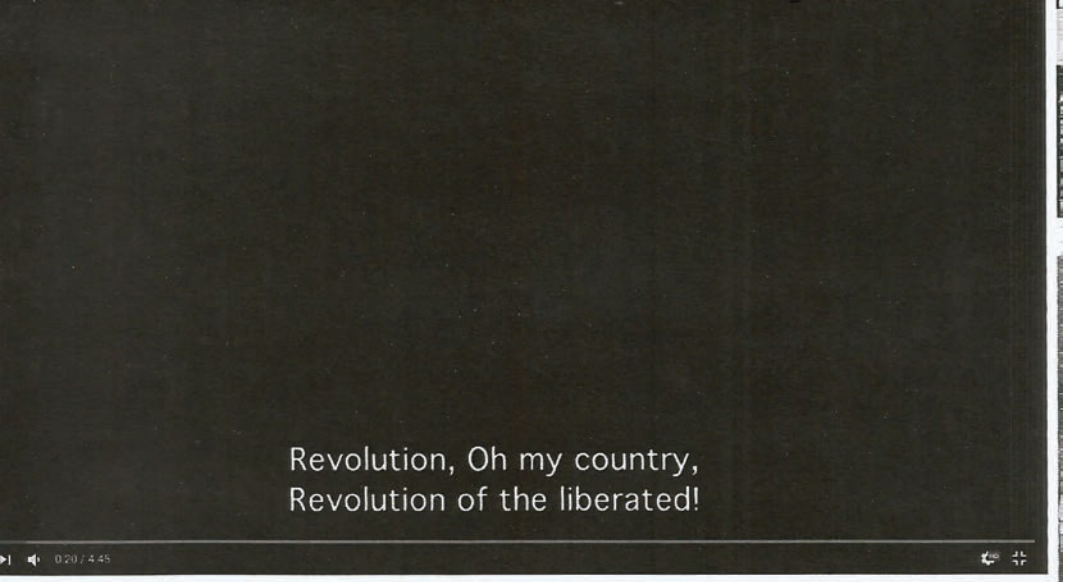


been under attack by the regime in a lot of places.
Who has provided funding for the councils?

Al-Shami: Governments have provided money through the provincial councils, and lots of international aid agencies are sending things through the local councils. Lots of Syrian aid agencies.

Yassin-Kassab: In many places, there's nothing really getting through, and people are trying to grow food on their rooftops, and so on. The real, fundamental point about sustainability is that if you got access to Aleppo, you could take them water purifiers, tons of food, and you build hospitals. And then the next day, these things would be bombed by the regime and Russia. So these things are ultimately not sustainable, of course, and won't be sustainable if the world continues to sit back and watch.

What is their geographic spread?



Yassin-Kassab: They're in the liberated areas [rebel-held areas]. There's a lot of them in the south, in Daraa, where the regime has been pulled out of that southern province, reaching down to the border with Jordan. In the suburbs in Damascus, which are liberated from the regime, and usually besieged, so places like Darayya, places like Douma, Harasta. Idlib province, part of Hama province. A little bit of Homs province. A bit of the north of Latakia province, and large areas of Aleppo province and Aleppo city.

Al-Shami: In areas that are under regime control, there are councils which are still operating in secret.

How inclusive are the councils? Do they breach sectarian and ideological divides and include women?

Al-Shami: I think the council structures themselves have not been inclusive to women at all. There's very few women that are sitting on local councils. What they try to do is include people who are selected to the council for

their technical, professional expertise. They've tried to include people from prominent families and tribes. They've always included, in mixed communities, minority groups, so people from different religions or sects.
There's been lots of campaigning by activists to call for greater women's greater representation.

Yassin-Kassab: There are members who are liberals and democrats, and then the more moderate sort of Islamist as well has been involved, and then nationalists and ex-Baathists and so on. But in a way it's not been so important. In general, they're non-ideological bodies, particularly at the local level, which, in a way, looks like a way forward. It doesn't matter if one guy is a leftist and the guy next to him is an Islamist. They're there because one of them knows something about how to get the water system working, and another one knows something about education, and they're working about practical things for the sake of the community.

How do rebel factions interact with the local councils?

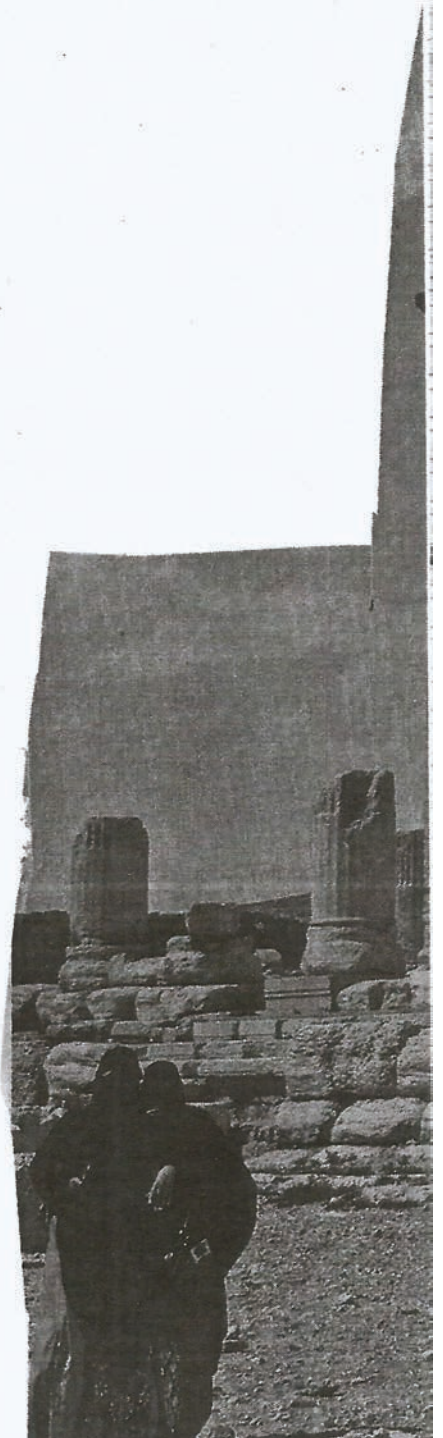
Al-Shami: I think it's been very different, the experience of cooperation between these civilians and administrative structures and armed groups. And I think some of the difference often comes down to whether armed groups are the local community itself. Because in many areas, the armed groups that are operating there, they're the sons and brothers and fathers from that neighborhood. The men have picked up arms to defend their community. So then they're also part of the same families or the same networks as the local councils. In those kind of areas, cooperation's been very broad. Some councils, and Darayya is one example, they've specifically set up structures to improve cooperation. So for example, the military brigade in that area attends some of the meetings of the local council, and they ensure cooperation so that the militia is essentially working as a security force which is subject to popular and local control and to civil control. So that's obviously an ideal model. That's not the case everywhere.

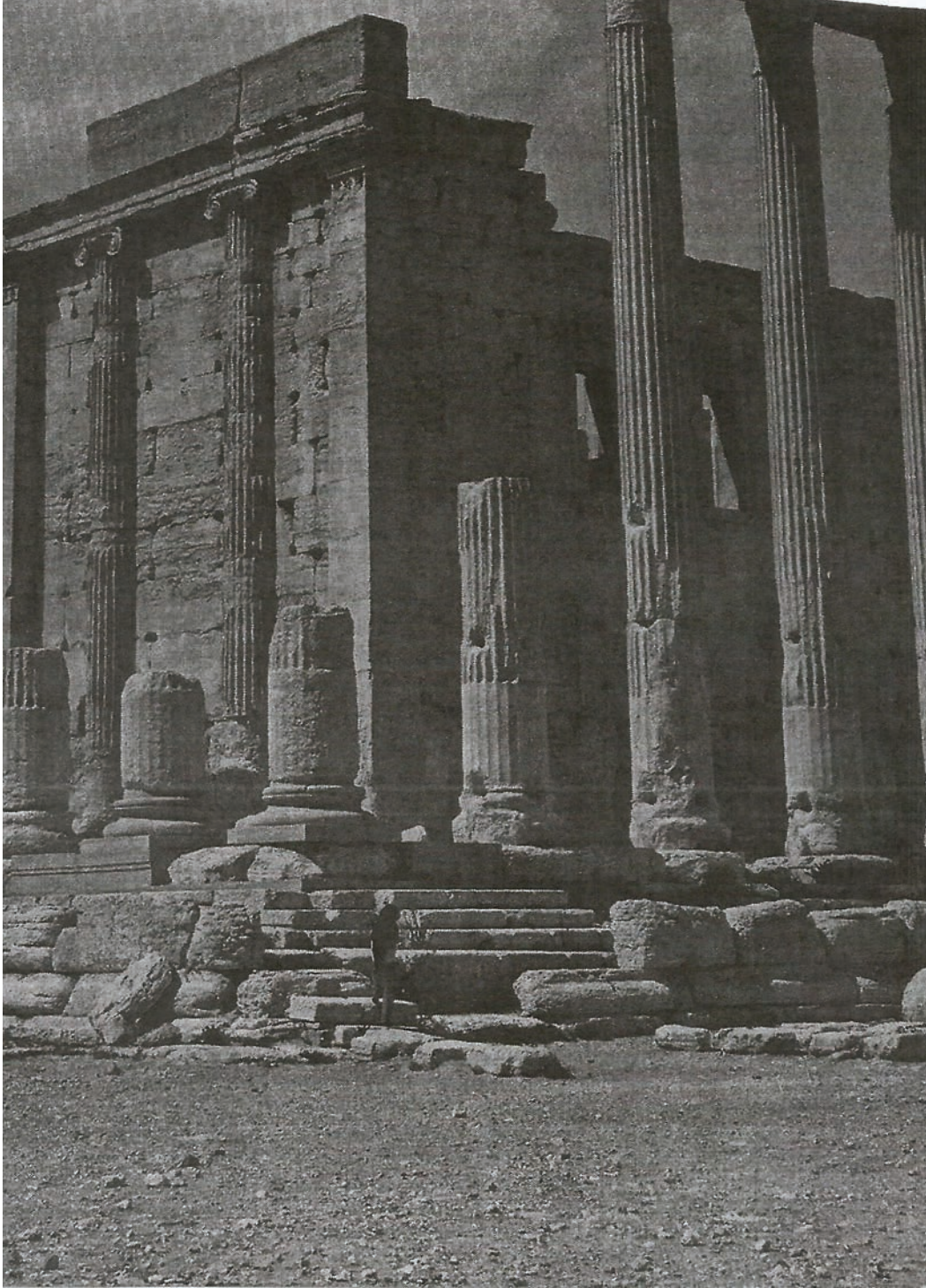
How are these councils important for Syria's future?

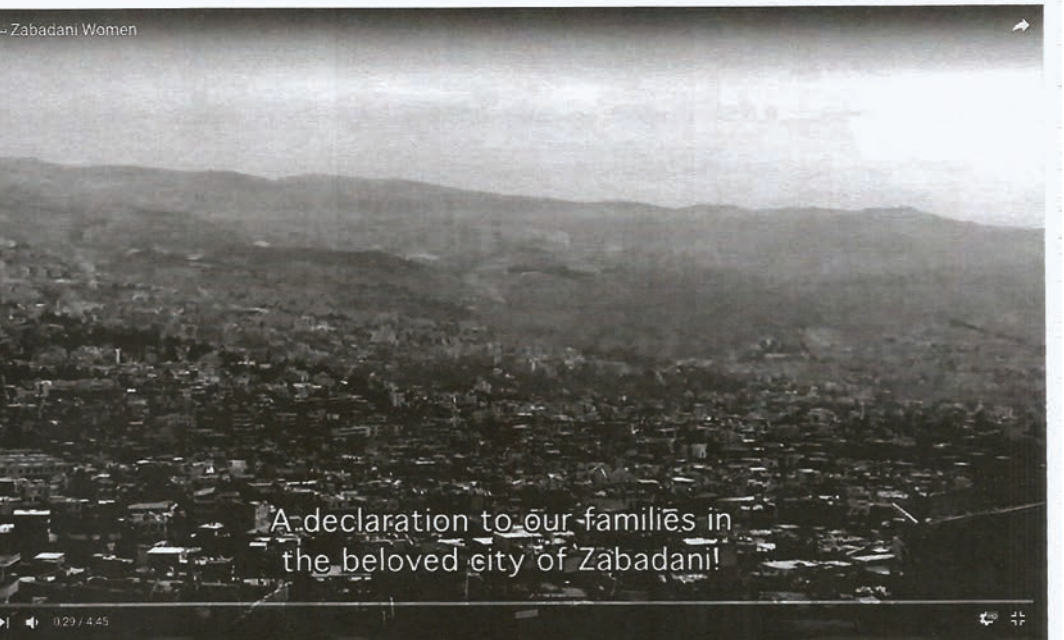
Yassin-Kassab: It's difficult to remember that in 2011, 2012 — it was this brief window — it looked like there could be a completely different future in Syria and the wider Middle East. Change was happening at a tremendous rate, and people were really interested in democratic ideas. These weren't seen as something imposed from the West or imported from the West. They were seen as immediate necessities. And people were discussing what that meant: how could people run their own lives, how could they live without dictatorship. The democratically elected local councils are a glimmer of that hope surviving in the midst of all of this chaos.

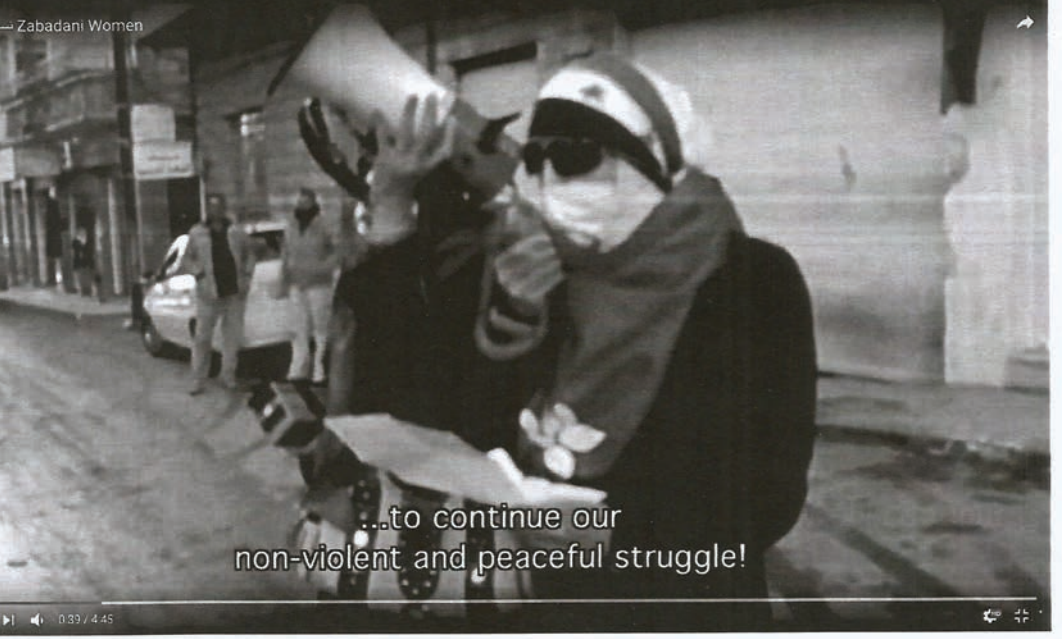
In wartime Syria, local councils and civil institutions fill a gap
BY DANIEL MORITZ-RABSON July 31, 2016 at 3:05 PM EDT

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/civil-society-emerges-syria-war/






Zabadani Women
A declaration to our families in
the beloved city of Zabadani!
0:29 / 4:45


Zabadani Women
...to continue our
non-violent and peaceful struggle!
0:39 / 4:45


نساء الزبداني Zabadani Women
In the name of God,
strikes are one way...
0:35 / 4:45
dani Women

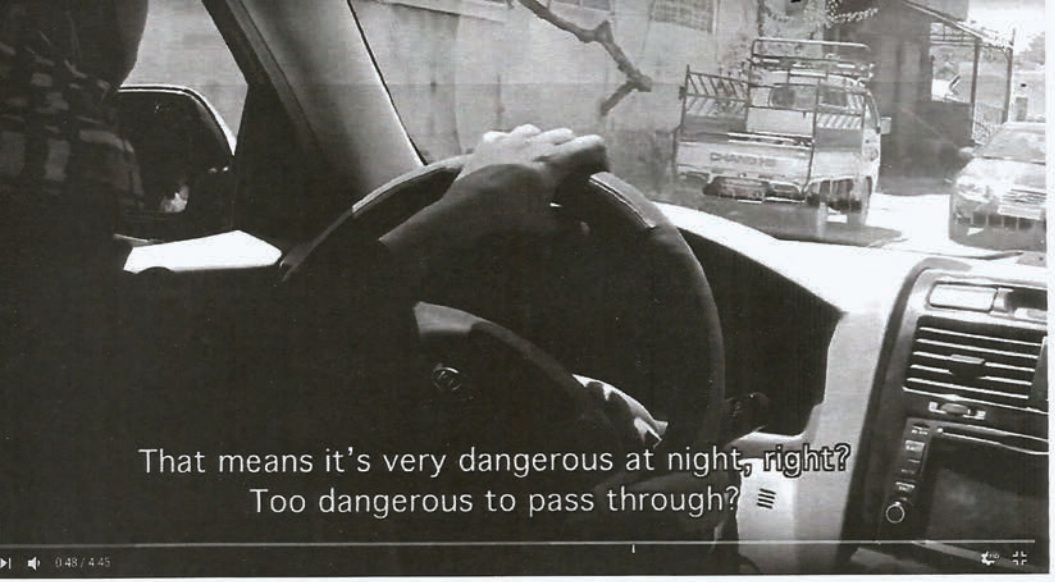
Omar Aziz (fondly known by friends as Abu Kamel) was born in Damascus. He returned to Syria from exile in Saudi Arabia and the United States in the early days of the Syrian revolution. An intellectual, economist, anarchist, husband and father, at the age of 63, he committed himself to the revolutionary struggle. He worked together with local activists to collect humanitarian aid and distribute it to suburbs of Damascus that were under attack by the regime. Through his writing and activity he promoted local self-governance, horizontal organization, cooperation, solidarity and mutual aid as the means by which people could emancipate themselves from the tyranny of the state. Together with comrades, Aziz founded the first local committee in Barzeh, Damascus.The example spread across Syria and with it some of the most promising and lasting examples of non-hierarchical self organization to have emerged from the countries of the Arab Spring.

In her tribute to Omar Aziz, Budour Hassan says, he "did not wear a Vendetta mask, nor did he form black blocs. He was not obsessed with giving interviews to the press ... [Yet] at a time when most anti-imperialists were wailing over

the collapse of the Syrian state and the "hijacking" of a revolution they never supported in the first place, Aziz and his comrades were tirelessly striving for unconditional freedom from all forms of despotism and state hegemony."[1] Aziz was encouraged by the revolutionary wave gripping the country and believed that "ongoing demonstrations were able to break the dominance of absolute power".[2] But he saw a lack of synergy between revolutionary activity and people's daily lives. For Aziz it didn't make sense to participate in demonstrations demanding the overthrow of the regime whilst still living within strict hierarchical and authoritarian structures imposed by the state. He described such division as Syria being subject to the overlapping of two times "the time of power" which "still manages the life activities", and "the time of Revolution" belonging to the activists working to overthrow the regime.[3] Aziz believed that for the continuity and victory of the revolution, revolutionary activity needed to permeate all aspects of people's lives. He advocated for radical changes to social organization and relationships in

Notes:

1. Budour Hassan, 'Omar Aziz: Rest in Power', 20 February 2013, http://budourhassan.wordpress.com/2013/02/20/omar-aziz/
2. Omar Aziz, 'A discussion paper on Local Councils,' (in Arabic) http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=143690742461532
3. Ibid.

