On Decolonising Revolution
through a Lens of Afterlives

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What do calls for decolonisation in postcolonial times offer to analysis of revolution? This article brings contemporary calls for decolonisation into conversation with scholarship on revolution. Taking inspiration from studies that question Enlightenment-centric paradigms of revolution, this article also understands decolonisation in postcolonial times as a project that contests ongoing colonial hierarchies, including violence, and retrieves the agencies that colonialist approaches neglect. Attending to these forms of decolonisation, first, the article outlines scholarship that decolonises ways of thinking about revolution, as a means of bringing visibility to those endeavours. Second, noting how this scholarship has prioritised events during or preceding revolution, the article extends inquiry temporally to address afterlives as a lens for decolonising revolution – and examines these possibilities through ethnographic work on the afterlives of revolutions that met with overwhelming repression, in Oman and beyond. Third, the article considers practical implications of decolonising analyses of revolutions and their afterlives.
Keywords: Revolution; decolonisation; afterlives; counterrevolution; Oman.

Sobre descolonizar a revolução através
da lente das suas vidas póstumas

O que podem as reivindicações para descolonizar oferecer a uma análise das revoluções em tempos pós-coloniais? Este artigo traz os apelos contemporâneos à descolonização para uma conversa com o trabalho académico sobre as revoluções. Inspirando-se em estudos que questionam os paradigmas sobre a revolução centrados no Iluminismo, este texto compreende a descolonização em tempos pós-coloniais como um projeto que contesta as hierarquias coloniais presente, incluindo a violência, enquanto recupera as agências que as abordagens colonialistas negligenciam. Atendendo a estas formas de descolonização, o artigo oferece, em primeiro lugar, um esboço do trabalho académico que descoloniza as formas de pensar sobre as revoluções, como uma forma de trazer visibilidade a este tipo de ações. Em segundo lugar, e tendo em conta a forma como este trabalho tem priorizado acontecimentos coevos ou anteriores às revoluções, o artigo estende a análise temporalmente para usar as vidas póstumas destas como uma lente para descolonizar a revolução – e examina estas possibilidades através do trabalho etnográfico sobre as vidas póstumas das revoluções, que tem sofrido ampla repressão em contextos como Omã e outros. Finalmente, o artigo reflete sobre algumas implicações práticas de análises descolonizadoras das revoluções e das vidas póstumas destas.
Palavras-chave: revolução; descolonização; vidas póstumas; contrarrevolução; Omã.

On Decolonising Revolution through a Lens of Afterlives

Alice Wilson[*]

In recent years, a "new" age of decolonisation has emerged. Activist movements across the globe – such as Rhodes Must Fall, Standing Rock, and Black Lives Matter – alongside writers and scholars call for a decolonisation of land, museums, schools, universities, prisons, gender, history, memory, theory, knowledge and more. Decolonisation across these fields seeks to overturn, and replace with emancipatory alternatives, discourses and power relations of exploitation, injustice, dispossession and hierarchy that reiterate colonial premises. What might such calls for decolonisation in postcolonial times offer to another project of emancipation, namely revolution? What might be the affordances of a project to decolonise ways of thinking about revolution?

These questions speak to recent debates about revolution that, departing from concerns about definitions, causes and outcomes, ask what conventional approaches may occlude, and think beyond them. Thus, sociologist Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, in his analysis of Michel Foucault's interest in the Iranian revolution of 1979, asks: "[i]s it possible for a people to envision and desire futures uncharted by already existing schema-

ta of historical change and patterns of social changes? Is it possible to think of dignity, humility, justice, and liberty outside the Enlightenment cognitive maps and principles?"[1] Foucault, Ghamari-Tabrizi argues, saw precisely such possibilities in Iran. Twenty years earlier, anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot offered a piercing critique of exclusionary historical narratives, such as scholarship that erases Haiti's revolution altogether or dismisses the agency of enslaved persons therein. He inquired: "can historical narratives convey plots that are unthinkable in the world within which these narratives take place?"[2] Trouillot's legacy continues to pose the question: can we avoid "[portraying] non-Westerners as passive objects who act in history only when awakened by Western ideas"?[3] Meanwhile, feminist analysis has problematised teleological assumptions that revolutionary transformations of gender necessarily map onto "oppositional poles of liberation and subordination."[4] Together, these questions disrupt accounts of revolution that centre on Enlightenment notions of progress and reflect intersecting hierarchies of colonialism, racism and prescriptions of gender. How do such inquiries chart a project to decolonise ways of thinking about revolution?

