

Chapter 0

Pre-introduction: Having a starting point seems impossible.

As I started to share my topic with others, which –to some extent- is about researching historical incidents relegated to the margins and found scant mention in the mainstream medium¹ of historytelling, I met with an interruption -a preemptive skepticism- veiled usually behind an awkward cough, as if the very act of acknowledging such historical omissions is an uncomfortable admission. I couldn't even get to complete my sentence and mention that "...and my question is why they are marginalized...", I was interrupted way before that with a tone that suggests an unspoken hesitation, followed by the question: "So if there is not enough documentation, then how do you know if they actually happened?"

That is a fair question, to be honest. To what extent I can convince myself with a lack of documentation? But It is a question that not only articulates a concern for historical rigor, -whatever that means and no matter what the measurement of this precision is- it also conceals a challenge to the legitimacy of narratives absent from the authoritative records. That is, a question of the definition of absence -and presence-, the fact that –maybe- absence can mean being present elsewhere. That is, the question of how much and in what material/shape must traces manifest themselves to be considered as present now / or existing at some other time?

When discussing marginalization in this context, the focus is not on the quantity or presence of documentation available. If we read the history in another way and dig into the already existing documentation with another approach, marginal becomes central, and central might become periphery. However, I can't deny that the effort put into preserving specific memories directly impacts how they are remembered later. Nevertheless, in my writing, I won't be prioritizing marginal over mainstream or periphery over center, nor do I seek to reinforce other dualistic frameworks. What if I put the mycelial ecologies of possibility in front of dualisms, asking, what would a mycelial political ecology of Iranian history look like?

As I stumble with the fragmented nature of found documents, I find myself drawn to the notion of the non-vicious vacuum as a means to explore and validate this fragmentation further. Engaging with Karen Barad's ideas has sparked within me a desire to leverage concepts from quantum physics to better understand the indeterminacy inherent in my research.

However, I find myself questioning why I feel the need for validation and why I'm turning to physics and science for this purpose. What drives this inclination towards a scientific paradigm for validation? I need to be transparent about exploring the concepts of absence, nothingness, and vacuum. To further elaborate, I am inspired by Barad's approach of using quantum physics not merely as a tool for understanding physics itself but as a lens through which to perceive broader phenomena. This approach highlights the interconnectedness of scientific paradigms and our understanding of the world around us, influencing how we encounter those phenomena, whether they be crises, mundane occurrences, historical narratives, or other aspects of our lived experiences.

I started collecting pieces as I believe that those are the things that would shape a mycelial approach rather than otherwise. Voices, poems, footage, diaries, and photos, as I was doing this, I found similarities and repetitions. I structured the repetitions in a framework so that I could make sense of them all together, and the way they repeat each other resembles a ritualistic system. Repetition is an important part of a ritual, and it resonates with the fact that I've found similarities and repetition in all of the narratives that I've found even though they happened in different periods. They were distant -geographically and on other levels- and I'm quite sure those narratives haven't heard each other but in a way, they repeat each other.

In/determinacy is not the state of a thing but an unending dynamism.
(Barad 2015, 396)

And the void is not vacuous.
It is a living, breathing indeterminacy of non/being.
(Barad 2015, 396)

(Processing stuff -->resistance?)

¹ By the term "mainstream medium," I refer to the main content found in history books or documentaries that have been officially and legally published in Iran. The construction of national memory encompasses those aspects that historians "recall" or deem worthy of remembering, writing about, or documenting. These documents have shaped the collective national memory unless intervened upon, such as when aspects intentionally forgotten by historians are brought to light.

Ritual has the element of “repetition” as a core and this is important in the sense of creating a space of communal shared activities and a space for continuous repetitive actions. Repetition is important, is an act of resilience and care, and makes a familiar possibility; Celebrating and/or grieving in the same manner, every time at a certain time. Repetition is an act of remembering.