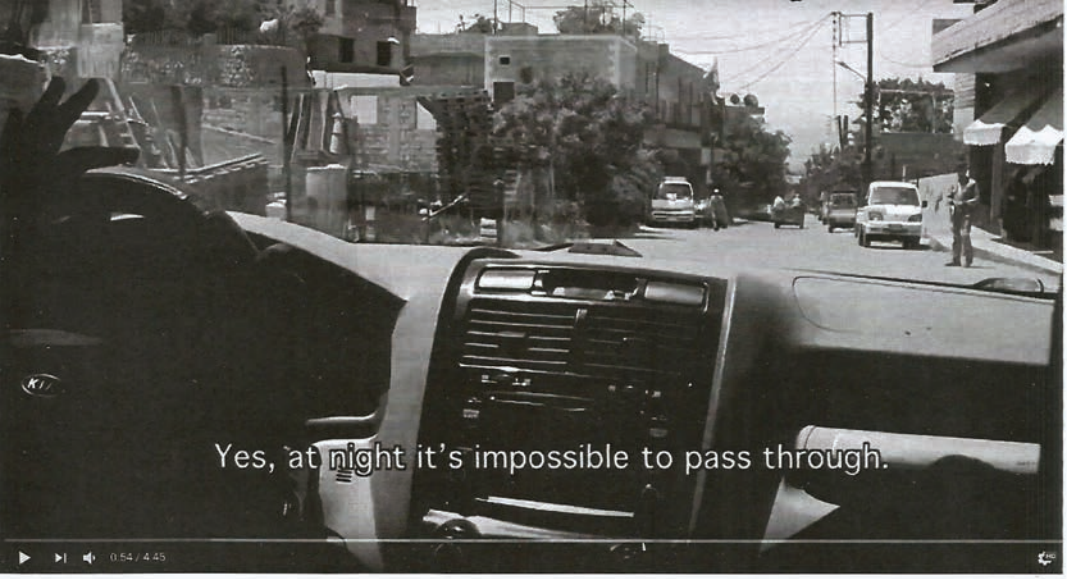


order to challenge the foundations of a system based on domination and oppression.

Aziz saw positive examples all around him. He was encouraged by the multiple initiatives springing up throughout the country including voluntary provision of emergency medical and legal support, turning houses into field hospitals and arranging food baskets for distribution. He saw in such acts "the spirit of the Syrian people's resistance to the brutality of the system, the systematic killing and destruction of community".[4] Omar's vision was to spread these practices and he believed the way to achieve this was through the establishment of local councils. In the eighth month of the Syrian revolution, when wide-spread protests against the regime were still largely peaceful, Omar Aziz produced a discussion paper on Local Councils in Syria where he set out his vision.

In Aziz's view the Local Council was the forum by which people drawn from diverse cultures and different social strata could work together to achieve

4. Ibid.



three primary goals; to manage their lives independently of the institutions and organs of the state; to provide the space to enable the collective collaboration of individuals; and activate the social revolution at the local, regional and national level.
In his paper Aziz lists what he thinks the core concerns of the local councils should be:

1. the promotion of human and civil solidarity through improving living conditions especially through provision of safe housing to the displaced; providing assistance, both psychological and material to the families of the wounded or detainees; providing medical and food support; ensuring the continuity of educational services; and supporting and coordinating media activities. Aziz notes that such acts should be voluntary and should not be a substitute for family or kin support networks. He believed it would take time for people to feel comfortable outside of the provision of state services and adjust their social behavior to be more cooperative. Aziz believed the council's role should be kept to a minimum allowing for the development of unique community initiatives.

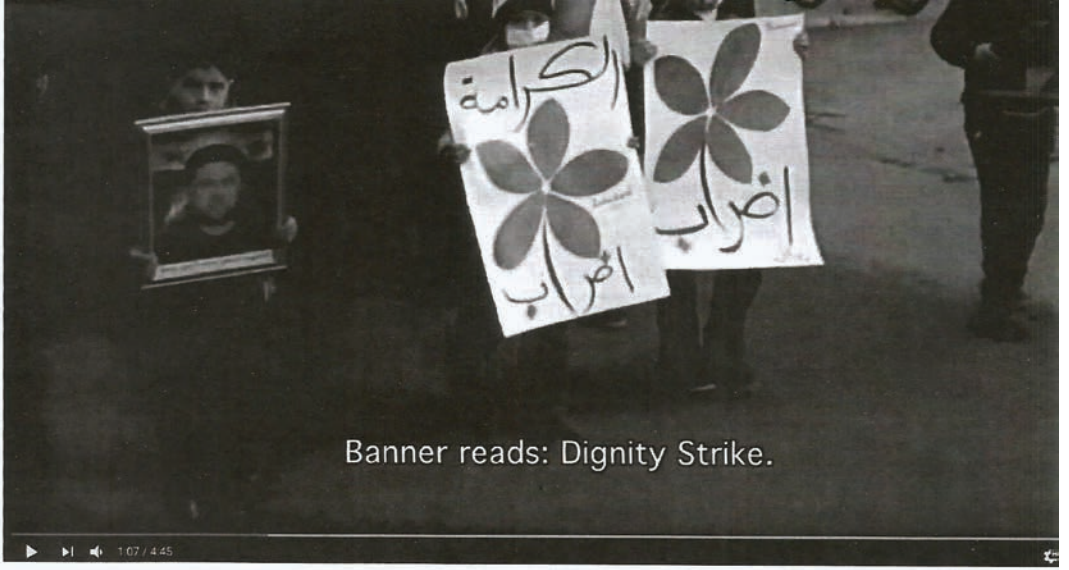
2. the promotion of cooperation including building local community initiatives and actions and promoting innovation and invention which Aziz saw as being stifled by half a century of tyranny. The local council would be the forum through which people could discuss the problems they face in life and their daily conditions. The local council would support collaboration and allow people to devise appropriate solutions to the problems they faced including on issues relating to infrastructure, social harmony and trade, as well as issues that required solutions external to the local community. Aziz also saw a key role as being the defense of territory in rural and urban areas that had been subject to expropriation and acquisition by the state. He rejected the urban expropriation of land and marginalization and displacement of rural communities, which he saw as a method used by the regime to enforce its policy of domination and social exclusion. Aziz believed it necessary to ensure access to land which can satisfy the necessities of life for all and called for a rediscovery of the commons. He was realistic but optimistic. He noted that "it is clear that such acts apply to safe locations or areas quasi- 'liberated' from power. But it is possible to assess the situation of each area and determine

what can be achieved." Aziz advocated for horizontal linkages to be made between councils to create linkages and interdependence between different geographic regions.

3. the relationship with the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and the interrelation between protection and defence of the community and the continuity of the revolution. Aziz believed that it was essential to coordinate between the popular civil and popular armed resistance. He saw the role of the FSA as to ensure the security and defence of the community particularly during demonstrations, support securing lines of communications between regions, and provide protection for the movement of people and logistical supplies. The role of the council would be to provide food and housing for all members of the FSA and coordinate with the FSA on security for the community and the defence strategy for the region.

4. the composition of local councils and organizational structure. Aziz saw a number of challenges facing the formation of multiple local councils. The

first was the regime, which repeatedly stormed cities and towns in order to paralyze the movement, isolate the people in enclaves, and prevent cooperation. Aziz argued that to respond to such onslaughts by the state, mechanisms of resistance needed to remain flexible and innovative. Councils would have to scale up or down according to need and adapt to power relations on the ground. He believed this flexibility was essential for the community's desire for freedom to be realized. He also saw the challenge in encouraging people to practice a way of life and social relationships which were new and unfamiliar. Also service provision needed to be maintained and it was necessary to find a way to get an independent source of power in the face of cuts, as well as supporting the development of economic and social activities. For this reason he believed local council members should include social workers and people with expertise in various social, organizational and technical fields who have both the respect of the people and a potential and desire to work voluntarily. For Aziz the organizational structure of the local council is a process that begins with the minimum required and should evolve depending on the level of the transformation achieved by the revolution, the



balance of power within a given area, and relationship with neighboring areas. He encouraged local council's to share knowledge, learn from the experience of other councils and coordinate regionally.

5. the role of the National Council is to give legitimacy to the initiative and gain the acceptance of activists. It should seek funding in order to carry out necessary work and cover expenses which it may not be possible to be cover at the regional level. The National Council would facilitate coordination between regions in order to find common ground and foster closer interdependence.[5]

Omar Aziz's work has had a huge impact on revolutionary organization in Syria. Whilst the mainstream political opposition failed to achieve anything of note in the past two years, the grassroots opposition movement, in the face of violent repression, has remained dynamic and innovative and has embodied the anarchist spirit. The core of the grassroots opposition is the youth, mainly from the poor and middle-classes, in which women and diverse

5. Ibid.

religious and ethnic groups play active roles (see here and here). Many of these activists remain non-affiliated to traditional political ideologies but are motivated by concerns for freedom, dignity and basic human rights. Their primary objective has remained the overthrow of the regime, rather than developing grand proposals for a future Syria.

The main form of revolutionary organization has been through the development of the tansiqiyyat; hundreds of local committees established in neighborhoods and towns across the country. Here, revolutionary activists engage in multiple activities, from documenting and reporting on violations carried out by the regime (and increasingly elements of the opposition) to organizing protests and civil disobedience campaigns (such as strikes and refusing to pay utility bills) and collecting and providing aid and humanitarian supplies to areas under bombardment or siege. There is no one model but they often operate as horizontally organized, leaderless groups, made up of all segments of the society. They have been the foundation of the revolutionary movement creating solidarity amongst the people, a sense of

community and collective action. See here about Yabroud's (Damascus suburb) efforts to organize in the absence of the state. Some local committees have elected representatives such as in Kafranbel Idlib, where a committee of elected representatives have made their own constitution (see here). Youth activists from Kafranbel keep the popular protest movement alive and have gained world wide fame for their use of colorful and satirical banners at weekly protests (see here). They also engage in civil activities such as providing psychosocial support for children and forums for adults to discuss issues such as civil disobedience and peaceful resistance.

At the city and district levels revolutionary councils or majlis thawar have been established. They are often the primary civil administrative structure in areas liberated from the state, as well as some areas that remain under state control.[6] These ensure the provision of basic services, coordinate the activities of local committees and coordinate with the popular armed resistance. Undoubtably as state provision of services has disappeared from some areas, and the humanitarian situation has deteriorated, they have played an increasingly vital role. There is no one model for the Local Councils, but they mainly follow some form of representative democratic model. Some have established different administrative departments to take over functions previously held by the state. Some have been more successful and inclusive than others which have struggled to displace the bureaucracy of the old regime or have been plagued by infighting.[7]

Whilst the main basis of activity is very much at the local level, there are a number of different umbrella groups which have emerged to coordinate and network on the regional and national level. These include the Local Coordination Committees (LCC), National Action Committees (NAC), the Federation of the Coordination Committees of the Syrian Revolution (FCC)

6. For a report on Local Councils see in Gayath Naisse 'Self organization in the Syrian people's revolution': http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article3025
7. Ibid.

and the Syrian Revolution General Commission (SRGC). None represent the totality of local committees/councils and they have different organizational structures and differing levels of engagement or non-engagement with the formal political opposition. See here for an interactive map which shows the coordinating committees and councils, as well as the flourishing of many other civil initiatives and campaigns in a country where such activity was previously brutally repressed.

A major threat facing these diverse initiatives has not only been the persecution of activists by the regime, lack of resources, the onslaught of the state's attack of civilian areas and increasingly deteriorating security and humanitarian conditions. Some local councils have been hijacked by reactionary and counter-revolutionary forces. For example, in Al Raqqa non-local rebel groups with salafi/takfiri leanings took much of the power away from the local council. As they have tried to impose an Islamic vision which is alien to almost everyone, the people of Raqqa have been holding continuous protests against them. In this video here from June 2013 people are demonstrating against arrests of family members by Jabhat Al Nusra. The women are shouting "shame on you! You betrayed us in the name of Islam". Throughout August 2013 the people of Al Raqqa have been protesting almost daily against the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) demanding the release of hundreds of detainees, abductees and missing persons. Likewise in Aleppo revolutionaries launched the 'enough is enough' campaign calling for an end to rebel abuses and for accountability. This demonstration from June 2013 was held in front of Sharia Court in Aleppo after the killing of a child for allegedly insulting the

prophet Mohammad. The people here are calling for the murderers to be brought to justice saying ""The Sharia Committee has become the Air Force Intelligence!" (the most brutal security branch of Assad regime). In Idlib people have also been protesting against a Sharia Committee which has been established, here they say "we are against the regime, against extremist killing and oppression" and are calling for the return of professional lawyers (independent judiciary) to the court (instead of religious men).

Omar Aziz did not live to see the often seemingly insurmountable challenges that would beset Syria's revolutionaries, or the successes and failures of experiments in local self-organization. On 20 November 2012, he was arrested from his home by the mukhabarat (much feared intelligence service). Shortly before his arrest he said "We are no less than the Paris Commune workers: they resisted for 70 days and we are still going on for a year and a half."[8] Aziz was held in an intelligence detention cell of 4 by 4 meters which was shared with 85 other people. This likely contributed to the deterioration of his already weak health. He was later transferred to Adra prison where he died from heart complications in February 2013, a day before his 64th birthday.

Omar Aziz's name may never be widely known, but he deserves recognition as a leading contemporary figure in the development of anarchist thought and practice. The experiments in grass roots revolutionary organization that he inspired provide insight and lessons in anarchist organizing for future revolutions across the globe.

8. Via @Darth Nader https://twitter.com/DarthNader/status/304015567231266816
SYRIA: The life and work of anarchist Omar Aziz, and his impact on self-organization in the Syrian revolution
AUG 23
Posted by tahriricn
By Leila Al Shami for Tahrir-ICN
https://tahriricn.wordpress.com/2013/08/23/syria-the-life-and-work-of-anarchist-omar-aziz-and-his-impact-on-self-organization-in-the-syrian-revolution/

OF THE MORE THAN FIFTY nations of the world which have become independent since World War II, few have managed to find workable solutions to such problems as poverty, illiteracy and disease. Some have had their "revolution", some have taken land from the rich and given it to the poor, some are making missiles, all have launched ambitious educational and health schemes. But not many have made as much progress as Syria in actually increasing agricultural and industrial production—the basic elements needed to raise the standard of living anywhere.

Yet Syria, slightly larger than the American state of North Dakota, or three-fourths the size of the United Kingdom, is not particularly well endowed by nature. Much of it is steppe or desert; much of the rest periodically lacks sufficient water. Nor has it had an easy past. Because of its situation on a vital land link joining three continents—Europe, Asia and Africa—again and again through the centuries conquerors and caravans have met there. They came from the East and the West, and all left some imprint on the land.

Plate 26

In this Turkish-style mosque each of the pilgrim's rooms, covered by a small dome, looks out on this quiet gardened courtyard, which must be conducive to meditation.

In the early days, the conquerors came mostly from the East—Sumerians, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Persians. Tribal life was the rule, kings were all-powerful and many gods were worshipped. Then came the Greeks from the West. They created cities and city-states and introduced a different type of civilization, democratic, free and secular. The Romans, who followed, also built cities, and laid out a fine network of roads, as they did wherever they went, primarily to establish and maintain effective control over a far-flung empire. With them they brought a system of law based on logical thinking rather than on divine power.

The Impact of the Arabs and Egyptians

A FAR MORE LASTING imprint was that of the Arabs, who conquered Damascus in 633 A.D. and all of Syria three years later. The Syrians adopted their language, Arabic, and their religion, Islam; to this day almost everyone in the country speaks Arabic and eighty-five per cent of the people are Moslems.

Under the Omayyad caliphate (661–750), Damascus became the

apital of an Arab empire which at the height of its power stretched rom Spain and Morocco almost to the borders of China. In 750, owever, the Omayyads, weakened by unrest in the distant provinces nd feuds at home, were overthrown by the Abbasids from Iraq. The ocus of the Islamic world moved from Damascus to Baghdad, and yria reverted to the status of a province.

Later, in the ninth century, Baghdad and Cairo fought over Syria. Cairo triumphed temporarily, conquering most of the country, but it in urn was defeated by the Turks.

Crusaders, Mongols, More Egyptians and Turks

TOWARD THE END of the eleventh century the Crusaders, having captured Antioch and Jerusalem, established a feudal kingdom in Syria. For the next 200 years they more or less maintained control,

After World War I Syria became a French Mandated Territory and France divided it into two separate states, Lebanon and Syria. This explains the French spellings of the names on this border marker.

Plate 3

This flag, consisting of red, white and black stripes, with three stars on the white stripe, is the same as that of Iraq. It was adopted by both countries when they were discussing federation in 1963. The hues are the same as in the flags of all nations belonging to the Arab League.

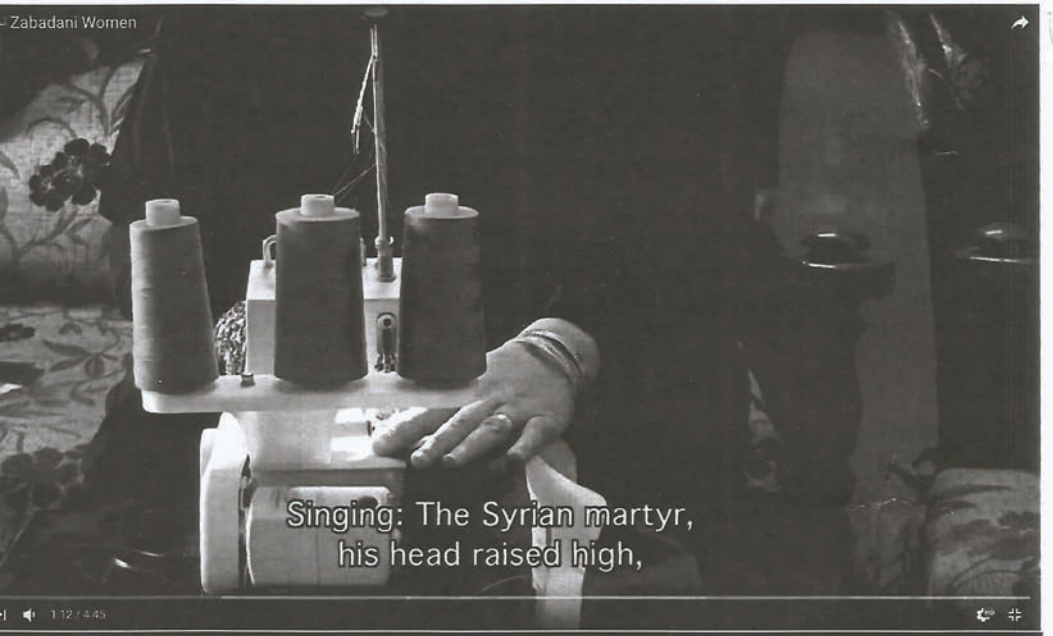
until the Mongols arrived, sacked Aleppo, and pillaged and devastated much of the country. Following the last Mongol invasion, in 1400, the situation deteriorated still further under the rule of the Mamelukes from Egypt, until in 1516 they were forced to hand over Syria to the Ottoman Turks.

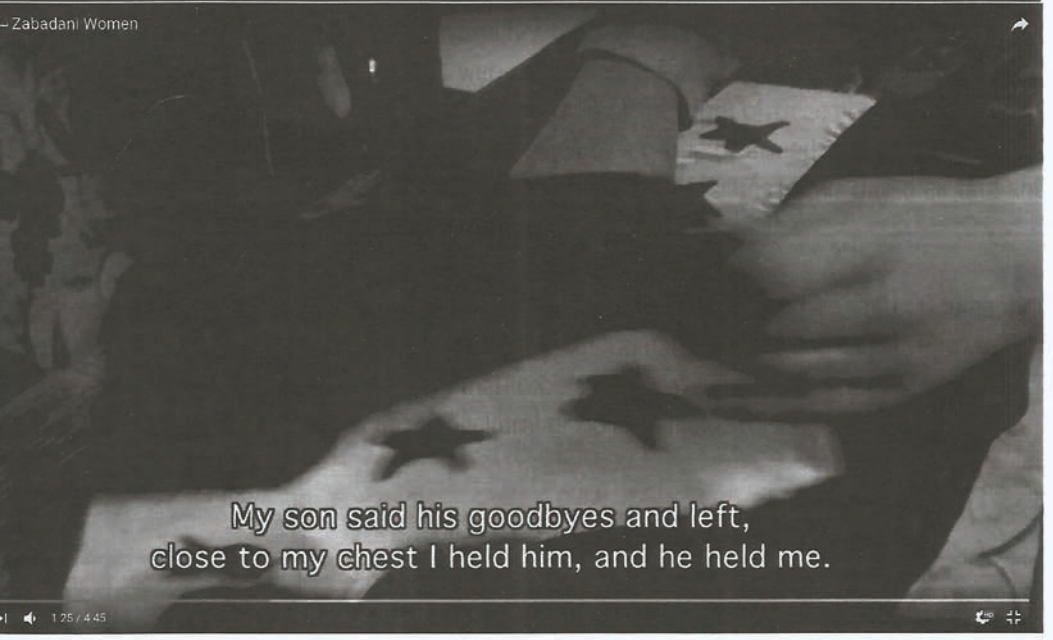
For almost all of the ensuing four centuries, until 1918, Syria was governed, or misgoverned, by a series of Turkish sultans, who did little to improve the economy or wellbeing of the inhabitants.