The idea of "decolonising revolution" might initially seem counterintuitive. Many revolutionary movements, from Haiti (1791-1804) to 20th and 21st century anticolonial liberation movements, such as in Algeria, Vietnam, Palestine and beyond, have fought to overturn colonial and imperial orders. Revolutionary states of the 20th and 21st centuries, such as the USSR, Cuba, the People's Republic of China, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Algeria, have offered varied and changing support for anticolonial movements elsewhere. Moreover, some revolutionary

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1 Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Foucault in Iran: Islamic Revolution after the Enlightenment* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 1.

2 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015 [1995]), 69.

3 Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, "Still Unthinkable? The Haitian Revolution and the Reception of Michel-Rolph Trouillot's 'Silencing the Past'," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 19, no. 2 (2013): 91.

4 Julie Peteet, *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1991), 5; Charlotte Al-Khalili, *Waiting for the Revolution to End: Syrian Displacement, Time, Subjectivity* (London: University College London Press, 2023), 138.

movements pursue liberation not only from the colonial and imperial nation-state, but also from the patriarchal relations that made women into "the first colony."[5] Across diverse incarnations, then, many revolutions have aspired to *achieve* decolonisation.

But the aftermaths of anticolonial and other revolutions, and of their decolonisation efforts at home and further afield – one iteration of the *afterlives of revolutions* that this special issue addresses – have questioned the affordances of revolutions for achieving decolonisation. Rather, both decolonisation, in the sense of the dissolution of colonialism, and the anticolonial revolutions that have sought to achieve it, have emerged as *unfinished projects*. Even when revolutions established postcolonial governments, challenges including – but not limited to – neocolonial and imperial domination have prevented the fulfilment of many expectations. These revolutions and their decolonisation projects, with their potential for political tragedy, have become the subjects of melancholy and disenchantment.[6]

The reframing of revolution and decolonisation as unfinished projects with complex afterlives invites provocative questions: what might calls for decolonisation in postcolonial times bring to understandings of revolution? However counterintuitive the proposition might initially seem, what merit might there be in a project to decolonise revolution? What might a focus on afterlives bring to such efforts? And since, as decolonial thinker Silvia Rivera Cusincanqui observes, "[t]here can be no discourse of decolonization, no theory of decolonization, without a decolonizing practice," what difference can decolonising perspectives make to practices of revolutionary emancipation?[7]

These questions invite debates that go beyond the scope of this article. As a preliminary contribution, here I build on, and further

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5 Dilar Dirik, *The Kurdish Women's Movement: History, Theory, Practice* (London: Pluto Press, 2021).

6 Enzo Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); Fadi Bardawil, *Revolution and Disenchantment: Arab Marxism and the Binds of Emancipation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

7 Silvia Rivera Cusincanqui, "Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111, no. 1 (2012): 100.

develop, my earlier "effort toward decolonizing narratives of revolution and counterinsurgency" in the light of the late 20th century anticolonial revolution in present day Oman.[8] The present article brings the decolonising possibilities of revolutionary afterlives, in Oman and beyond, into conversation with wider debates about intellectual decolonisation. I understand the latter as a project that not only contests Enlightenment universals, but also interrogates ongoing patterns of colonial power relations and hierarchies, including violence, as well as envisions and enacts alternative interpretations and relations that retrieve the agencies and histories that colonialist accounts obscure.[9] With these concerns in mind, the aims of this article are threefold.