Repetition / familiarity / remembering

I wouldn't have scrutinized narrative gaps if I hadn't harbored doubts about something being lost. I wouldn't have sought what was absent if I hadn't noticed the awkward, crude marker lines on unclothed bodies in photography books at the Tehran University's library. My encounter with the "hidden" began on June 20, 2009, when I stumbled upon a video - purely by chance - showing a woman being shot during the Green Revolution protests. Subsequently, I observed that this video was absent from local TV broadcasts and elsewhere. What remains vivid from that first viewing at the age of 12 is a sound and a number: the repeated plea of a man, "Neda, do not be afraid, Neda, stay," and Neda's age, 26. At that time, I held the notion that at 26, one should have a firm grasp of their circumstances. However, upon reaching that age myself, I found such assumptions to be superficial.

collective memory is continually revised to suit present purposes. (Hutton 1993, 7). This scene kept coming back to me as I approached my 26th birthday, and following an unpleasant simultaneity, it resurfaced across social media platforms thirteen years after it occurred, triggered by similar incidents during the protests of the Jina Revolution in Iran. I believe these events, with journalists resurrecting images from years past and articulating them in the context of current events, aim to construct a shared history. They assert, that this present is an extension of our past and our collective sorrow has persisted. These efforts foster a sense of social solidarity. In some instances, this extends beyond the national narrative to encompass other historical narratives, as seen in Iranian protests holding banners with "Ni Una Menos," on them, which serves as external validation for ongoing struggles - indicating that these struggles cannot be dismissed as failures, as others outside our immediate experience have undertaken similar endeavors. (see Figure 1)



Figure 1: NI UNA MENOS.
Photographed by author,
September 16, 2023, Berlin.

Longing for historical voids created a sense of poignancy; grieving for something that was never there before, never known before. Something so far and gone and yet, so close and present. This feeling of poignancy has been completely visual and sonic because the creation of this collective memory has been audio-visual.

My memory is filled with photos. When I think of you, I see this still portrait of you looking at me, but this is not an image, this is my gaze that I remember, looking at you. Neda, with her face resting on her hand and a mischievous smile directed slightly off-camera, the picture of Haleh Sahabi's funeral, amidst the faint lights of the candles in the halo of clouds, appears as if captured by a distracted, tearful, and hurried photographer. The photo of Haleh's lifeless face, which I stumbled upon while searching her name in several sources, left me wondering why someone would take such a picture; a portrait of someone who has just died. The image of Homa Darabi, standing alongside Parvaneh Forouhar in a group photo, with everyone looking into the camera but her gaze is elsewhere. (see Figure 2)



Figure 2: Funeral of Haleh Sahabi. Courtesy of Jila Baniyaghub, June 1, 2011, Lavasan.

There are no words, only scattered sounds and images.

Our current collective memory relies heavily on imagery rather than ideas or discourse. Even when discourses exist, they are often grounded in imagery. The importance of transferring and validating data through imagery, as opposed to words, is attested by the number of people killed in Iran in 2022 while recording videos of protests². The historians' task, therefore, is not to resurrect the past by restoring an idea to living memory, as Freud believed but rather to describe the images in which collective memory once lived. (Hutton 1993, 8).

To unravel the woven threads:

I remember my grandma's mama (Madar Jan مادر جان) used to do the unraveling of her knotted yarn, all the while complaining about nearly anything. As she carefully worked through each thread, lifting it from the tangled web, it was as though she transitioned to a new subject with each distinct color, seamlessly shifting from one topic to another. I remember her hands, carefully separating threads.

Dismantling the warp and weft of anything requires "touching". How would I know, if I don't touch?

You can see without being seen
You can hear without being heard
But you can't touch without being touched

As I am dismantling these threads not in a blank void but in relation to myself, I am going back and forth between being and becoming, now and then, existence and absence, permanence and decaying, touching and keeping distance, I situated myself in a labyrinth. Here I am, as Theseus and as Ariadne at the same time. I'm not sure whether Ariadne gave the thread to Theseus so he would find the way out of the labyrinth, or so she could find the way back to him, I am prone to over-romanticize this myth. Regardless, there is a thread that remembers where I was better than I do, like a back button in a webpage that goes back indefinite times until you're at the "homepage", like a cookie crumb or bread crumbs that birds might eat as they did with Hansel.

This text uses cookies, and cookies are poems.

²Ghazaleh Chalabi, Shirin Alizade, and many more who remained nameless or, there are no official documents on their death.

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