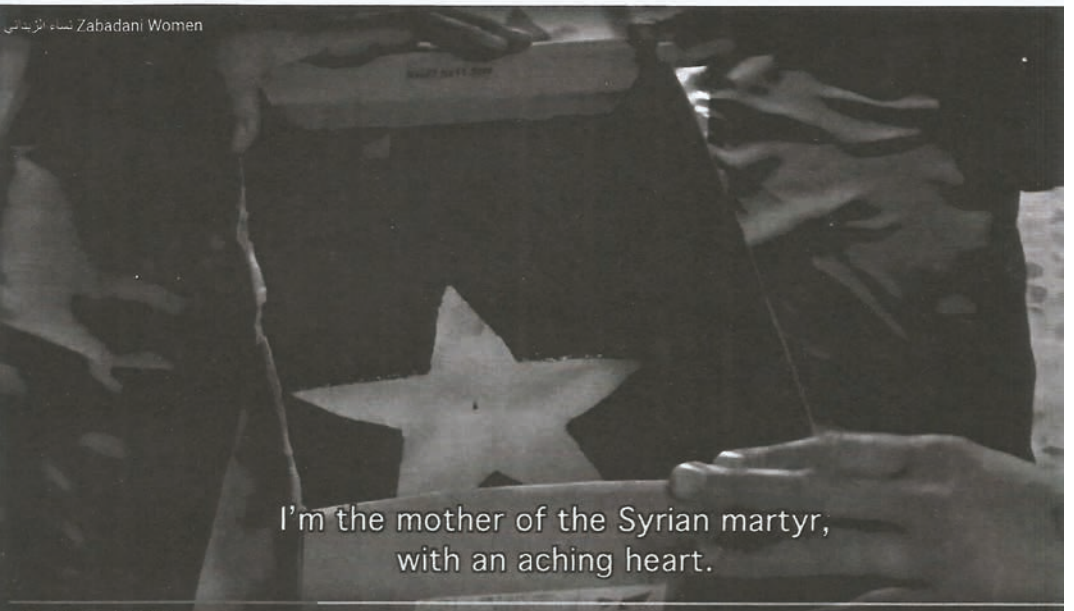
French Mandate and Independence

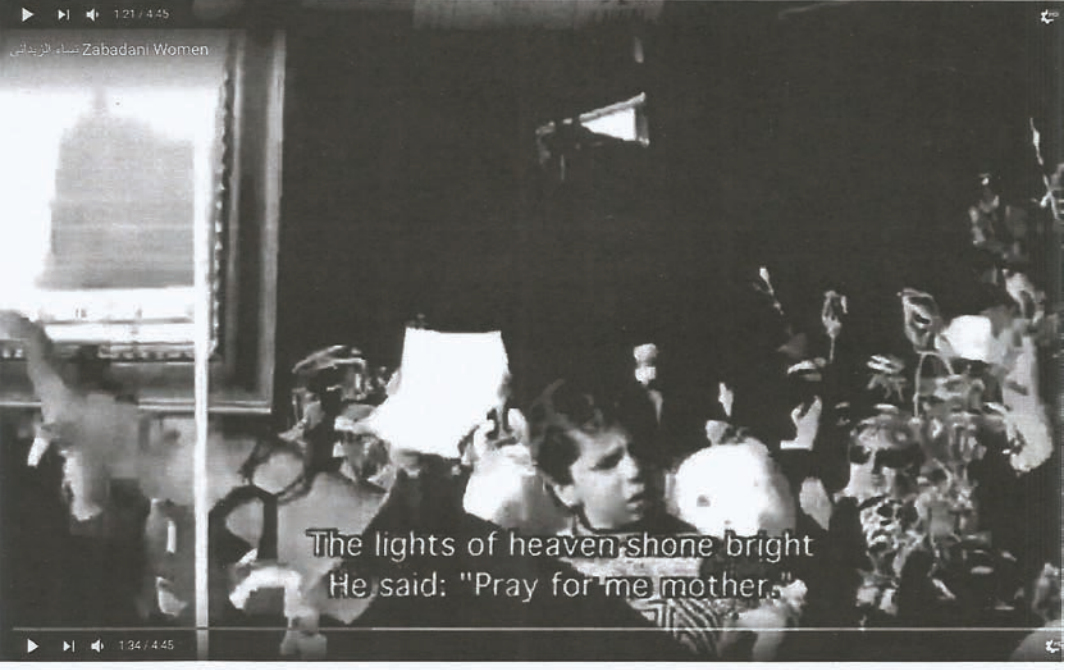
In 1920 Syria was placed under French mandate. Although the French tried to revive agriculture, built some schools and founded a university and a museum in Damascus, and launched a scheme to preserve outstanding monuments of the past, they failed to capture the allegiance of the Syrians and their period of administration was peppered with revolts. The people wanted independence.

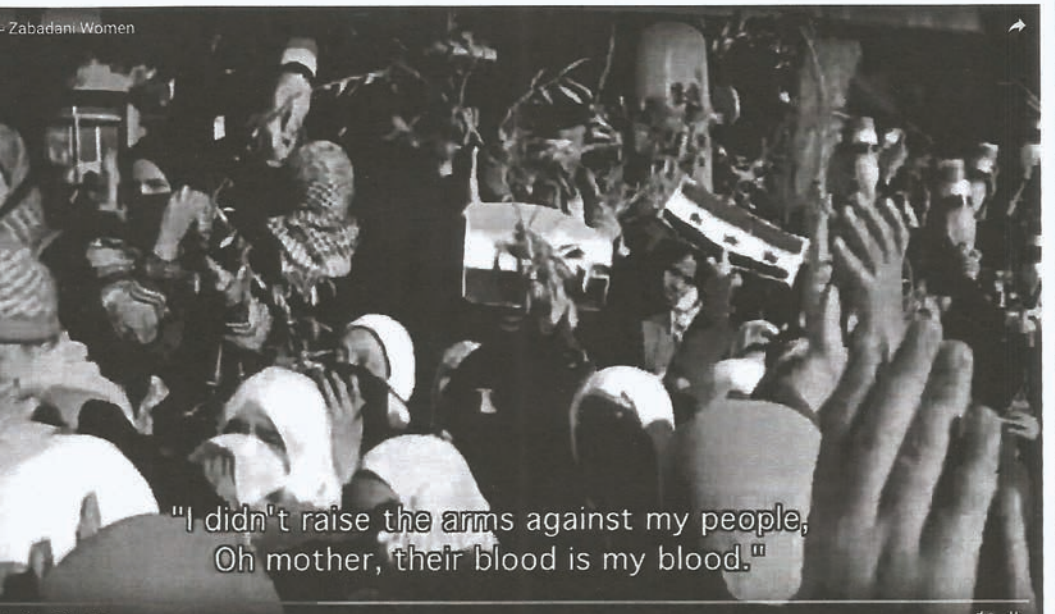
This they achieved in 1946, and this they have maintained since then except for a three-year union with Egypt (1958–61).

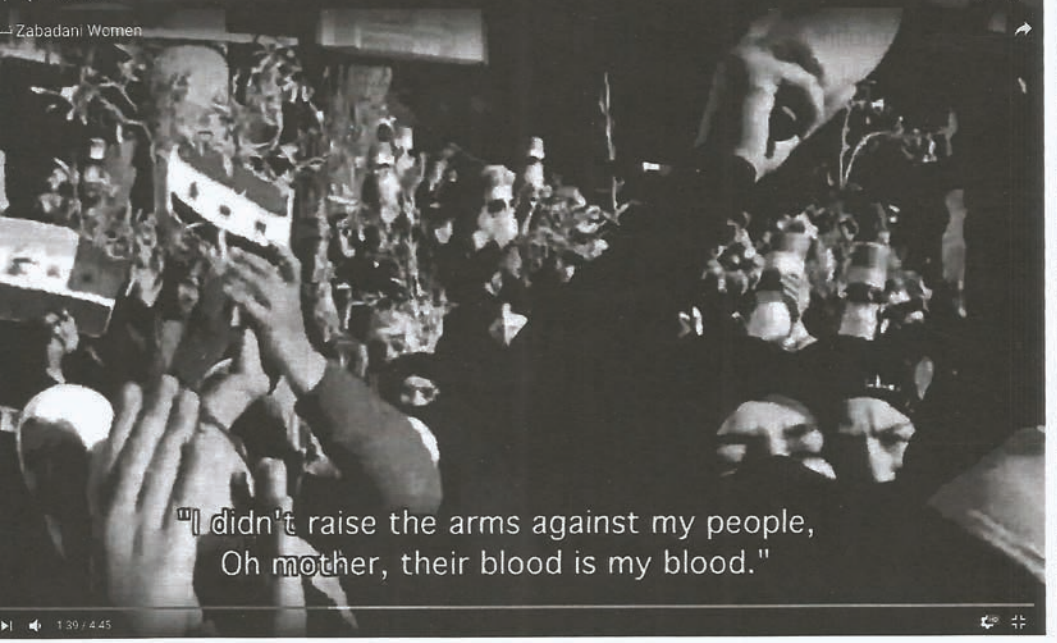

– Zabadani Women
Singing: The Syrian martyr,
his head raised high,
1:12 / 4:45

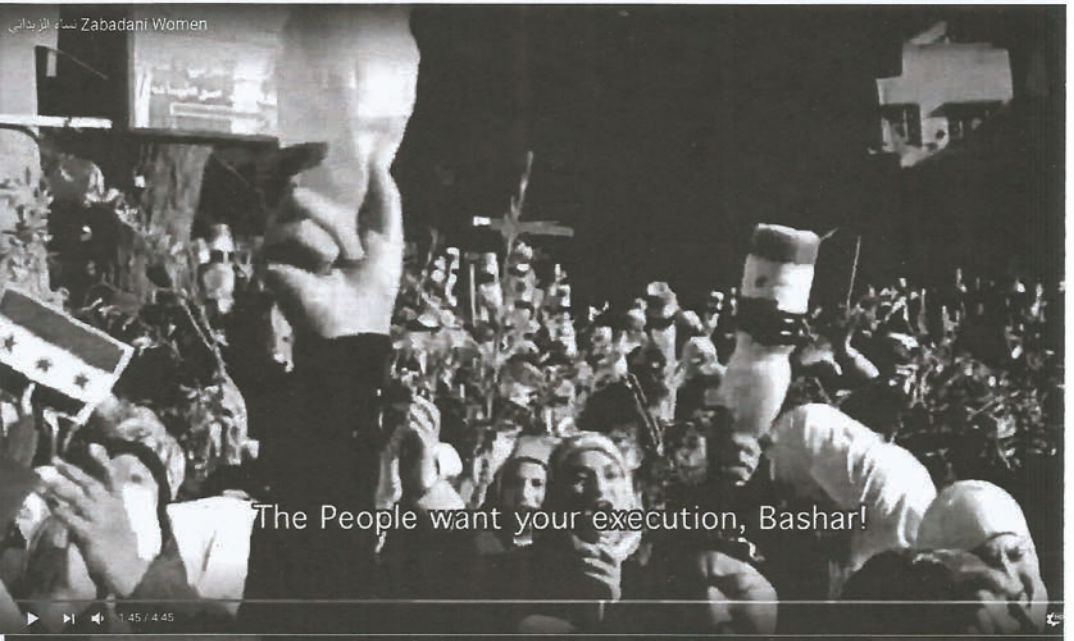

– Zabadani Women
My son said his goodbyes and left,
close to my chest I held him, and he held me.
1:25 / 4:45

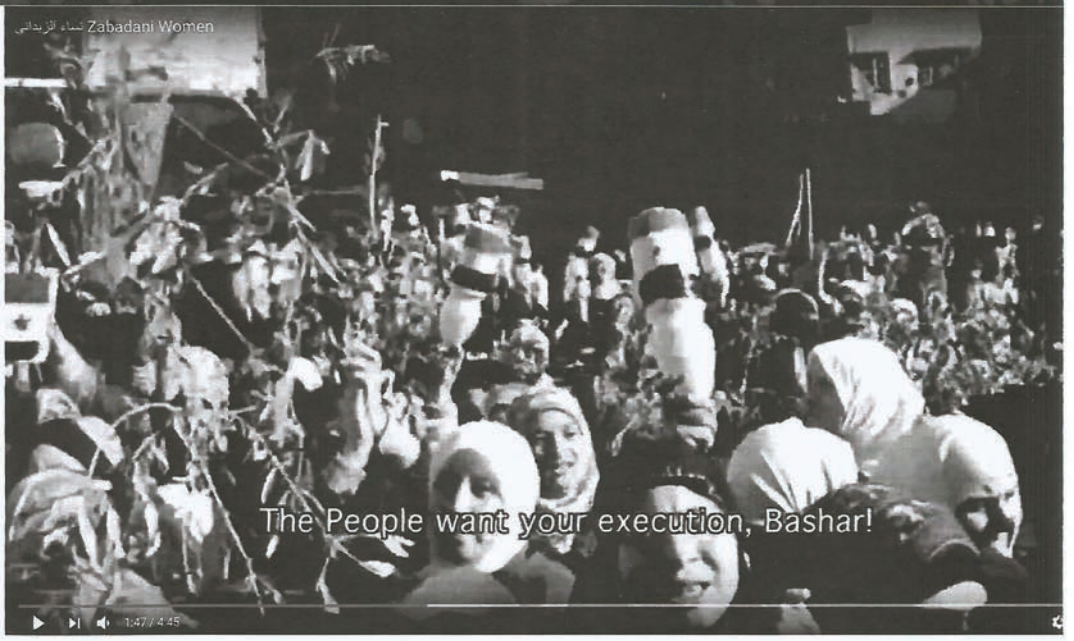

نساء الزبداني Zabadani Women
I'm the mother of the Syrian martyr,
with an aching heart.
1:21 / 4:45


نساء الزبداني Zabadani Women
The lights of heaven shone bright
He said: "Pray for me mother."
1:34 / 4:45


Zabadani Women
"I didn't raise the arms against my people,
Oh mother, their blood is my blood."
1:38 / 4:45


Zabadani Women
"I didn't raise the arms against my people,
Oh mother, their blood is my blood."
1:39 / 4:45


نساء الزبداني Zabadani Women
The People want your execution, Bashar!
1:45 / 4:45


نساء الزبداني Zabadani Women
The People want your execution, Bashar!
1:47 / 4:45

THE STREET CALLED STRAIGHT

feet thick and thirty feet high, dotted with towers, and a theatre where off-duty Roman soldiers amused themselves. Also worth seeing are a triumphal arch, a temple, a cathedral built about 513 A.D. and the Great Mosque.

Plate 12

This is in the newer part of the city. To the left is a municipal office building. It is the waters of the Barada River that keep the greenery green. Without them Damascus would never have become a large city in the midst of a flourishing oasis.

Damascus

NORTH OF THE DUSTY and parched Hauran Plain lies the Ghuta, the oasis of Damascus. Here orchards of apricot and pomegranate trees, vineyards and olive groves, fields of wheat and barley, vegetable gardens, fig, pear, plum, palm, poplar, sycamore and walnut

YOUNG BEDOUIN GIRL

20.

21. ALEPPO'S COVERED

23. ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF

Plate 16

Damascenes escape from the summer heat to cooler hill resorts such as Malula, altitude 5,650 feet. The cupola of its Greek Catholic Convent dates from Byzantine times.

The Woman Who Defied Rome

NORTH-EAST OF DAMASCUS a vast, stony, sandy desert extends as far as and even beyond the River Euphrates. Here and there are small oases supported by a well or two, and large flocks of sheep, goats and camels, with their Bedouin herdsmen, slowly move southward in winter and northward in summer in search of the grasses that spring up after a light rain.

Largely deprived of their ancient caravan business by less picturesque but faster means of transport, these Bedouins now depend principally upon their animals for food, clothing and shelter. In place of the tribute they formerly collected from the sedentary cultivators for pro-

tection, they now collect rent for land leased to them. The government, which disapproves of migratory habits, has encouraged some of these wanderers to take to farming on lands allotted for the purpose. But it is difficult for them to adapt to a way of life which from time immemorial they have considered inferior to their own.

The weathered ruins of Palmyra in the midst of this desert dramatically illustrate the magnificence of a once-flourishing caravan city, focus of a vast trade network extending eastward to Persia and India and westward to Rome. At its peak, Palmyra probably had a population of some 30,000.

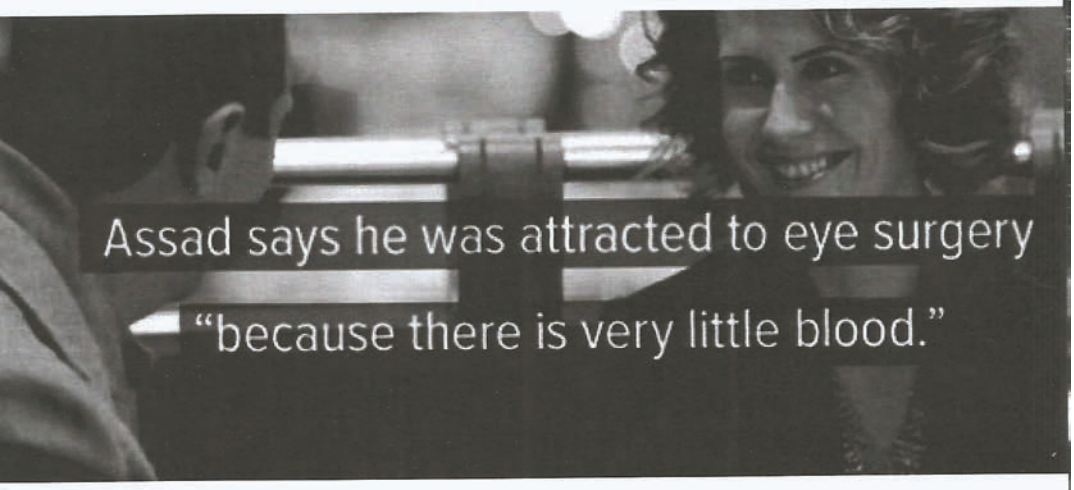
In the middle of the third century A.D. it was ruled by Zenobia, one of the few women to rule in antiquity. She was, according to all accounts, beautiful, talented, shrewd, energetic, just, mistress of several languages, a scholar and a poet, who herself led troops in rebellious campaigns against the Romans after the murder of her husband Odenathus. She created overnight a huge merchant empire. But eventually, in 272 A.D., she was defeated by the Emperor Aurelian, a military genius, who razed the city walls and destroyed its water supply. Zenobia was taken to Rome a captive, but her chains apparently were of gold and she was thereafter "confined" to a villa on the Tiber.

The wandering Bedouins are probably the most hospitable people in the world. Courteous hospitality was and still is a law among them, for to turn away a passer-by in the desert meant almost certain death by thirst or starvation.

Plate 9

In February, Vogue magazine published, for the benefit of its 11.7 million readers, an article titled "A Rose in the Desert" about the first lady of Syria. Asma al-Assad has British roots, wears designer fashion, worked for years in banking, and is married to the dictator Bashar al-Assad, whose regime has killed over 5,000 civilians and hundreds of children this year. The glowing article praised the Assads as a "wildly democratic" family-focused couple who vacation in Europe, foster Christianity, are at ease with American celebrities, made theirs the "safest country in the Middle East," and want to give Syria a "brand essence."

Vogue's editors defended the controversial article as "a way of opening a window into this world a little bit," conceding only that Assad's Syria is "not as secular as we might like." A senior editor responsible for the story told me the magazine stood by it. A few weeks later, the article and all references to it were removed from Vogue's website without explanation. In August, The Hill reported that U.S. lobbying firm Brown Lloyd James had been paid $5,000 per month by the Syrian government to arrange for and manage the Vogue article.



For all the controversy, the article's author, former French Vogue editor Joan Juliet Buck, did manage to spend some one-on-one time with both Asma and Bashar al-Assad, an exclusive many journalists might have killed for. Today, as the world watches for cracks in the Assad regime and in the Assad family, Buck's interviews are an increasingly important tool for understanding the man at the top of Syria and the woman next to him.

Here it is in full:

Asma al-Assad is glamorous, young, and very chic--the freshest and most magnetic of first ladies. Her style is not the couture-and-bling dazzle of Middle Eastern power but a deliberate lack of adornment. She's a rare combination: a thin, long-limbed beauty with a trained analytic mind who dresses with cunning understatement. Paris Match calls her "the element of light in a country full of shadow zones." She is the first lady of Syria.