First, I offer an exploratory, although by no means exhaustive, sketch of decolonising ways of thinking about revolution. Drawing on decolonial thinkers and empirical work in history, political science, ethnography and related disciplines that addresses diverse revolutions from the 18th to 21st centuries, the article outlines an intellectual decolonisation of revolution that interrogates Enlightenment-centrism, contests colonial hierarchies and relations, including violence, and retrieves agencies that these approaches erase and neglect. Recent scholarship that has brought revolution and decolonial perspectives into conversation has not necessarily entailed speaking directly of "decolonising revolution."[10] In pursuing here an explicit project of "decolonising revolution," my intention is not to join a "decolonial bandwagon."[11] Rather, my aim is to bring visibility to an interconnected field of decolonising

8 Alice Wilson, *Afterlives of Revolution: Everyday Counterhistories in Southern Oman* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2023), 36.

9 "Colonialist" and "coloniality" denote colonial dynamics not necessarily occurring in colonial times. For some, "coloniality" and "colonialist" reflect power relations spanning 500 years of colonial and postcolonial times, e.g. Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America," *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2000): 215-232.

10 E.g. Charlotte Al-Khalili et al., "Introduction," in *Revolution Beyond the Event: The Afterlives of Radical Politics* (London: University College London Press, 2023), 11; Atef Said, "Whose Political Imaginary? Insights from Decolonial Epistemologies to Explicate the Arab Spring Uprisings," *Middle East Studies Association*, Montreal, 2023; but see Matthieu Renault, "Decolonizing Revolution with C. L. R. James, or What Is To Be Done with Eurocentrism?," *Radical Philosophy* 199 (2016): 35-45.

11 Leon Moosavi, "The Decolonial Bandwagon and the Dangers of Intellectual Decolonisation," *International Review of Sociology*, 30, no. 3 (2020): 332-354.

endeavours, and its contributions and possibilities, to make connections between existing debates and to provide resources for future discussion. In bringing visibility to these endeavours, I also foreground the extent to which decolonising perspectives on revolution have mostly focused on analysis of events during or preceding revolutions – which prompts my next contribution.

Second, I extend the analytical timeframe to encompass revolutions' afterlives as a further lens for decolonising ways of thinking about revolution. This move recognises how the "new" age of decolonisation has opened up novel vantage points, in relation to anticolonial and other revolutions, for exposing colonial tropes about revolution, and retrieving the agencies that colonialist approaches occlude. I particularly explore the decolonising possibilities of afterlives through cases of revolutions that met with overwhelming repression. I write of "overwhelming repression" in an attempt to keep within view the kinds of surviving legacies of revolution from which alternative formulations, such as "defeat," may detract. The cases discussed below – Oman, Syria, Egypt, and Grenada – have been the subject of the kind of ethnographic work from which this article takes its primary disciplinary inspiration; but the wider premise for privileging such cases is the heightened conceptual potential of afterlives, in the wake of overwhelming repression, for interrogating colonialist projects of erasure, and retrieving the agencies that such approaches have marginalised.

The potential of the concept of afterlives for decolonising analyses of revolution reflects the distinctive qualities of aftermaths that anthropologist David Scott has explored. As historical contexts change, so do the "particular problems that get posed as problems as such," as well as "the particular questions that seem worth asking and the kinds of answers that seem worth having" – the ensemble that Scott terms a "problem-space."[12] Afterlives open up their own problem-spaces, questions and interpretations. For instance, retrospective narrations of rev-

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12 David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 4.

olution shift, in changing historical contexts of anticolonial optimism and postcolonial failure, from romance to tragedy, as Scott explores for Haiti and Toussaint Louverture.[13] Afterlives and their problem-spaces also, potentially, decolonise revolution by bringing into view the impacts of revolutionary agency that survive long-term, despite obstacles such as colonial(ist) violence and erasures.

Third, I begin a discussion of some practical implications of decolonising perspectives on revolutions and their afterlives: for reframing understandings of the past that anticipate hopeful futures; for raising awareness about the coloniality of contemporary counterrevolutionary violence; and for the renewal and "regeneration" of contemporary anticolonial revolutionary movements.[14]

Decolonising revolution, including through the lens of afterlives, then, is an enriching prospect for both revolution and decolonisation as ongoing projects. Decolonising perspectives deepen understanding of revolution by foregrounding diverse experiences, actors and agencies, including the extended times, places, impacts and significance of revolutionary agency during a revolution's afterlives. These reconfigured understandings of revolution in turn expand the repertoires through which decolonising discourse and practice can contest colonial hierarchies and violence, and retrieve experiences that colonialist projects have suppressed.

In what follows, I first address the changing meanings of revolution, afterlives and decolonisation. Next, I explore ways of decolonising revolution, before examining afterlives as a lens for further decolonising revolution. I then address a range of practical implications. Finally, the conclusion reflects on the implications of afterlives for revitalising revolution and decolonisation as unfinished projects.

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13 Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, 4.

14 Vivian Solana, "Between Publics and Privates: The Regeneration of Sahrawi Female Militancy," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 40, no. 1 (2020): 150-165.

Revolution, afterlives, decolonisation

The diversity of revolutions from the late 18th century to the present illustrates the range of views on how to define revolution. Since the Enlightenment, revolution has shifted its dominant meaning away from the pre-Enlightenment sense of things returning to their original place. The (post)Enlightenment meaning implies a break with the past and a leap forwards towards "progress." Revolution in this sense entails a project *both* to change the nature of political power by ousting an incumbent and instigating a new political authority, *and* to transform society by creating a new social order.[15] An emphasis on creating the new is similarly prominent in influential political theoretical approaches to revolution, for instance in Hannah Arendt's emphasis on "freedom of active creation" of that which "was not given, not even as an object of cognition or imagination," and Frantz Fanon's call for a "new man."[16] Most social scientists also agree on a quality of rupture and urgency in revolutionary transformations, such as the use of violence or mass popular protests.[17] The exceptional nature of such acts makes revolutions "events" in the sense of breaches of social norms that bring into view new possibilities.[18]

There is less agreement on the actors and outcomes that "qualify" as revolutionary. Some analysts take the view that revolutionary actors must originate from outside existing centres of political power, discounting those who already occupy positions within the state apparatus.[19] Some posit that a "successful" revolution requires ousting an

15 E.g. Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

16 Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 151; Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1968).

17 E.g. Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity*, 1; Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, *Revolution and Dictatorship: The Violent Origins of Durable Authoritarianism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022), 5.

18 Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (London: Continuum, 2005); Charis Boutieri, "Events of Citizenship: Left Militantism and the Returns of Revolution in Tunisia," *History and Anthropology* 34, no. 2 (2023): 175-193.

19 Levitsky and Way, *Revolution and Dictatorship*.

incumbent.[20] Such qualifications regarding actors and outcomes that "count" as revolutionary nevertheless present challenges from the point of view of people who live through revolutions. For those who shape and participate in revolutionary political, economic and social change, their diverse experiences may *feel* just as revolutionary, regardless of key actors' backgrounds and of ultimate outcomes. Accounting for such experiences means apprehending revolution less as a particular constellation of actors, agendas and outcomes than as a *process.*

A processual understanding of revolution invites analysis of connections with other social processes such as worldmaking, rites of passage, self-sacrifice and moral injunctions.[21] Such a processual understanding of revolution, that resists the dismissal of revolutionary experiences that do not conform to pre-determined criteria, offers rich possibilities for decolonising narratives about revolution. This approach takes seriously that revolution, rather than being a unitary experience, is more a "countlessly repeated uprooting of social relations."[22]

A processual approach also anticipates revolution's varied, non-unitary afterlives. In a literal sense, afterlives are later stages of life or life after death. Afterlives encompass legacies, ongoing influences and resonances that outlast a given project's core manifestation. They may see later generations purposefully take up projects that predecessors began.[23] They may also "seep" into later political projects, "haunting" subsequent generations.[24] Revolutionary afterlives span

20 E.g. Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1978); Levitsky and Way, *Revolution and Dictatorship*; Mark R. Beissinger, *The Revolutionary City: Urbanization and the Global Transformation of Rebellion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022).