Syria is known as the safest country in the Middle East, possibly because, as the State Department's Web site says, "the Syrian government conducts intense physical and electronic surveillance of both Syrian citizens and foreign visitors." It's a secular country where women earn as much as men and the Muslim veil is forbidden in universities, a place without bombings, unrest, or kidnappings, but its shadow zones are deep and dark. Asma's husband, Bashar al-Assad, was elected president in 2000, after the death of his father, Hafez al-Assad, with a startling 97 percent of the vote. In Syria, power is hereditary. The country's alliances are murky. How close are they to Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah? There are souvenir Hezbollah ashtrays in the souk, and you can spot the Hamas leadership racing through the bar of the Four Seasons. Its number-one enmity is clear: Israel. But that might not always be the case. The United States has just posted its first ambassador there since 2005, Robert Ford.

Iraq is next door, Iran not far away. Lebanon's capital, Beirut, is 90 minutes by car from Damascus. Jordan is south, and next to it the region that Syrian maps label Palestine. There are nearly one million refugees from Iraq in Syria, and another half-million displaced Palestinians.

"It's a tough neighborhood," admits Asma al-Assad.

It's also a neighborhood intoxicatingly close to the dawn of civilization, where agriculture began some 10,000 years ago, where the wheel, writing, and musical notation were invented. Out in the desert are the magical remains of Palmyra, Apamea, and Ebla. In the National Museum you see

small 4,000-year-old panels inlaid with mother-of-pearl that is echoed in the new mother-of-pearl furniture for sale in the souk. Christian Louboutin comes to buy the damask silk brocade they've been making here since the Middle Ages for his shoes and bags, and has incidentally purchased a small palace in Aleppo, which, like Damascus, has been inhabited for more than 5,000 years.

The first lady works out of a small white building in a hilly, modern residential neighborhood called Muhajireen, where houses and apartments are crammed together and neighbors peer and wave from balconies. The first impression of Asma al-Assad is movement--a determined swath cut through space with a flash of red soles. Dark-brown eyes, wavy chin-length brown hair, long neck, an energetic grace. No watch, no jewelry apart from Chanel agates around her neck, not even a wedding ring, but fingernails lacquered a dark blue-green. She's breezy, conspiratorial, and fun. Her accent is English but not plummy. Despite what must be a killer IQ, she sometimes uses urban shorthand: "I was, like. . . ."

Asma Akhras was born in London in 1975, the eldest child and only daughter of a Syrian Harley Street cardiologist and his diplomat wife, both Sunni Muslims. They spoke Arabic at home. She grew up in Ealing, went to Queen's College, and spent holidays with family in Syria. "I've dealt with the sense that people don't expect Syria to be normal. I'd show my London friends my holiday snaps and they'd be—'Where did you say you went?' " She studied computer science at university, then went into banking. "It

wasn't a typical path for women," she says, "but I had it all mapped out." By the spring of 2000, she was closing a big biotech deal at JP Morgan in London and about to take up an MBA at Harvard. She started dating a family friend: the second son of president Hafez al-Assad, Bashar, who'd cut short his ophthalmology studies in London in 1994 and returned to Syria after his older brother, Basil, heir apparent to power, died in a car crash. They had known each other forever, but a ten-year age difference meant that nothing registered—until it did.

"I was always very serious at work, and suddenly I started to take weekends, or disappear, and people just couldn't figure it out," explains the first lady. "What do you say—'I'm dating the son of a president'? You just don't say that. Then he became president, so I tried to keep it low-key. Suddenly I was turning up in Syria every month, saying, 'Granny, I miss you so much!' I quit in October because by then we knew that we were going to get married at some stage. I couldn't say why I was leaving. My boss thought I was having a nervous breakdown because nobody quits two months before bonus after closing a really big deal. He wouldn't accept my resignation. I was, like, 'Please, really, I just want to get out, I've had enough,' and he was 'Don't worry, take time off, it happens to the best of us.' " She left without her bonus in November and married Bashar al-Assad in December.

"What I've been able to take away from banking was the transferable skills—the analytical thinking, understanding the business side of running a company—to run an NGO or to try and oversee a project." She runs

her office like a business, chairs meeting after meeting, starts work many days at six, never breaks for lunch, and runs home to her children at four. "It's my time with them, and I get them fresh, unedited—I love that. I really do." Her staff are used to eating when they can. "I have a rechargeable battery," she says.

The 35-year-old first lady's central mission is to change the mind-set of six million Syrians under eighteen, encourage them to engage in what she calls "active citizenship." "It's about everyone taking shared responsibility in moving this country forward, about empowerment in a civil society. We all have a stake in this country; it will be what we make it."

In 2005 she founded Massar, built around a series of discovery centers where children and young adults from five to 21 engage in creative, informal approaches to civic responsibility. Massar's mobile Green Team has touched 200,000 kids across Syria since 2005. The organization is privately funded through donations. The Syria Trust for Development, formed in 2007, oversees Massar as well as her first NGO, the rural micro-credit association FIRDOS, and SHABAB, which exists to give young people business skills they need for the future.

And then there's her cultural mission: "People tend to see Syria as artifacts and history," she says. "For us it's about the accumulation of cultures, traditions, values, customs. It's the difference between hardware and software: the artifacts are the hardware, but the software makes all the difference—the customs and the spirit of openness. We have to make sure

that we don't lose that. . . . " Here she gives an apologetic grin. "You have to excuse me, but I'm a banker—that brand essence."

That brand essence includes the distant past. There are 500,000 important ancient works of art hidden in storage; Asma al-Assad has brought in the Louvre to create a network of museums and cultural attractions across Syria, and asked Italian experts to help create a database of the 5,000 archaeological sites in the desert. "Culture," she says, "is like a financial asset. We have an abundance of it, thousands of years of history, but we can't afford to be complacent."
In December, Asma al-Assad was in Paris to discuss her alliance with the Louvre. She dazzled a tough French audience at the International Diplomatic Institute, speaking without notes. "I'm not trying to disguise culture as anything more than it is," she said, "and if I sound like I'm talking politics, it's because we live in a politicized region, a politicized time, and we are affected by that."

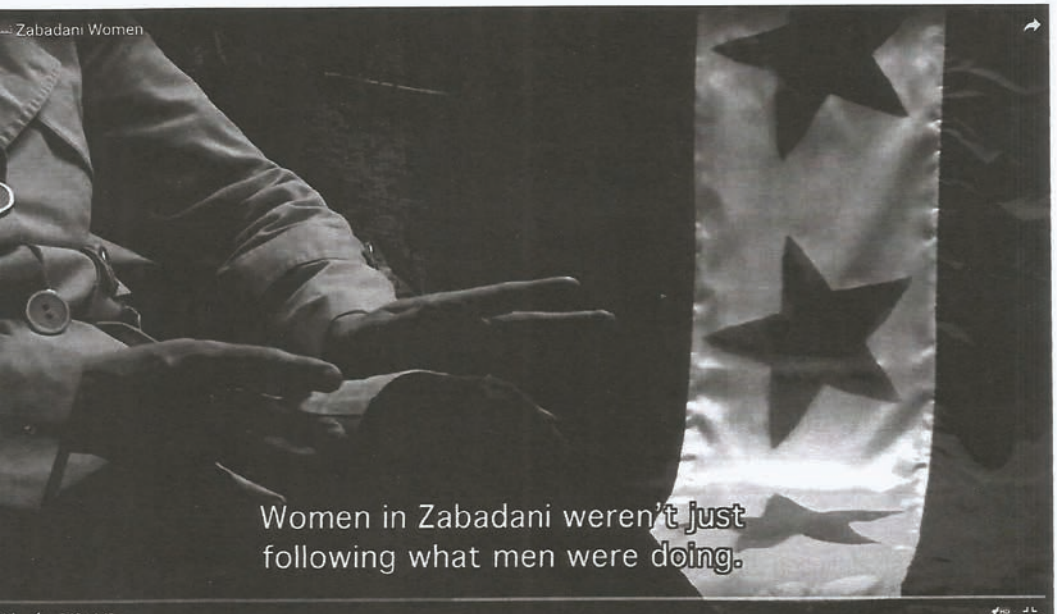
The French ambassador to Syria, Eric Chevallier, was there: "She managed to get people to consider the possibilities of a country that's modernizing itself, that stands for a tolerant secularism in a powder-keg region, with extremists and radicals pushing in from all sides—and the driving force for that rests largely on the shoulders of one couple. I hope they'll make the right choices for their country and the region. "

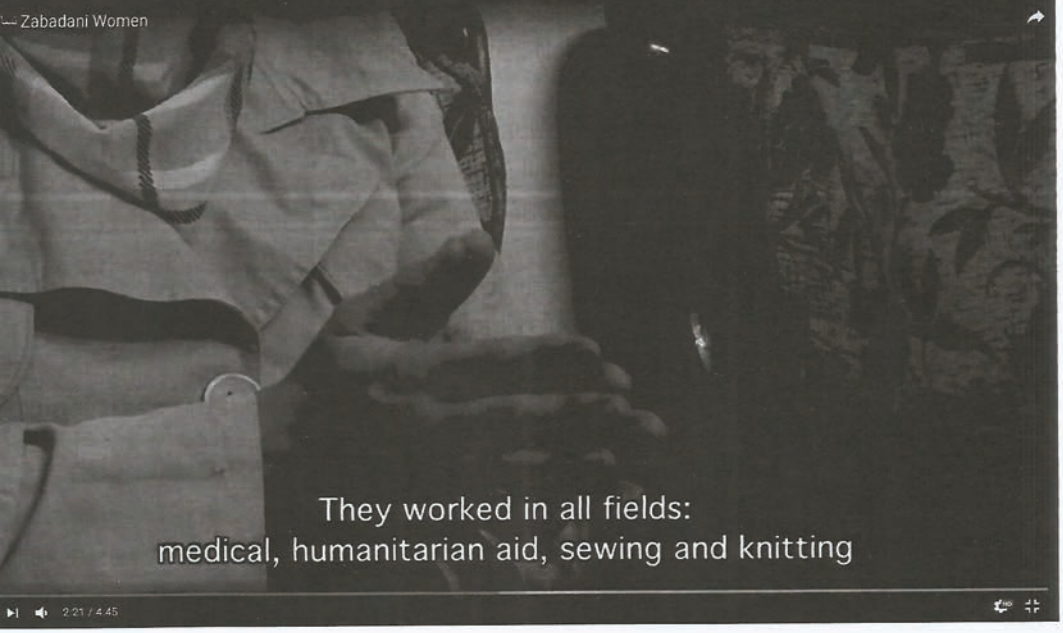
Damascus evokes a dusty version of a Mediterranean hill town in an Eastern-bloc country. The courtyard of the Umayyad Mosque at night looks

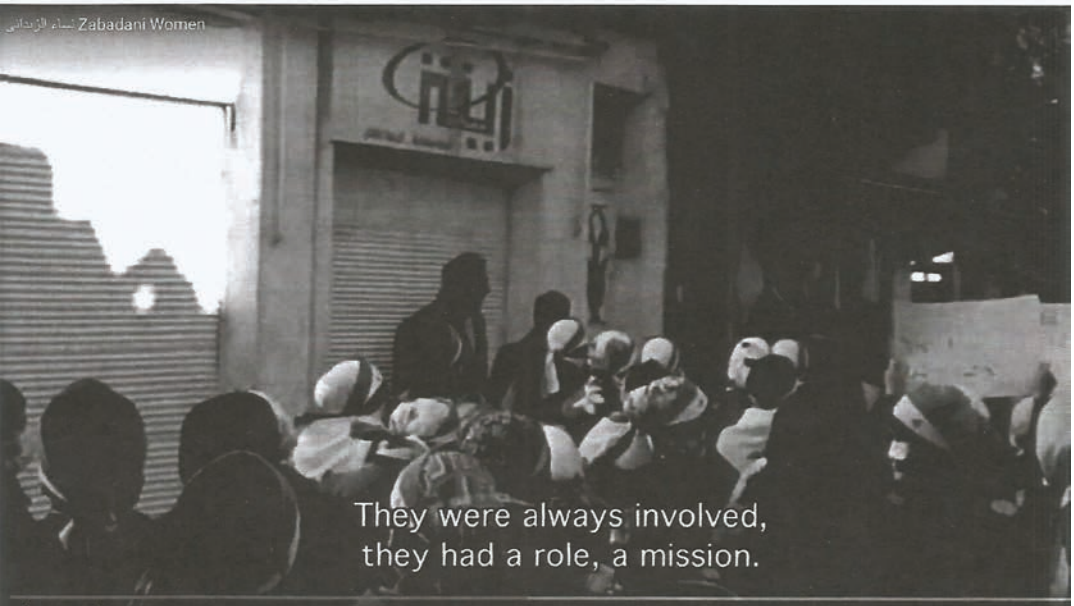
exactly like St. Mark's square in Venice. When I first arrive, I'm met on the tarmac by a minder, who gives me a bouquet of white roses and lends me a Syrian cell phone; the head minder, a high-profile American PR, joins us the next day. The first lady's office has provided drivers, so I shop and see sights in a bubble of comfort and hospitality. On the rare occasions I am out alone, a random series of men in leather jackets seems to be keeping close tabs on what I am doing and where I am headed.

"I like things I can touch. I like to get out and meet people and do things," the first lady says as we set off for a meeting in a museum and a visit to an orphanage. "As a banker, you have to be so focused on the job at hand that you lose the experience of the world around you. My husband gave me back something I had lost."

She slips behind the wheel of a plain SUV, a walkie-talkie and her cell thrown between the front seats and a Syrian-silk Louboutin tote on top. She does what the locals do—swerves to avoid crazy men who run across busy freeways, misses her turn, checks your seat belt, points out sights, and then can't find a parking space. When a traffic cop pulls her over at a roundabout, she lowers the tinted window and dips her head with a playful smile. The cop's eyes go from slits to saucers.

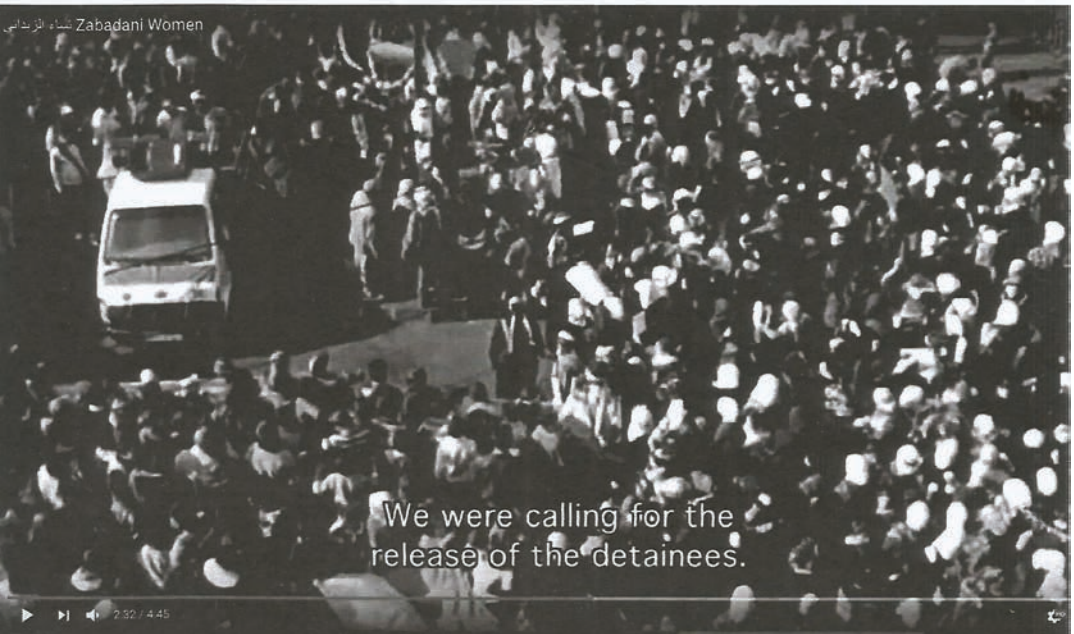

Zabadani Women
Women in Zabadani weren't just
following what men were doing.
2:10 / 4:45


Zabadani Women
They worked in all fields:
medical, humanitarian aid, sewing and knitting
2:21 / 4:45

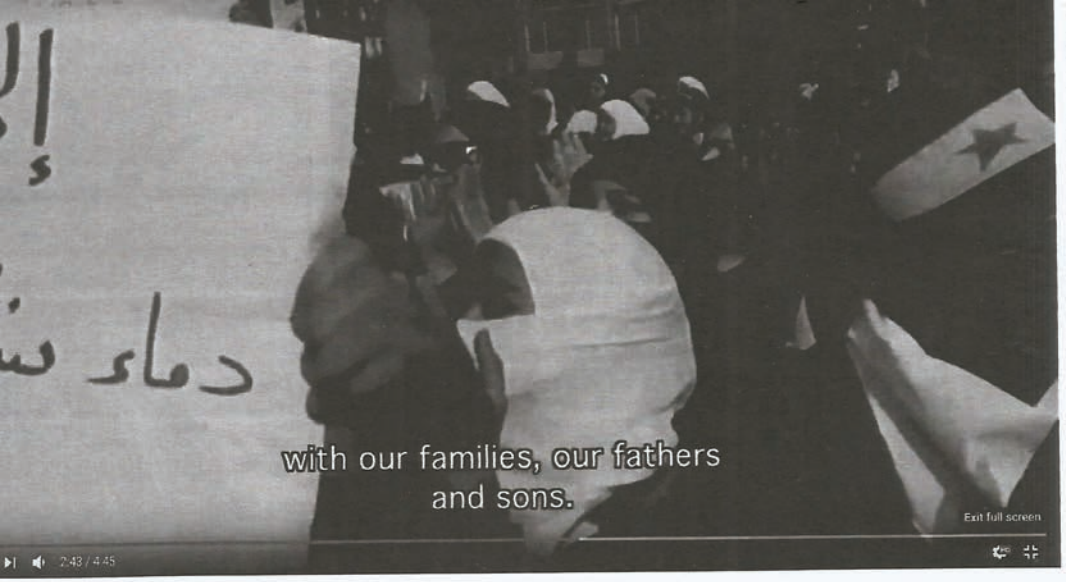

نساء الزبداني Zabadani Women
They were always involved,
they had a role, a mission.
2:14 / 4:45


نساء الزبداني Zabadani Women
And most importantly,
the protests.
2:26 / 4:45


Zabadani Women
Our first protest was
very spontaneous,
2:29 / 4:45
Zabadani Women
After a while, without consulting
anyone, we gathered
2:36 / 4:45


نساء الزبداني Zabadani Women
We were calling for the
release of the detainees.
2:32 / 4:45


نساء الزبداني Zabadani Women
And went regularly to
protests with our children,
2:40 / 4:45



Her younger brother Feras, a surgeon who moved to Syria to start a private health-care group, says, "Her intelligence is both intellectual and emotional, and she's a master at harmonizing when, and how much, to use of each one."

In the Saint Paul orphanage, maintained by the Melkite–Greek Catholic patriarchate and run by the Basilian sisters of Aleppo, Asma sits at a long table with the children. Two little boys in new glasses and thick sweaters are called Yussuf. She asks them what kind of music they like. "Sad music," says one. In the room where she's had some twelve computers installed, the first lady tells a nun, "I hope you're letting the younger children in here go crazy on the computers." The nun winces: "The children are afraid to learn in case they don't have access to computers when they leave here," she says.

In the courtyard by the wall down which Saint Paul escaped in a basket 2,000 years ago, an old tree bears gigantic yellow fruit I have never seen before. Citrons. Cédrats in French.

Back in the car, I ask what religion the orphans are. "It's not relevant," says Asma al-Assad. "Let me try to explain it to you. That church is a part of my heritage because it's a Syrian church. The Umayyad Mosque is the third-most-important holy Muslim site, but within the mosque is the tomb of Saint John the Baptist. We all kneel in the mosque in front of the tomb of Saint John the Baptist. That's how religions live together in Syria—a way that I have never seen anywhere else in the world. We live side by side, and have historically. All the religions and cultures that have passed through these lands—the Armenians, Islam, Christianity, the Umayyads, the Ottomans—make up who I am."

"Does that include the Jews?" I ask.