21 Igor Cherstich, Martin Holbraad, and Nico Tassi, *Anthropologies of Revolution: Forging Time, People and Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020); Bjorn Thomassen, "Notes Towards an Anthropology of Political Revolutions," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 3 (2012): 679-706; Martin Holbraad, "Revolución o Muerte: Self-Sacrifice and the Ontology of Cuban Revolution," *Ethnos* 79, no. 3 (2014): 365-387; Alice Wilson, *Sovereignty in Exile: a Saharan Liberation Movement Governs* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

22 Donald L. Donham, *Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 35.

23 Samuel Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

24 Sara Salem, *Anticolonial Afterlives in Egypt: The Politics of Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

both lasting legacies of transformations as well as "hauntings." Whether or not revolutions oust an incumbent and, from a position of dominance, instigate a new political and social order, their afterlives have wide-ranging and long-lasting impacts across social, political, economic and religious life.[25] The manifestation of these afterlives necessarily varies from context to context, for instance with exile or multi-party postwar transitions offering possibilities, especially political, that ongoing authoritarian repression may preclude.[26] Meanwhile, revolutions can haunt later generations, as people experience new understandings of time in the wake of revolution, and seek new interpretations of the revolutionary past.[27]

It follows that the temporal (and indeed conceptual) contours of revolutionary afterlives may not – perhaps cannot – be clearly delineated. If revolutions have starting points, their lasting legacies question whether they have endpoints.[28] When revolutions meet with overwhelming repression, their afterlives include the many changes and legacies that nevertheless survive. For instance, the Paris Commune of 1871 saw the very government that crushed it go on a decade later to adopt its educational policies.[29] But in the case of revolutions that establish new, often long-lasting, governing authorities, where would afterlives begin? Indeed, it has recently been argued that when post-1900 revolutions ousted incumbents, these movements' promotion of radical ideas, and the subsequent need to develop political and coercive strategies to defend radical projects from internal and/or external opposition, "inoculates" revolutionary governments against internal threats and equips them, should they survive initial challenges, for longevity.[30] In cases of decades-long rule – such as the USSR 1922 to 1991, Mexico 1929 to

25 Al-Khalili et al., "Introduction."

26 E.g. Wilson, *Afterlives of Revolution.*

27 David Scott, *Omens of Adversity: Tragedy, Time, Memory, Justice* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

28 Al-Khalili et al., "Introduction," 14.

29 Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune* (London: Verso, 2015).

30 Levitsky and Way, *Revolution and Dictatorship.*

2000, and, at the time of writing, Cuba from 1959, Algeria from 1962, Vietnam from 1975, China since 1949, and Iran from 1979 – from what point can we speak of afterlives of revolution?

It is surely the expansiveness of afterlives' temporal and conceptual contours that enrich their potential for decolonising perspectives on revolutions. First, given that revolutions with a range of outcomes – whether or not they oust incumbents – produce afterlives, a focus on revolutions' lasting legacies challenges the distinction and hierarchy between "successful" and "failed" revolutions. This distinction risks dismissing and overlooking the significance of many – indeed, most – revolutionary experiences as "failure." Attending to afterlives prompts an analysis that looks beyond pre-determined criteria and instead retrieves wide-ranging experiences. Second, investigation of the ways that later generations retrospectively reinterpret revolution foregrounds contingency over a teleological script of "progress." The Paris Commune and subsequent reinterpretations of its significance illustrate this well.[31] For communists, the Commune's afterlife was to serve as an example of failed revolution. For French Republicanism, the Commune came to exemplify French republican spirit. But for its survivors and fellow travellers, the Commune became a source of intellectual inspiration and community.[32] To recognise reinterpretative afterlives of revolution destabilises teleological accounts.

Decolonisation – like revolution – has changed meaning over time. In the early twentieth century, for Woodrow Wilson and his peers in the League of Nations, decolonisation meant the conditional possibility for colonies to become self-governing once they resembled European nation-states.[33] Yet mid-20th century Black Atlantic intellectuals retooled decolonisation as a means of undoing the colonial order and its dependencies and racial hierarchies.[34] Such rethinking of an interna-

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31 Ross, *Communal Luxury.*

32 Ross, *Communal Luxury.*

33 Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2019).

34 Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire.*

tional order beyond racial hierarchies of empire and colonialism was the kind of decolonisation that in the 1960s and 1970s revolutionary liberation fronts pursued. Some – but not all – of these movements dislodged colonial and colonially-backed rulers. The unfulfilled promises of these decolonisation movements have led to postcolonial calls for a wider project of decolonisation that, going beyond the dislodging of the colonial nation-state, interrogates, and seeks alternatives to, ongoing colonial power relations.

This decolonising project thrives in social and protest movements, such as Standing Rock, Black Lives Matter and Rhodes Must Fall; in activist, diplomatic and scholarly calls for reparations, restitution and revised historical narratives that recognise the wrongs of colonialism, enslavement and dispossession; in calls for multiple epistemic decolonisations; and in activist scholars' calls for practical steps to address colonialism, racism and the legacies of enslavement and dispossession.[35] In a changing world, decolonisation has also acquired new meanings – that are the subject of much debate.

For Walter Mignolo, it is "a very good thing" that in recent years "[t]he usages of *decolonization* (and its verb, *to decolonize*) have been growing exponentially."[36] For him, these proliferating meanings reflect a distinction between decolonisation as the transformation of state power, and "decoloniality after decolonization" as a broader project "focused on epistemology and knowledge."[37] Others have voiced concerns that in postcolonial times the meaning of decolonisation has become

35 E.g. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 2012); Gurminder Bhambra, Dalia Gebrial, and Kerem Nisancıoğlu, *Decolonising the University* (London: Pluto Press, 2018); Faye Harrison, *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further toward an Anthropology of Liberation* (Arlington: American Anthropological Association, 1997); Terri Smith and Adom Getachew, "Bringing Abolition to the Ivory Tower," *American Association of University Professors*, 2017, https://www.aaup.org/article/bringing-abolition-ivory-tower#:~:text=The%20fight%20to%20reimagine%20campus%20safety.&text=%E2%80%9CWho%20do%20you%20serve%3F!,police%20and%20state%2Dsanctioned%20violence; Julia Elyachar, "For Anthropology, Decolonizing Knowledge Means Supporting the Academic Boycott of Israel," *Mondoweiss*, 2023, https://mondoweiss.net/2023/06/for-anthropology-decolonizing-knowledge-means-supporting-the-academic-boycott-of-israel/.

36 Walter Mignolo, "What Does It Mean to Decolonize?," in Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 108.

37 Mignolo, "What Does It Mean to Decolonize?," 121.

too broad. Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang caution that expanding meanings of decolonisation lose sight of settler colonial dispossession, whilst positing changed discourses as a "solution" – at the risk of neglecting reparations and other actions that challenge colonial privilege and power relations.[38] For Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò, proliferating calls for decolonisation obscure more than they illuminate, while an understanding of decolonisation as a project to break with all legacies of colonialism risks obscuring the agency of colonised and formerly colonised persons and their descendants when they engage with colonial legacies.[39] Raising different concerns, Leon Moosavi cautiously finds merits in "intellectual decolonisation" that "[incorporates] marginalised perspectives or people within academia," but warns that a "decolonial bandwagon" risks "decolonisation without decolonising" by reproducing, rather than contesting, coloniality.[40]

These calls for caution require explorations of decolonisation in postcolonial times to specify what such an approach hopes to achieve. Given the changing meanings of decolonisation, a focus on one historically-specific understanding of decolonisation risks losing sight of the evolving meanings of the term. Arguably, the very proliferation of meanings also highlights a key insight, namely the enormous potential of decolonisation as a *process* that, going far beyond the question of gaining the right to self-rule, remains unfinished. Meanwhile, calls for caution when using the term "decolonisation" helpfully keep in sight questions of what is "incommensurable between decolonising projects and other social justice projects," and of what kinds of agencies need recognition.[41] In postcolonial contexts, something that different calls for decolonisation share is surely an interrogation of past and/or ongoing colonial power dynamics and hierarchies, including violence, and the envisioning and pursuit of alternatives, including a concern for

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38 Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1-40.

39 Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò, *Against Decolonisation: Taking African Agency Seriously* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2022).

40 Moosavi, "The Decolonial Bandwagon," 343-4.

41 Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," 7.

retrieving the agencies that colonialist approaches have marginalised. With such an understanding of decolonisation in mind, we may ask: what are the affordances of extending intellectual decolonisation to the field of revolution studies, and what agencies can such a move retrieve? Sketching these possibilities lays the groundwork for then asking how a focus on afterlives of revolution can advance such a project.