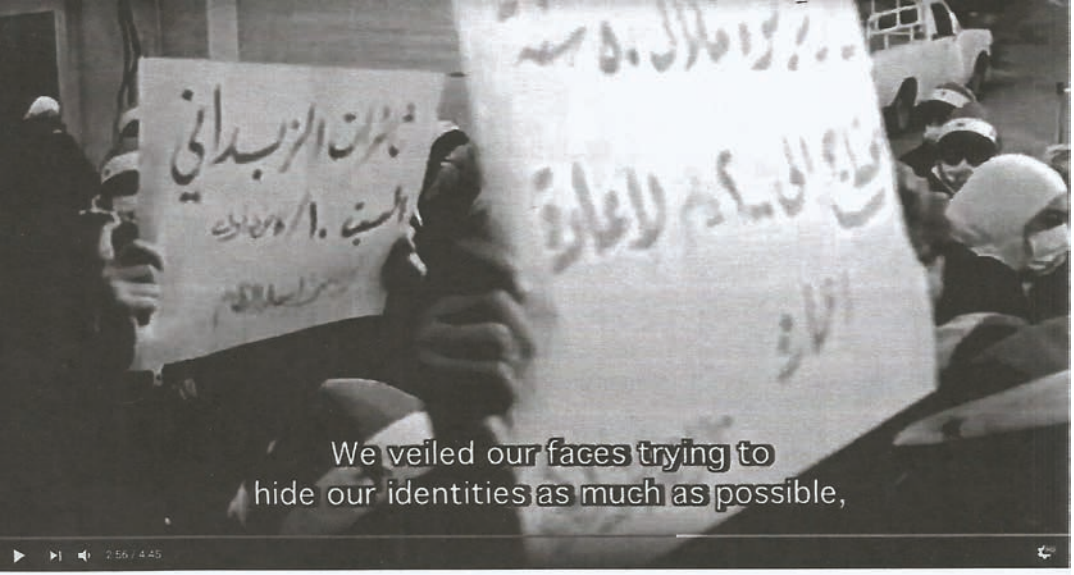
"And the Jews," she answers. "There is a very big Jewish quarter in old Damascus."

The Jewish quarter of Damascus spans a few abandoned blocks in the old

city that emptied out in 1992, when most of the Syrian Jews left. Their houses are sealed up and have not been touched, because, as people like to tell you, Syrians don't touch the property of others. The broken glass and sagging upper floors tell a story you don't understand—are the owners coming back to claim them one day?

The presidential family lives surrounded by neighbors in a modern apartment in Malki. On Friday, the Muslim day of rest, Asma al-Assad opens the door herself in jeans and old suede stiletto boots, hair in a ponytail, the word happiness spelled out across the back of her T-shirt. At the bottom of the stairs stands the off-duty president in jeans—tall, long-necked, blue-eyed. A precise man who takes photographs and talks lovingly about his first computer, he says he was attracted to studying eye surgery "because it's very precise, it's almost never an emergency, and there is very little blood."

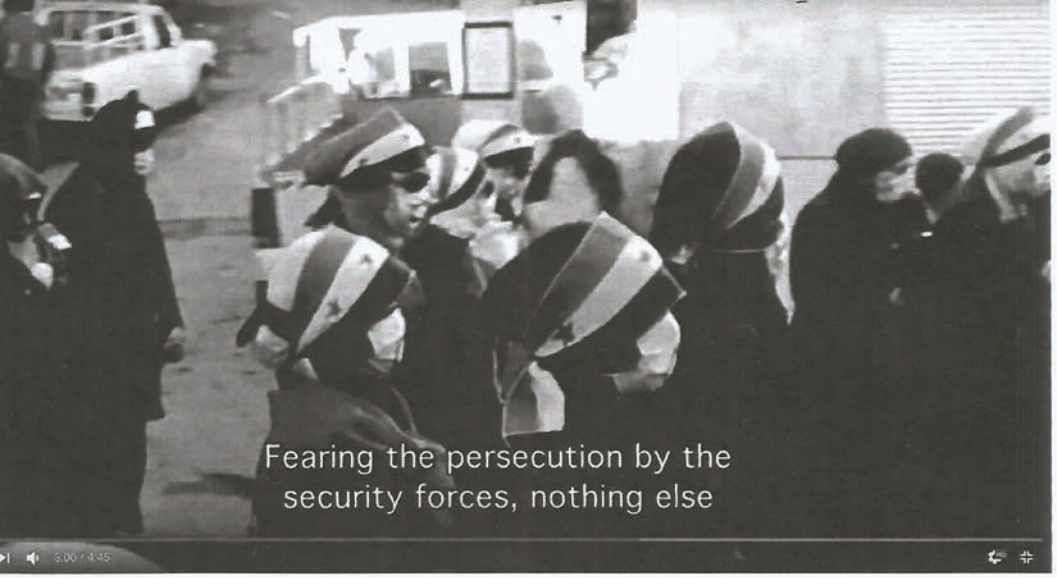
The old al-Assad family apartment was remade into a child-friendly triple-



decker playroom loft surrounded by immense windows on three sides. With neither shades nor curtains, it's a fishbowl. Asma al-Assad likes to say, "You're safe because you are surrounded by people who will keep you safe." Neighbors peer in, drop by, visit, comment on the furniture. The president doesn't mind: "This curiosity is good: They come to see you, they learn more about you. You don't isolate yourself."

There's a decorated Christmas tree. Seven-year-old Zein watches Tim Burton's Alice in Wonderland on the president's iMac; her brother Karim, six, builds a shark out of Legos; and nine-year-old Hafez tries out his new electric violin. All three go to a Montessori school.

Asma al-Assad empties a box of fondue mix into a saucepan for lunch. The household is run on wildly democratic principles. "We all vote on what we want, and where," she says. The chandelier over the dining table is made of cut-up comic books. "They outvoted us three to two on that."

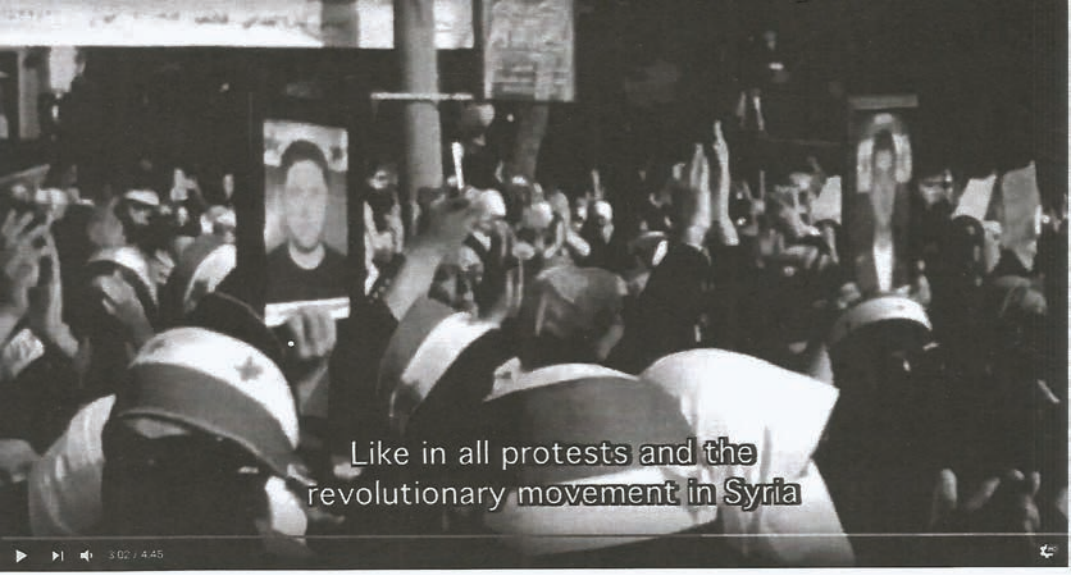


A grid is drawn on a blackboard, with ticks for each member of the family. "We were having trouble with politeness, so we made a chart: ticks for when they spoke as they should, and a cross if they didn't." There's a cross next to Asma's name. "I shouted," she confesses. "I can't talk about empowering young people, encouraging them to be creative and take responsibility, if I'm not like that with my own children."

"The first challenge for us was, Who's going to define our lives, us or the position?" says the president. "We wanted to live our identity honestly."

They announced their marriage in January 2001, after the ceremony, which they kept private. There was deliberately no photograph of Asma. "The British media picked that up as: Now she's moved into the presidential palace, never to be seen again!" says Asma, laughing.

They had a reason: "She spent three months incognito," says the president. "Before I had any official engagement," says the first lady, "I went to 300



villages, every governorate, hospitals, farms, schools, factories, you name it—I saw everything to find out where I could be effective. A lot of the time I was somebody's 'assistant' carrying the bag, doing this and that, taking notes. Nobody asked me if I was the first lady; they had no idea."

"That way," adds the president, "she started her NGO before she was ever seen in public as my wife. Then she started to teach people that an NGO is not a charity."

Neither of them believes in charity for the sake of charity. "We have the Iraqi refugees," says the president. "Everybody is talking about it as a political problem or as welfare, charity. I say it's neither—it's about cultural philosophy. We have to help them. That's why the first thing I did is to allow the Iraqis to go into schools. If they don't have an education, they will go back as a bomb, in every way: terrorism, extremism, drug dealers, crime. If I have a secular and balanced neighbor, I will be safe."

When Angelina Jolie came with Brad Pitt for the United Nations in 2009, she was impressed by the first lady's efforts to encourage empowerment among Iraqi and Palestinian refugees but alarmed by the Assads' idea of safety.

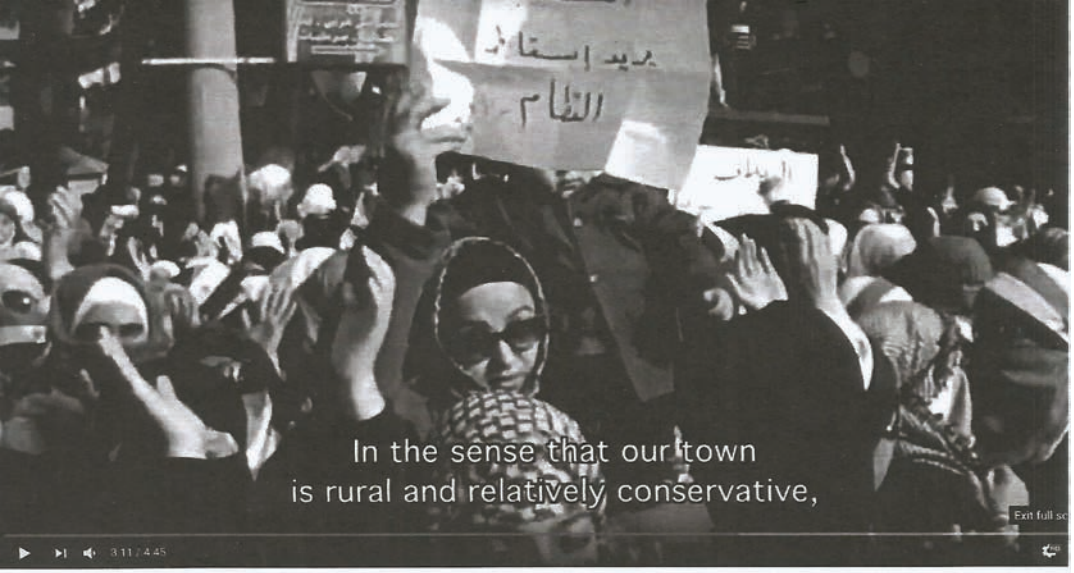
"My husband was driving us all to lunch," says Asma al-Assad, "and out of the corner of my eye I could see Brad Pitt was fidgeting. I turned around and asked, 'Is anything wrong?' "

"Where's your security?" asked Pitt.

"So I started teasing him—'See that old woman on the street? That's one of them! And that old guy crossing the road?

That's the other one!' " They both laugh.

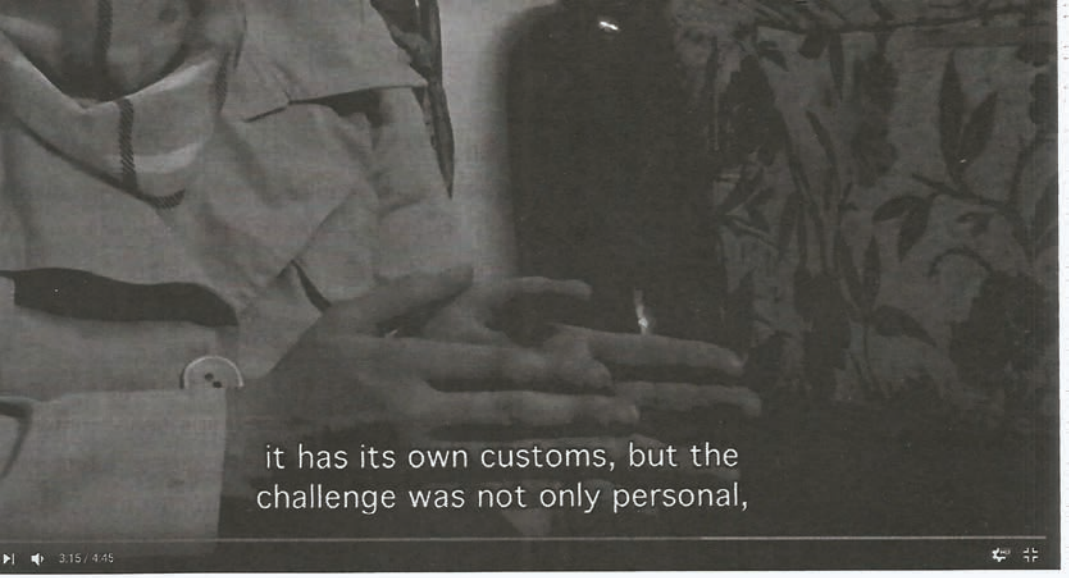
The president joins in the punch line: "Brad Pitt wanted to send his security guards here to come and get some training!"



After lunch, Asma al-Assad drives to the airport, where a Falcon 900 is waiting to take her to Massar in Latakia, on the coast. When she lands, she jumps behind the wheel of another SUV waiting on the tarmac. This is the kind of surprise visit she specializes in, but she has no idea how many kids will turn up at the community center on a rainy Friday.

As it turns out, it's full. Since the first musical notation was discovered nearby, at Ugarit, the immaculate Massar center in Latakia is built around music. Local kids are jamming in a sound booth; a group of refugee Palestinian girls is playing instruments. Others play chess on wall-mounted computers. These kids have started online blood banks, run marathons to raise money for dialysis machines, and are working on ways to rid Latakia of plastic bags. Apart from a few girls in scarves, you can't tell Muslims from Christians.

Asma al-Assad stands to watch a laborious debate about how—and whether—to standardize the Arabic spelling of the word Syria. Then she throws out a curve ball. "I've been advised that we have to close down this



center so as to open another one somewhere else," she says. Kids' mouths drop open. Some repress tears. Others are furious. One boy chooses altruism: "That's OK. We know how to do it now; we'll help them."

Then the first lady announces, "That wasn't true. I just wanted to see how much you care about Massar."

As the pilot expertly avoids sheet lightning above the snow-flecked desert on the way back, she explains, "There was a little bit of formality in what they were saying to me; it wasn't real. Tricks like this help—they became alive, they became passionate. We need to get past formalities if we are going to get anything done."

Two nights later it's the annual Christmas concert by the children of Al-Farah Choir, run by the Syrian Catholic Father Elias Zahlawi. Just before it begins, Bashar and Asma al-Assad slip down the aisle and take the two empty seats in the front row. People clap, and some call out his nickname:

Two hundred children dressed variously as elves, reindeers, or candy canes share the stage with members of the national orchestra, who are done up as elves. The show becomes a full-on songfest, with the elves and reindeer and candy canes giving their all to "Hallelujah" and "Joy to the World." The carols slide into a more serpentine rhythm, an Arabic rap group takes over, and then it's back to Broadway mode. The president whispers, "All of these styles belong to our culture. This is how you fight extremism—through art."

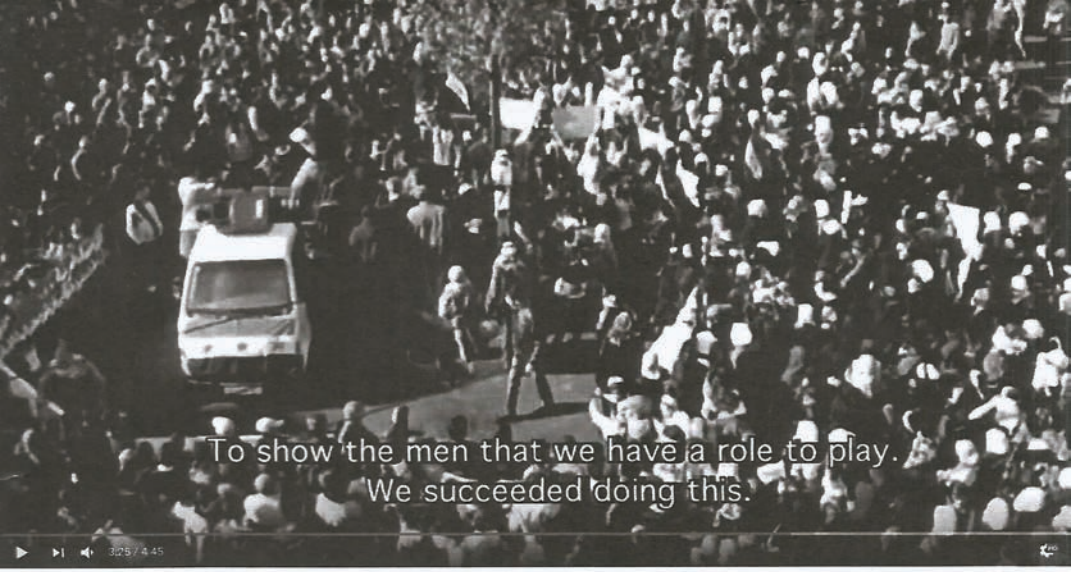
Brass bells are handed out. Now we're all singing "Jingle Bell Rock," 1,331 audience members shaking their bells, singing, crying, and laughing.

"This is the diversity you want to see in the Middle East," says the president, ringing his bell. "This is how you can have peace!"

The Only Remaining Online Copy of Vogue's Asma al-Assad Profile
MAX FISHER JAN 3, 2012

https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/01/the-only-remaining-online-copy-of-vogues-asma-al-assad-profile/250753/\
NOW ONLY AVAILABLE AT:
http://gawker.com/asma-al-assad-a-rose-in-the-desert-1265002284


To challenge and overcome
the social norms of our society
Exit full screen
3:21 / 4:45


To show the men that we have a role to play.
We succeeded doing this.
3:25 / 4:45


نساء الزبداني Zabadani Women

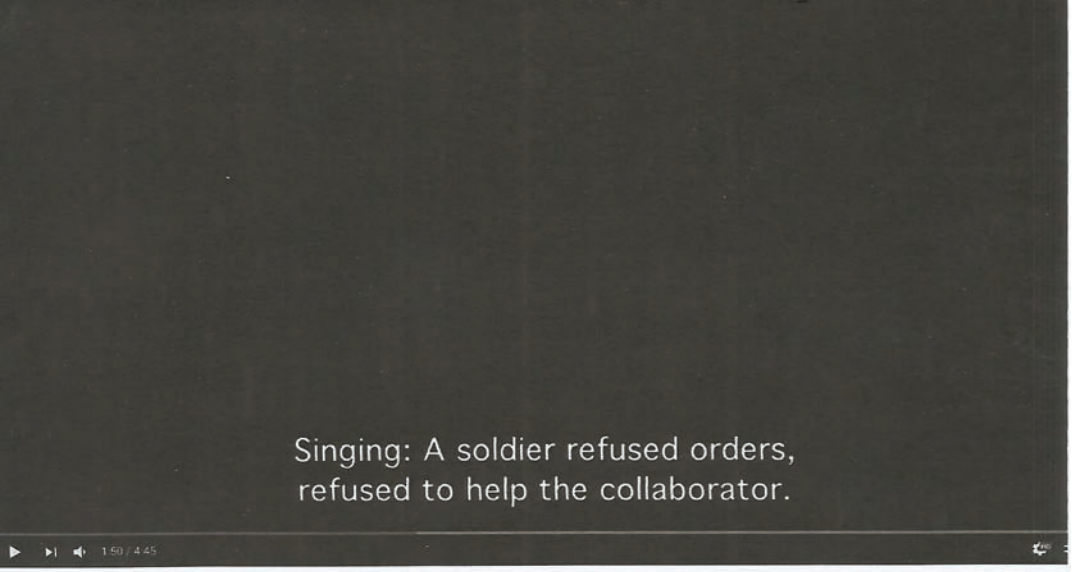
Jerome McDonnell: Since the war began, we haven't heard much about the democratic council movement in Syria. What can you tell me about them?

Joseph Daher: The democratic movement has been the main target since the beginning of the uprising. It's the biggest threat to the Assad regime. The best enemy for the Assad regime — internally or in winning over foreign countries — is a group like ISIS. At the beginning of the uprising, the Assad regime liberated the worst jihadist personalities from its prisons. That's what established the Islamic fundamentalist forces in Syria and played a big part in crushing the movement's democratic components.

The so-called "Friends of Syria," like Turkey and the Gulf monarchies, supported the Assad regime to "sectarianize" the revolution. The Gulf monarchies were scared to see a successful democratic revolution in Syria that could serve as an example for their own citizens during the Arab Spring in 2011. Unfortunately, the Syrian people have been left alone. Regional and international interests have been the enemy of the Syrian people and their Democratic aspirations.

McDonnell: Obama's policy was to slowly "roll back" ISIS, but Donald Trump is focusing on "pounding ISIS." What effect will that have on Syria?

Daher: When it comes to ISIS and similar organizations, it's necessary to tackle their root causes: authoritarian regimes and international and regional foreign interventions. In Assad's prisons in Syria, President Abdel Fattah



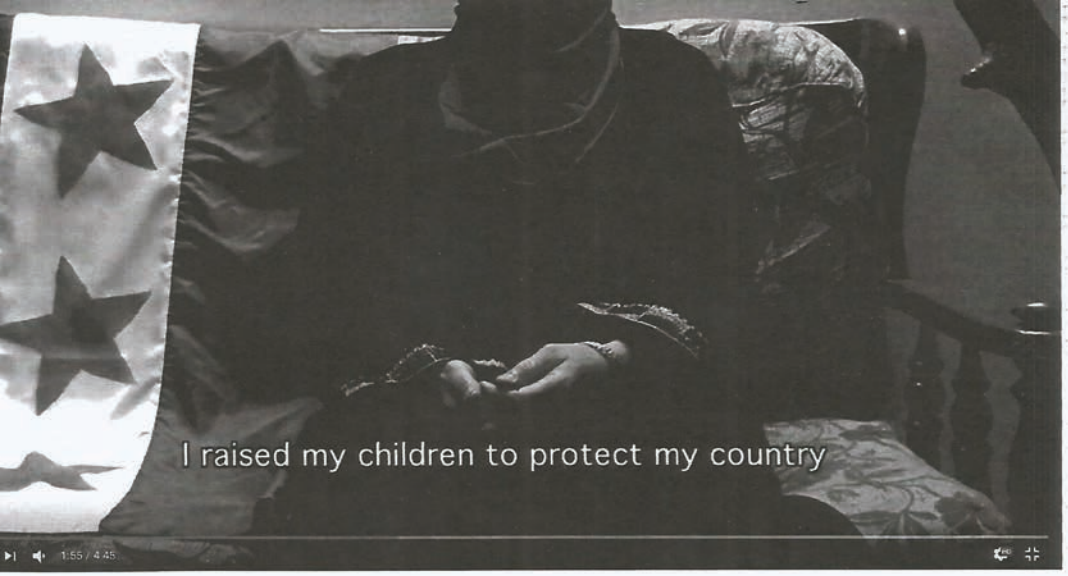
el-Sisi's prisons in Egypt, and in the prisons of other authoritarian regimes, you create future radical militant groups. Who would've thought you could have had something worse than Al-Qaeda? The creation of ISIS in 2013 rose out of the suppression of mass movements by authoritarian regimes.

McDonnell: What is the role of Hezbollah in the Syria conflict?

Daher: Just as the Assad regime would not have been able to survive until today with out the support of Iran and Russia, Hezbollah has been intervening in Syria since the end of 2011. Hezbollah notably participated in the conquest of Eastern Aleppo last December, playing a leading role on the side of the Assad regime. Therefore, their role has been destructive and criminal by assisting the Assad regime.

McDonnell: How does Hezbollah avoid appearing as a puppet of Iran?

Daher: When Hezbollah intervened at the end of 2011, you didn't have the



massive Islamic fundamentalist groups like today. They say they're only there to protect against sectarianism and the interests of Lebanon. Meanwhile, they say they're intervening in Syria to save the project of resistance against Israel. Hezbollah and Iran say, for example, that the liberation of Palestine goes through Aleppo. That's incredible knowing the Assad regime's violent history against the Palestinian people.

McDonnell: Wouldn't the Assad regime stand without the support of Iran or Russia?

Daher: The Syrian army hasn't been on the battlefield since 2015. It has not led one single military confrontation. Most of the Syrian military, which has gone down from 300,000 to 80,000 is mostly based in cities to control population and checkpoints.There's around 150,000 protegee militias in Syria. Meanwhile, institutions in Assad's Syria have been crumbling. It's only been through the financial help of Russia and Iran that they've sustained. But that's creating huge tensions within the Assad regime where the political economy

of Iran and Russia within Syria take precedent.

McDonnell: How do we map out a future democratic Syria?

Daher: The international scene — especially following Trump's election in the U.S. — is just legitimizing a criminal regime. There's a general consensus to put an end to the uprising in Syria, and likewise to its democratic aspirations. Maintaining the regime is seen as a way of fighting against ISIS and al-Nusra. So, unfortunately, peace is not looking very close. We cannot have peace with this criminal regime continuing to eliminate anything or anyone opposing it.

McDonnell: What went wrong with the Arab Spring?

Daher: The biggest issue is that there was no capacity to build an independent democratic coalition from what I call the two sides of the counter-revolution — the old regimes and Islamic fundamentalists forces. Unfortunately, democrats and progressives try to join one side or the other instead of

building a third coalition that could be more positive and democratic. But, you know, six years after the French Revolution, the situation was not very good either. So even though we're witnessing very harsh conditions now, we're very far from finished.

Posted on February 24, 2017 on Syria Freedom Forever.
https://syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com/2017/02/24/activist-democratic-movements-still-have-a-chance-in-syria/


FREE
RAZAN ZAITOUN
ثورة
الشعب السوري عارف طريقه

There was a time, not too long ago, when a young woman headed one of the largest networks of Syrian activists working against the Assad regime. She had blue eyes and uncovered blond hair; she spoke English and held a degree in law; and she was a staunch secularist. But Razan Zaitouneh was utterly uninterested in showcasing any of these 'qualities', or in becoming an international icon. She believed in the universality of freedom and human rights, but it was only through very local battles that she thought such values could acquire life and meaning.

It was in 2005 that I first heard of Razan. She had taken part in a small demonstration in Damascus, and soon thereafter stories circulated of her exceptional bravery. Razan Zaitouneh had raised chants against the Assad family when, for most Syrians, the mere mention of the president or his father was reason enough to shudder with fear. She had spoken the radical truth when older activists and most international observers were content with their vague demands for 'reform' or 'gradual change' in Syria.

And so when the Syrian countryside rose up in rebellion in 2011, Razan did not hesitate to join the struggle. With her husband Wael Hamadeh and many old and new friends, she had soon built a formidable constellation of 'Local Coordination Committees', which covered around fifty different locations in

the country. The LCCs organized and documented demonstrations on film; they tracked the rising numbers of the dead, the wounded, and the missing; and they started to provide and coordinate humanitarian assistance to the displaced families. They also elected a political committee that debated all matters related to the Syrian uprising, and offered a detailed vision for a truly democratic and pluralistic post-Assad Syria.

It was all the stuff of true revolutions, and for those of us who took part or helped from outside, the experience was often truly euphoric. But by the time the uprising had entered its second year, the inclinations of the mostly secular and pacifist members of the LCCs seemed at odds with the grand political realities and ideological forces that were now at work in their country. The savage repression of the Assad regime had made it impossible for the people to continue with their non-violent protests. They started to carry arms, and with that, their need for an ideology of confrontation and martyrdom started to eclipse their earlier enthusiasm for forgiveness and reconciliation.

For many civilian activists, the transformation of the Syrian uprising into what seemed like a full-blown civil war was unbearable. Of those who escaped death or detention, many decided to flee the country; and, from the bitterness of their exile, they began to tell a story of loss and disillusionment. But for Razan, Wael, and many of their close friends, these same developments called for more, not less, engagement. They argued that civilian activists had the responsibility now to monitor the actions of the armed rebels, to resist their excesses, and to set up the institutions for

good governance in the liberated parts of the country. They also believed, much like their friend the renowned writer Yassin al-Haj Saleh, that their task as secularists was not to preach 'enlightenment' from a safe distance, but to join the more ordinary and devout folk in their struggle for a life lived with dignity. Only then could liberal secularism earn its 'place' in Syrian society and truly challenge its primordialist detractors.

It was these beliefs that set Razan Zaitouneh on her last journey in late April 2013. After two years of living underground in Damascus, she followed the example of Yassin al-Haj Saleh and moved to the liberated town of Douma. There, among a starving population that was constantly under shelling by the regime forces, Razan launched a project for women empowerment and a community development center, all while continuing her work in documenting and assisting the victims of the war. By August, al-Haj Saleh had already left for the north, but his wife Samira al-Khalil, Razan and her husband, and their friend, the poet and activist Nazem Hammadi were all settled in Douma, sharing two apartments in the same building. In the middle of the night of December 9, they were abducted from their new homes by a group of armed men that were later linked to Al-Nusra front and the Army of Islam. To this day, their fate and whereabouts remain unknown.

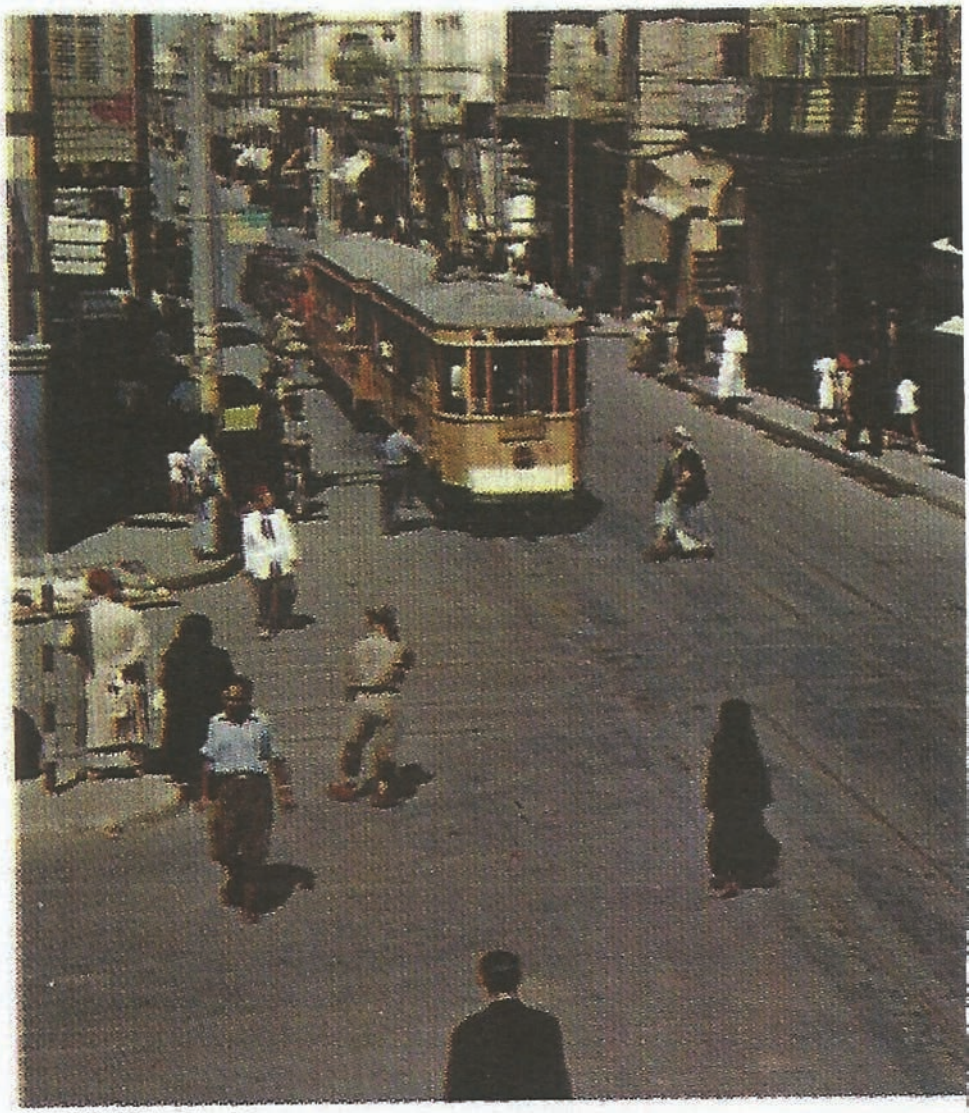
Razan Zaitouneh did not cover her hair in Douma, nor did Samira al-Khalil. They did not 'go native' in the conservative town, because they believed that to be a native of Syria should not require conforming to any one cultural or political mold. This alone seems to have terrified the new Islamo-

fascist forces in the area in the same way mass protests had terrified the Assad regime. But beyond these local actors, the presence of people like Razan Zaitouneh also disturbed the narrative that the world had found most convenient to adopt about Syria, in which true democrats were seen as weak or entirely absent in what was now only a sectarian civil war. If this statement has a ring of truth now, it is only because for two years the true democrats have been left to fight a brutal dictatorship, Al-Qaeda extremists, and corrupt warlords all by themselves. Already in December 2011, when Amy Goodman asked her what she expected from the world, Razan replied "I do not expect anything anymore". She was right. The world has done nothing for Syrians like Razan. At least not yet.

Who's Afraid of Razan Zaitouneh? – Karam Nachar

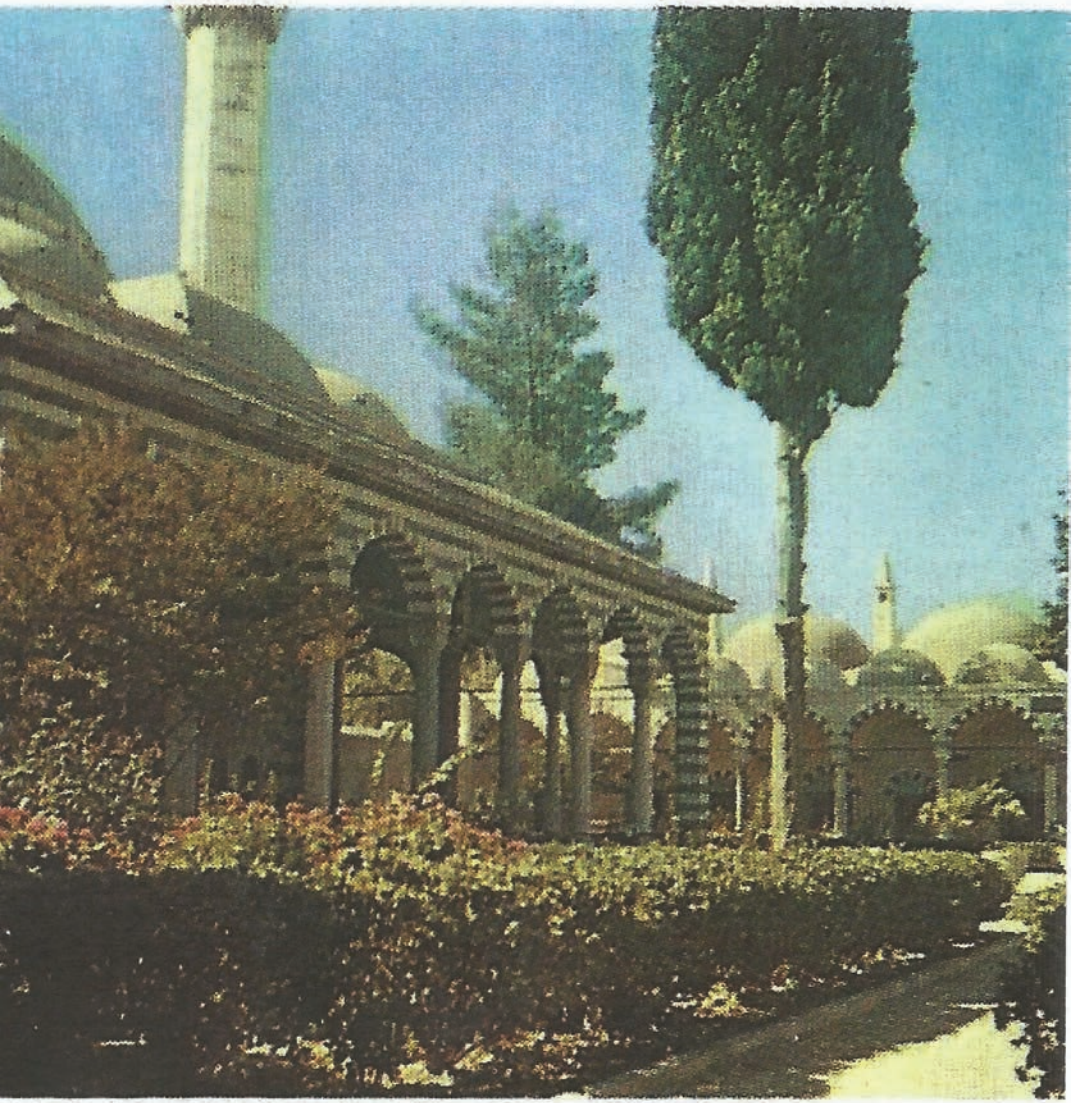
9. December 2014 von ADOPT A REVOLUTION
This article by Karam Nachar was originally published on the Website "Al-Jumhuriya" ("The Republic") on September 10, 2014.
https://www.adoptrevolution.org/en/whos-afraid-of-razan-zaitouneh-karam-nachar/


F
RAZ
ثورة



13. ALEPPO: SYRIA'S SECOND CIT

14. THEY AWAIT



A MOSQUE IN DAMASCUS

27. MODERN DAMASCUS

The past abused: Palmyra's magnificent theatre, located off one of the grand

significant in Syria from the Roman period," he says.

Not just significant, but beautiful. Syrian antiquities director Maamoun Abdulkarim said earlier this week: "The Temple of Bel was the most beautiful symbol of all of Syria. It was the most beautiful place to visit." The temple was built 2,000 years ago and was the best known of the monuments of this ancient city visited by 150,000 tourists each year until war broke out in Syria in 2011. But, as a symbol of polytheism, it was also a glaring target to Isis. The temple was dedicated in AD32 to the god Bel or Ba'al, who was worshipped at Palmyra along with the lunar god Aglibol and the sun god Yarhibol.

The razing of the Temple of Bel was just the latest act of destruction by Isis which seized control of Palmyra in May. In addition to dar in Syria, Isis has destro shrines and manuscrip city of Mosul, and dem ancient Assyrian city o

But in May, in an int an anti-Assad radio sta al-Saoudy, the nom de Isis military commande pledged not to damage

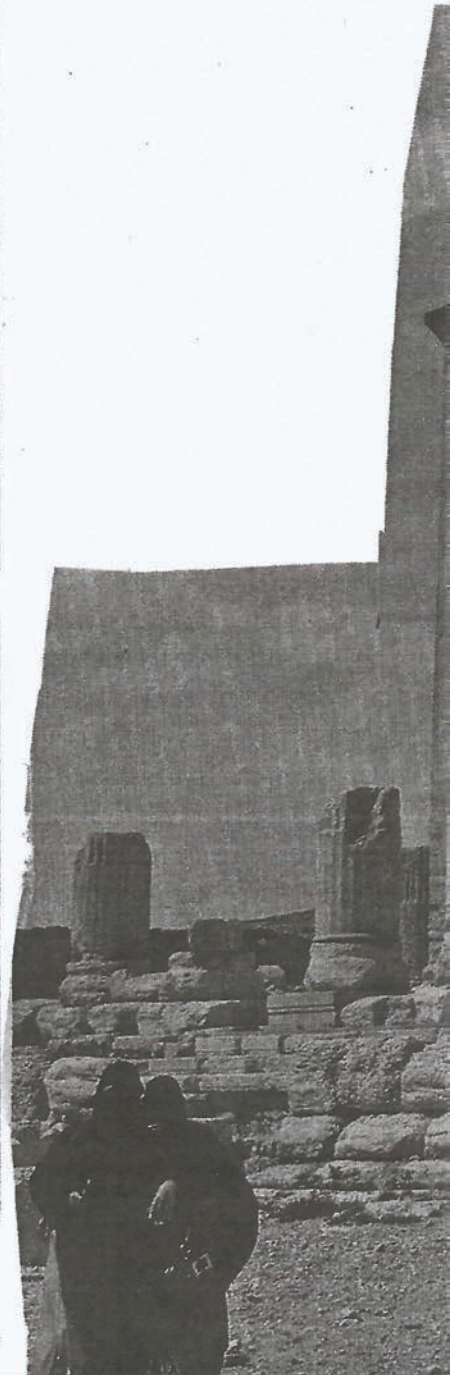
'Concerni historic cit not be ha promised local comm

3. Horned viper killed in the excavations at Mari

The views are incredible

4. Tell Hariri before the excavations (1933)

5. Tell Hariri-Mari after four seasons' digging

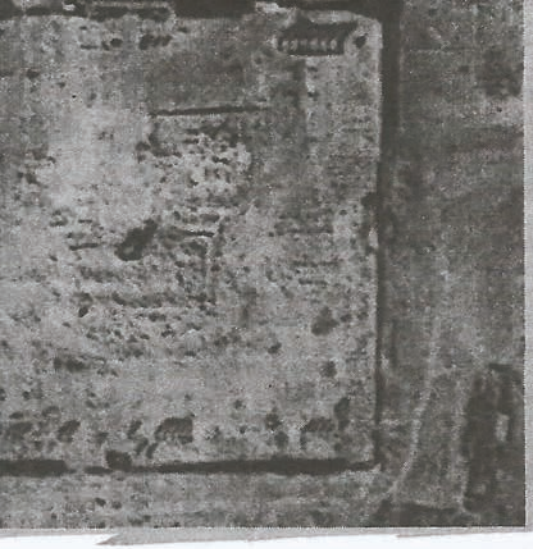


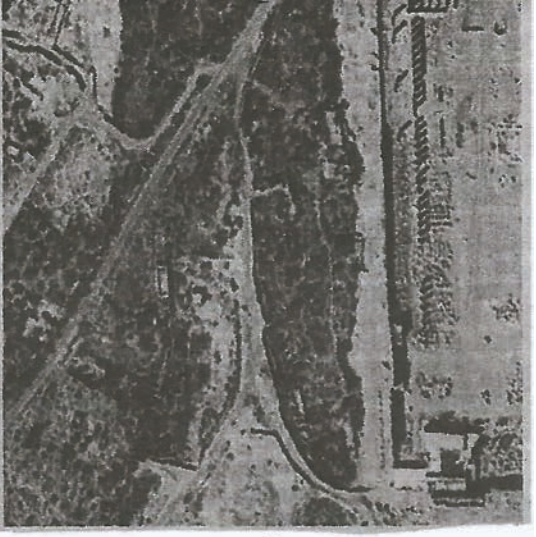
held in common, regardless of sect or politics. Like Stonehenge or Westminster Abbey, they provided a focus for nationalist pride and belonging. Naturally, they would have been central to any future tourism industry. Now they are vanishing.

The potential future looked very different until very recently. The popular revolution of 2011 announced a new age of civic activism and

leventh century B.C.)

11. Mari: Statuettes from the temple of Ishtar (first half of the third millennium B.C.)

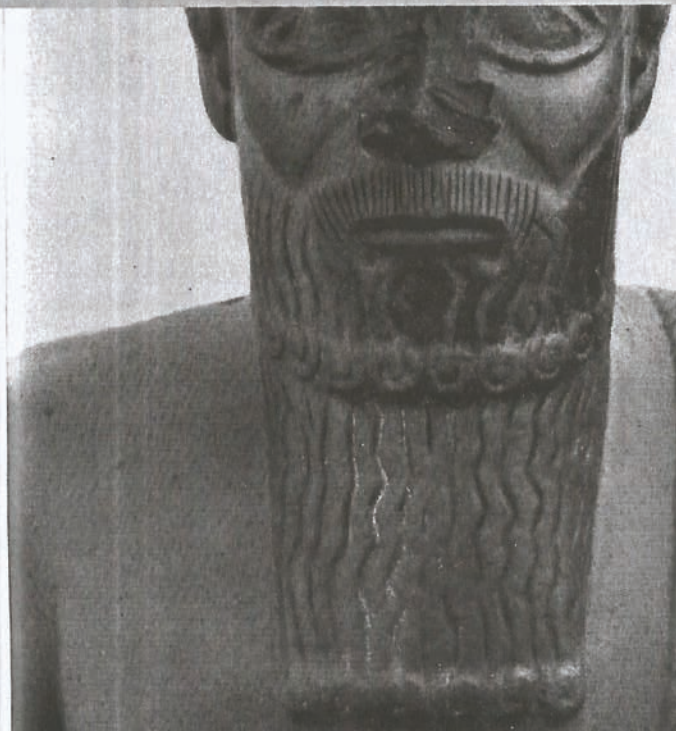


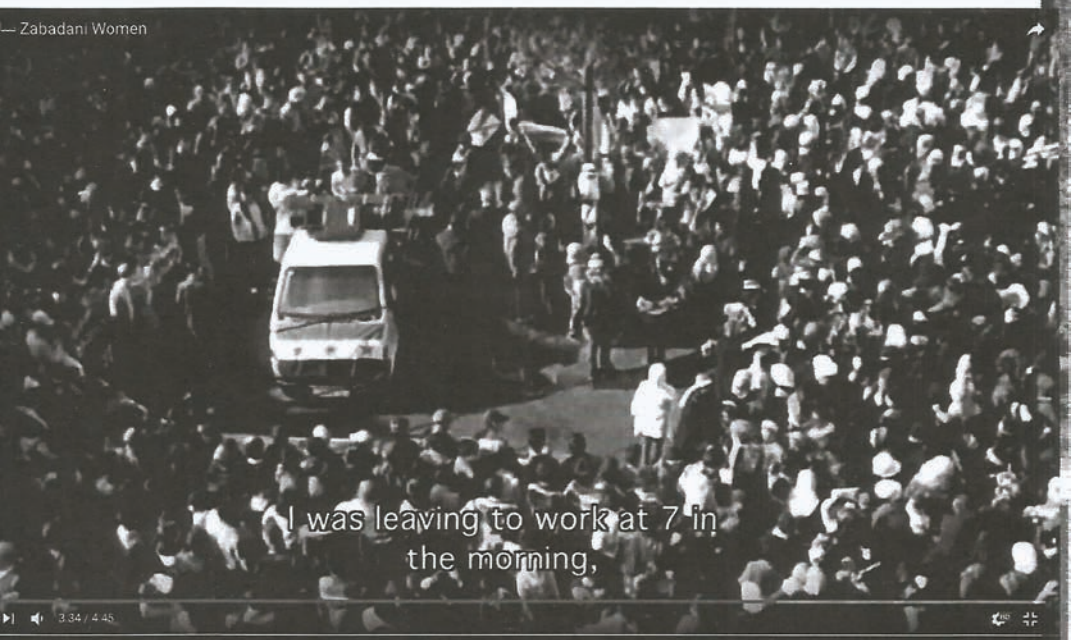


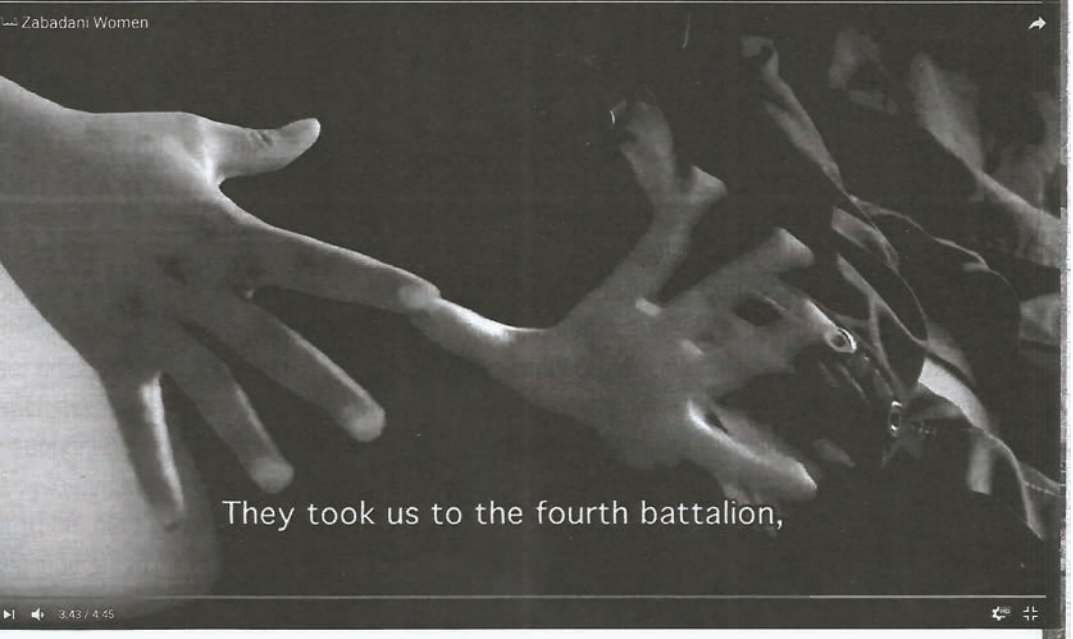
-ilum (nineteenth centu
Museum)

o dust

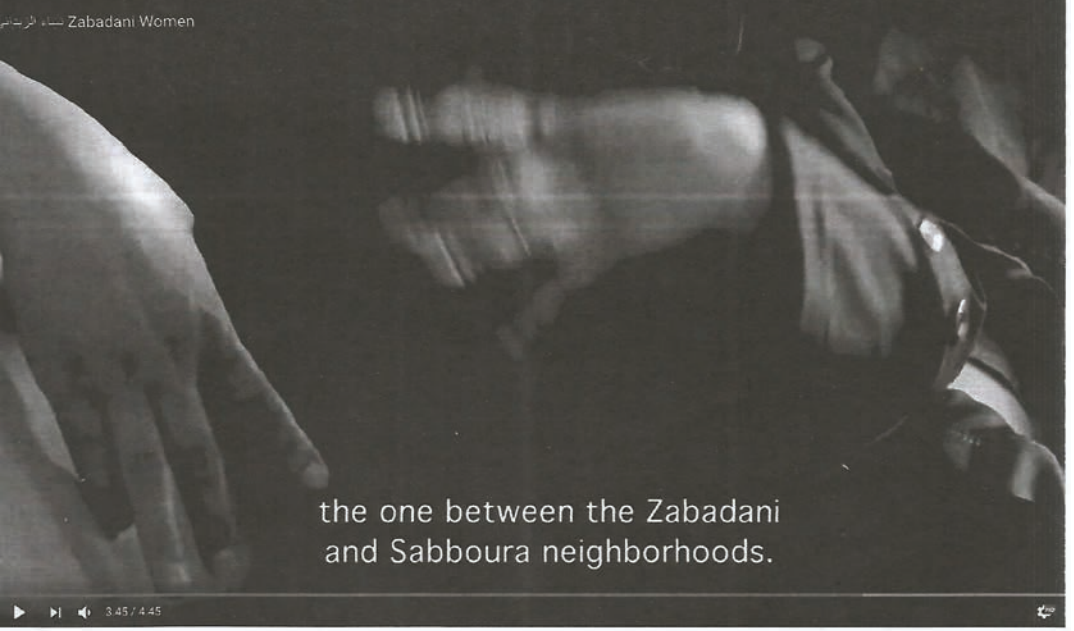
6. Mari: Alabaster head on the step of a staircase (Aleppo Museum)




Zabadani Women
I was leaving to work at 7 in the morning,
3:34 / 4:48

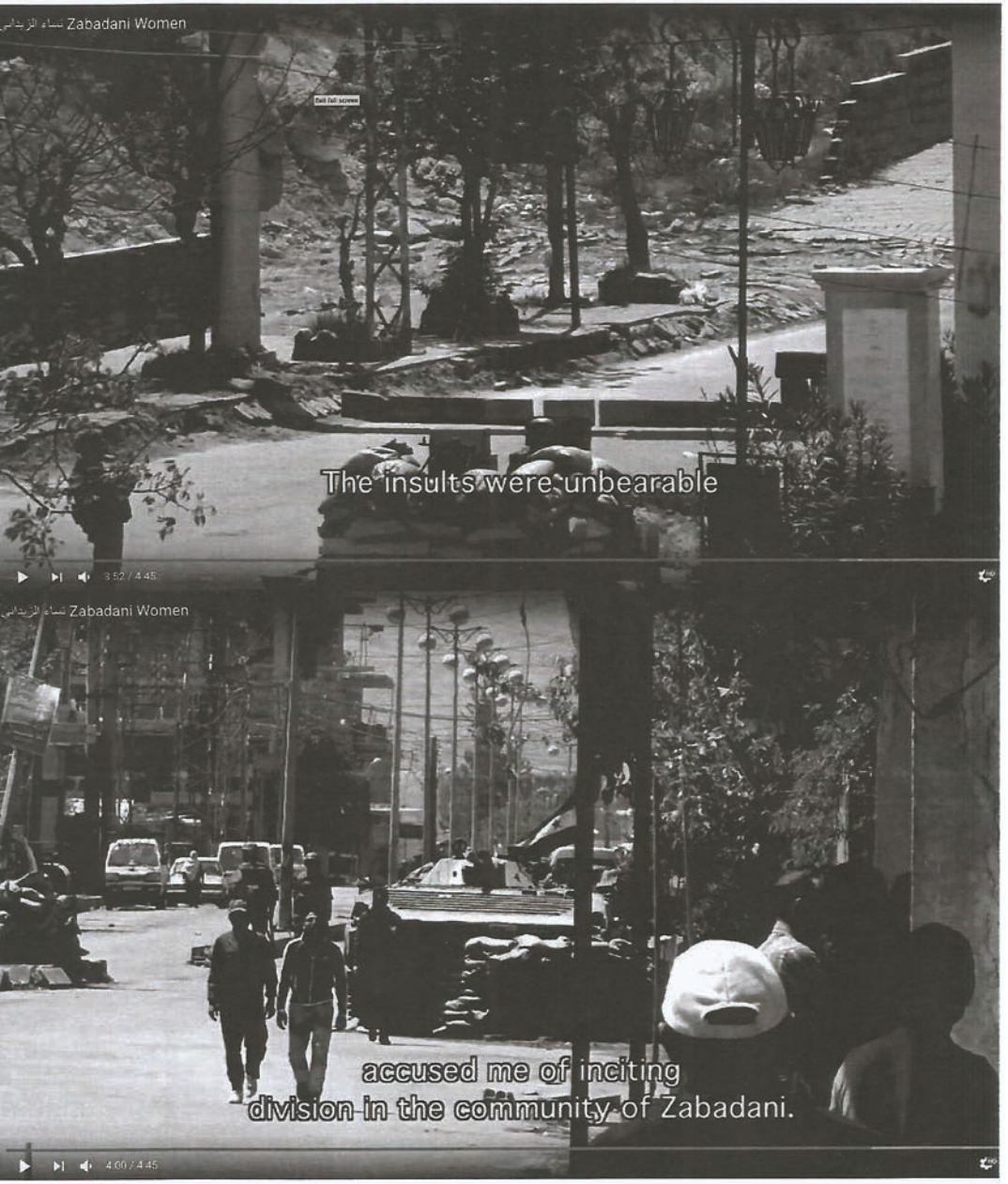

Zabadani Women
They took us to the fourth battalion,
3:43 / 4:45

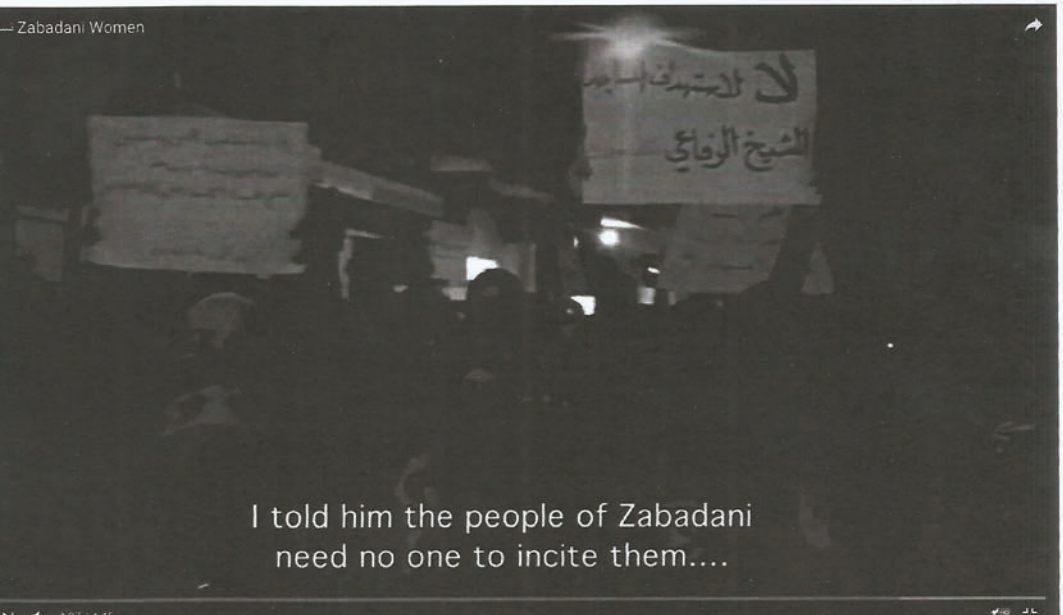

Zabadani Women
Put Your Ad Here
Manage Translations
Qasim Kawa
Nor Ali
I was surprised to see security
forces and armed gangs waiting for me.
3:40 / 4:45

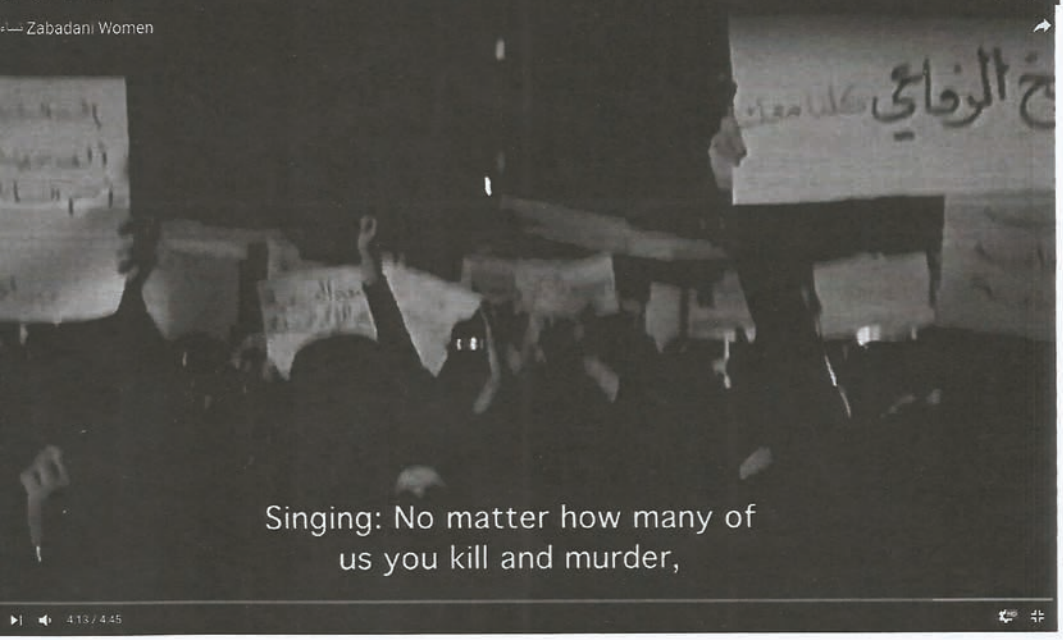

Zabadani Women
the one between the Zabadani
and Sabboura neighborhoods.
3:45 / 4:45

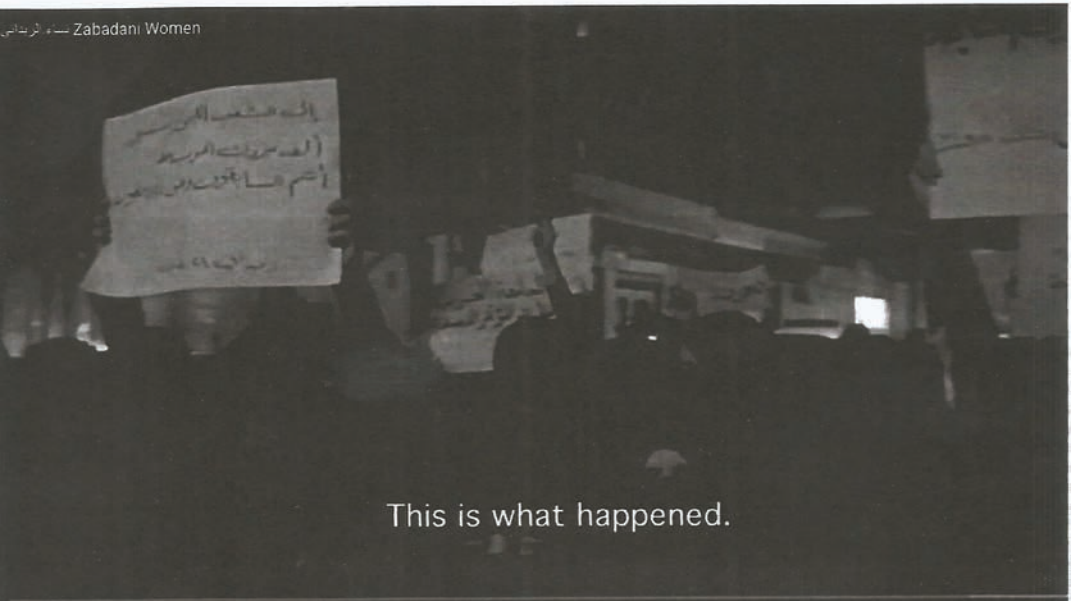

Zabadani Women
The situation was tragic;
torture, and insults...
3:47 / 4:45

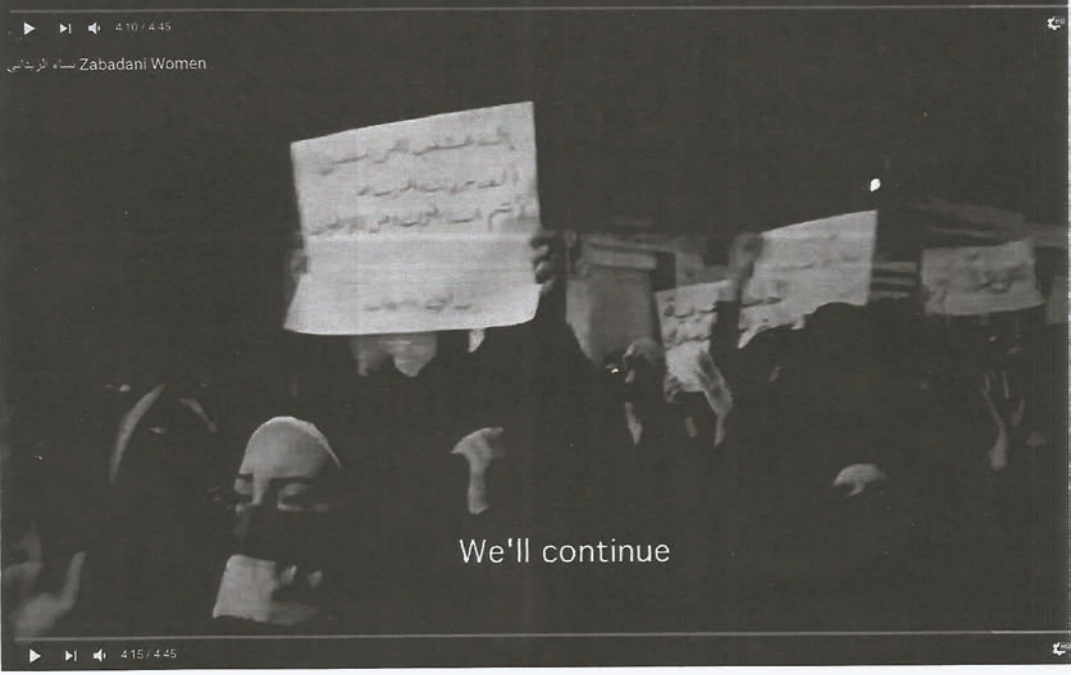

Zabadani Women
They put me in a squared
meter solitary confinement,
3:54 / 4:45

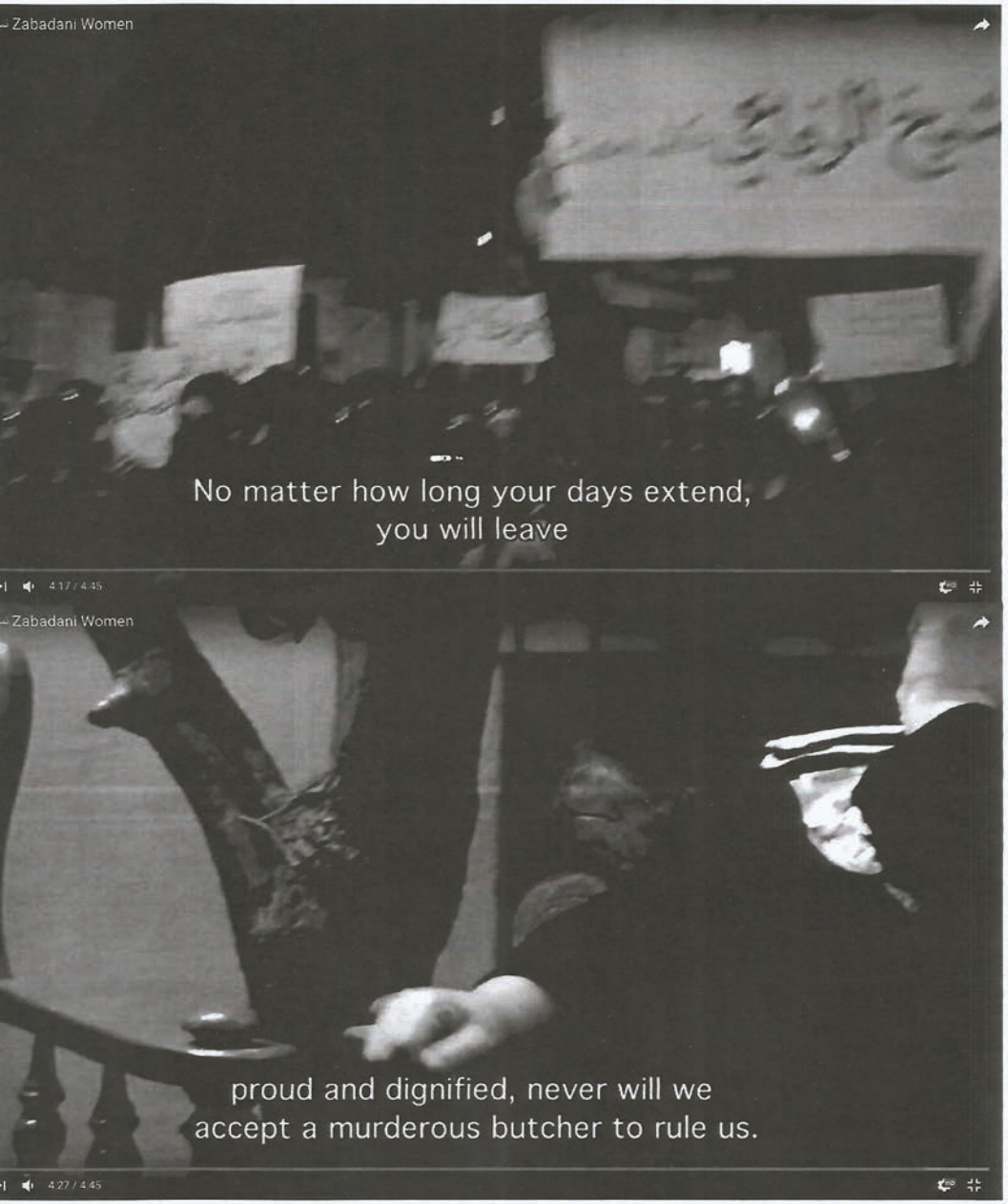

Zabadani Women نساء الزبداني
Exit full screen
The insults were unbearable
3:52 / 4:45
Zabadani Women نساء الزبداني
accused me of inciting
division in the community of Zabadani.
4:00 / 4:45

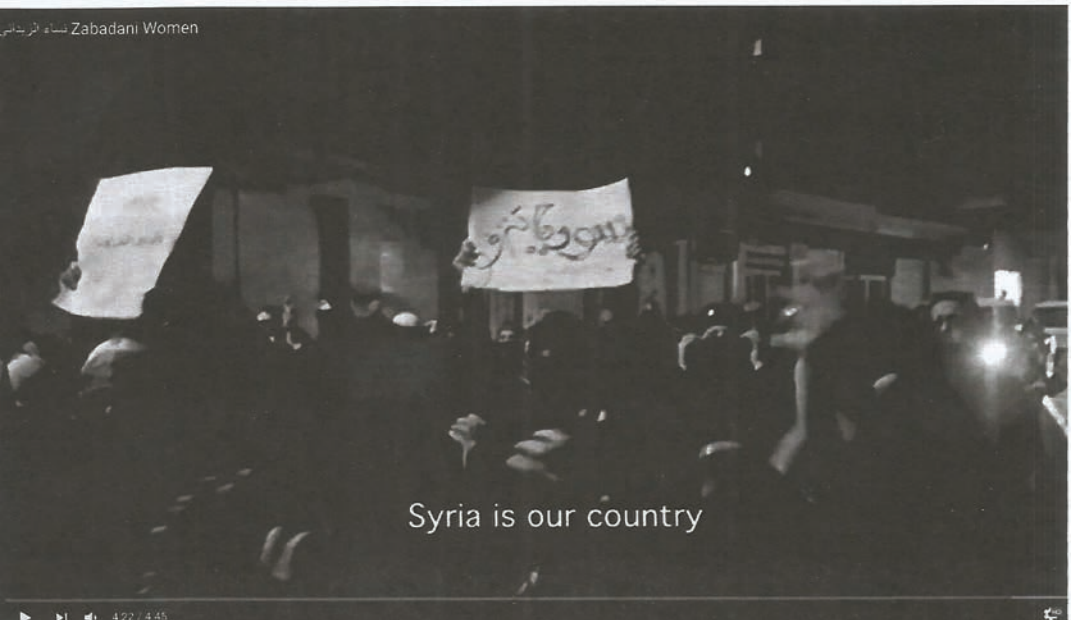

Zabadani Women
لا
الشيخ الرفاعي
I told him the people of Zabadani
need no one to incite them....
4:07 / 4:45

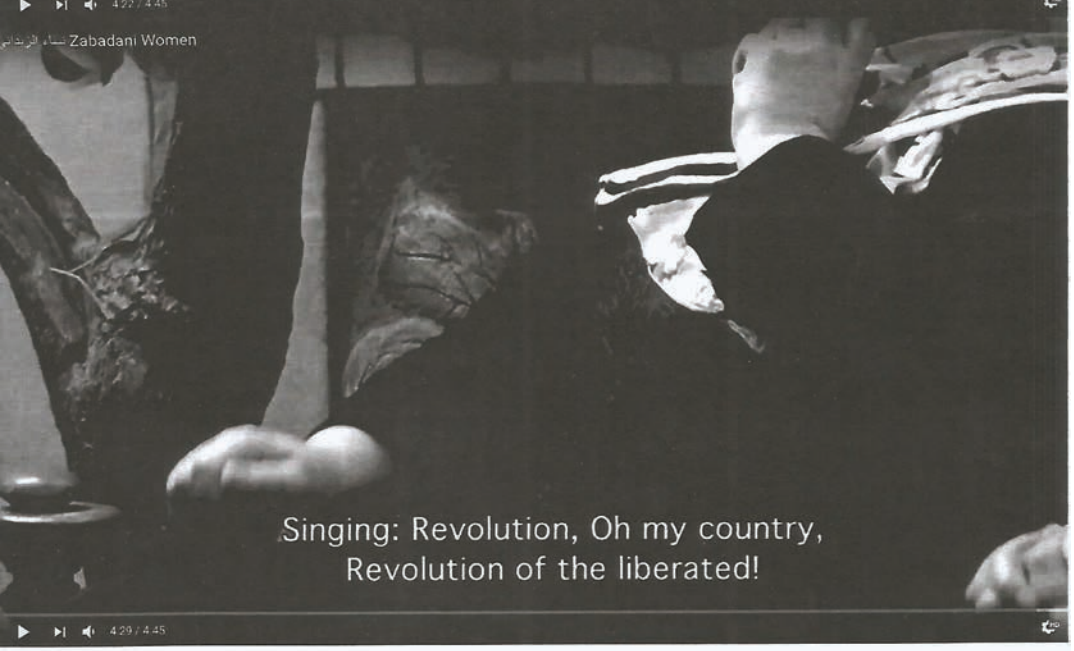

Zabadani Women
الرفاعي
Singing: No matter how many of
us you kill and murder,
4:13 / 4:45

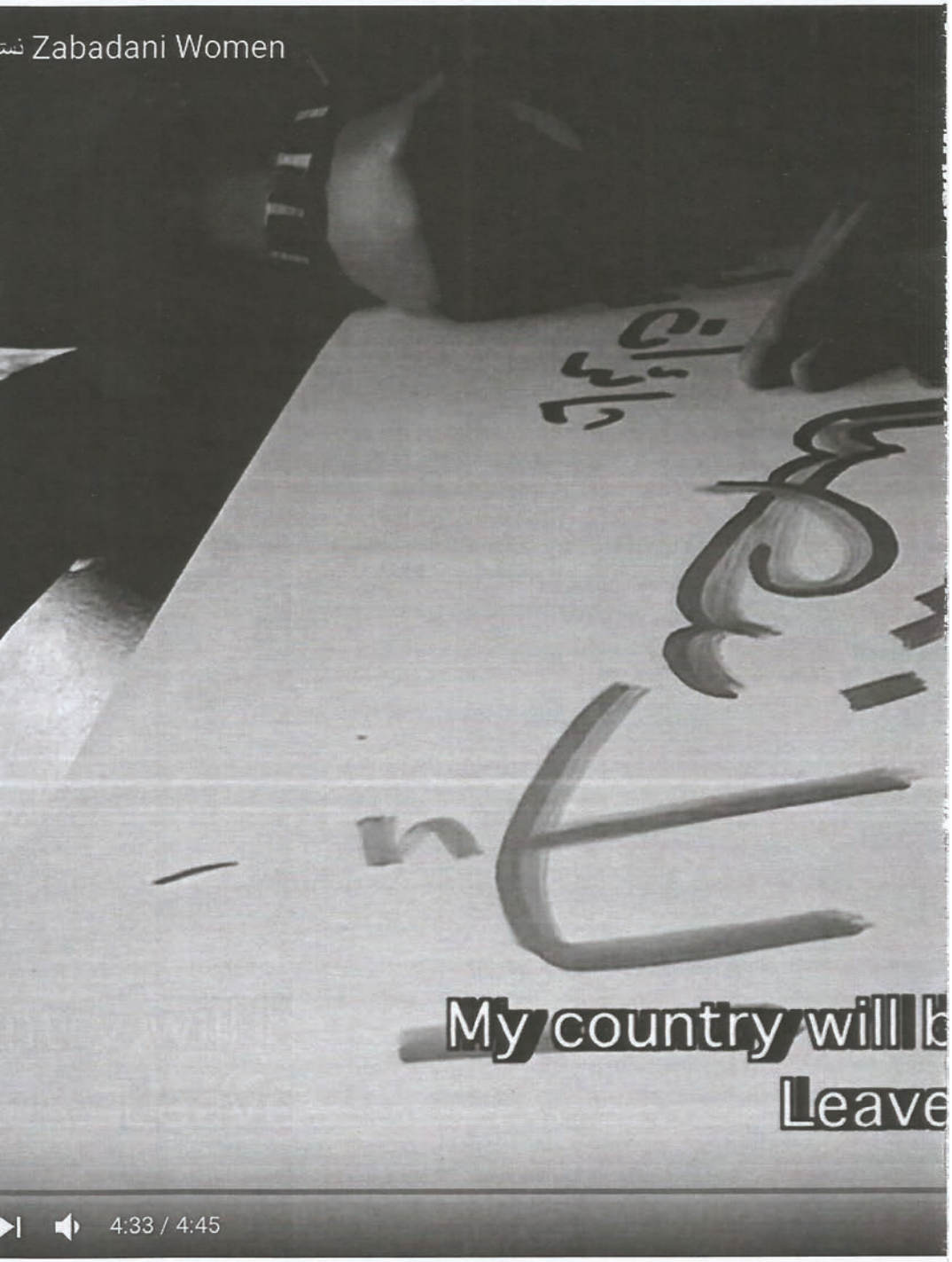

نساء الزبداني Zabadani Women
This is what happened.
4:10 / 4:45

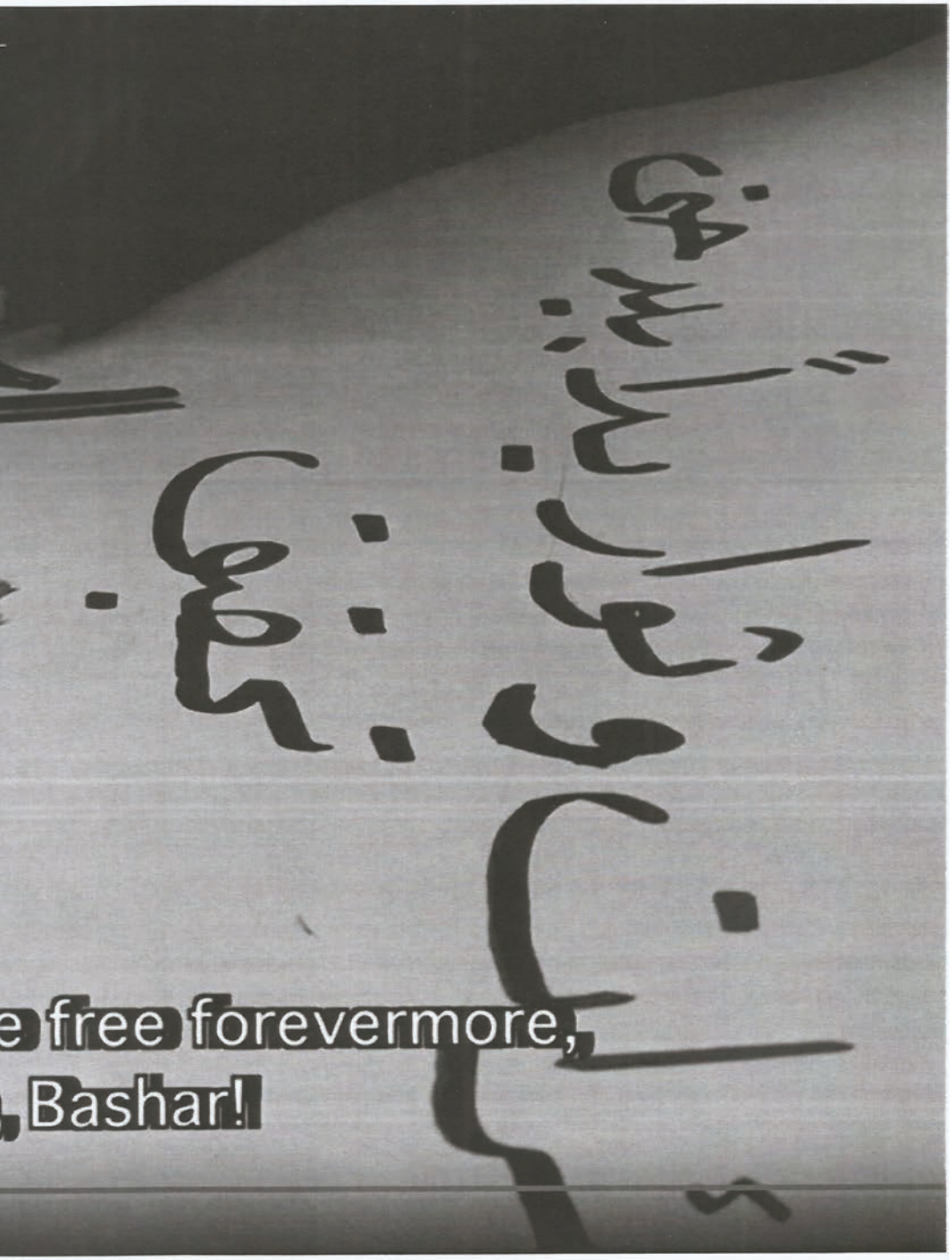

نساء الزبداني Zabadani Women
We'll continue
4:15 / 4:45


~ Zabadani Women
No matter how long your days extend,
you will leave
4:17 / 4:45
~ Zabadani Women
proud and dignified, never will we
accept a murderous butcher to rule us.
4:27 / 4:45


نساء الزبداني Zabadani Women
Syria is our country
4:22 / 4:45


نساء الزبداني Zabadani Women
Singing: Revolution, Oh my country,
Revolution of the liberated!
4:29 / 4:45


Zabadani Women
My country will b
Leave
4:33 / 4:45


e free forevermore,
, Bashar!

3. Horned viper killed in the excavations at Mari

5. Tell Hariri-Mari after four seasons' digging

25. THE

THE REAL HORROR OF SYRIA:
LOCAL SELF-GOVERNANCE
HORIZONTAL ORGANISATION
CO-OPERATION
SOLIDARITY &
MUTUAL AID
A'zaz
Aleppo
Idlib
Khan Sheikhun
Latakia
Hama
Tartus
Homs
Palmyra
En Nebk
Qamishli
Dumier
Damascus
Ezra
Es Suweida
Der'a
Busra