Decolonising revolution

The scope of decolonising approaches to revolution includes interrogating universalistic Enlightenment premises, contesting colonial hierarchies and dynamics, including violence, and retrieving the agency of diverse revolutionary actors.

As Ghamari-Tabrizi observes, a project to decolonise ways of thinking about revolution questions universalising accounts of revolution, such as Enlightenment narratives that enshrine teleological assumptions of time as linear progress towards future emancipation. Those assumptions are not universals. One means of questioning universalisms is to attend to alternative terminologies. For instance, as Rivera Cusicanqui has examined, the Quechua/Aymara term *pachakuti*, that references both "upheaval" (*kuti*) and "world balance" and "spacetime" (*pacha*), distances itself from Enlightenment notions of teleology and emancipation. The meaning and applications of *pachakuti* are more ambiguous. Indigenous Andeans have used the term since the sixteenth century to refer to the invasion of Europeans that brought disastrous consequences for indigenous worlds, but over time have also used it to refer to uprisings that seek to unseat (neo)colonial rule and restore indigenous world balance.[42] Engaging with diverse terms "provincialises" culturally specific assumptions of revolution as progress towards emancipation.

A disruption of Enlightenment notions of teleology may also be at stake when participants' and analysts' preferred term is "revolution"

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[42] Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, "Aymara Past, Aymara Future," *Report on the Americas* 25, no. 3 (1991): 18-45.

or an equivalent. Paying close attention to how revolutionaries experience and understand transformations reveals important differences with teleological approaches. Although Enlightenment understandings of revolution bespeak a linear notion of time as progress towards an emancipatory future, this is not necessarily what revolutionaries experience. Anthropologist Charlotte Al-Khalili has explored how Syrians who have taken part in the revolution (*al-thawrah*) in Syria, and/or supported the revolution from exile, experience their participation as living the yet-to-arrive future in the present, and anticipate the future as a repetition of past uprisings, but with different results.[43] For them, revolution evokes not a linear but a cyclical notion of time.[44] Attending to such experiences de-universalises Enlightenment assumptions of time, and revolutionary time, as progress.

Those who seek to bring about and/or theorise revolution can espouse precise prescriptions, at the risk of excluding non-conforming experiences and histories. Those exclusions present fertile grounds for intellectual decolonisation. In such a spirit, political theorist Cedric Robinson argues that trajectories of creativity and emancipation do not have to conform to a Marxist understanding of class-based conflict that anticipates a proletarian revolution's overthrow of bourgeois society, capitalism and private property. Experiences of racialised subjection shaped the black radical tradition and its projects for emancipation and revolution.[45] In medieval Europe, radical projects for emancipation that drew on religious beliefs likewise revealed a broader basis for revolutionary emancipation than Marxism's focus on class-based revolution.[46] A project to decolonise revolution, then, can expose the historical specificity of dominant prescriptive approaches to revolution, and acknowledge the multiple trajectories of creativity that forge revolutionary emancipation. Such a project requires a processual understanding of revolution that eschews pre-determined categories of exploitation, such as the

43 Al-Khalili, *Waiting for the Revolution to End.*
44 Al-Khalili, *Waiting for the Revolution to End.*
45 Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London: Zed, 1983).
46 Cedric Robinson, *An Anthropology of Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 2019).

state, capitalism and industrialised class relations, and recognises efforts to imagine and strive for emancipation by overturning existing power relations beyond Enlightenment trajectories.

A project to decolonise revolution also resists imposing historically-specific perspectives about revolution onto other cases, at the risk of occluding diverse agencies and creativities. Political theorist Adom Getachew makes such a case with regard to the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804). Getachew takes issue with accounts of the Haitian Revolution that depict it as "completing" the goals of liberty, equality and fraternity of the French (1789-1799) and American (1775-1783) revolutions, thanks to its promotion of a racially inclusive notion of citizenship.[47] Such interpretations, Getachew cautions, run the risk of denying Haiti's revolutionaries the creativity to imagine and create something new. The idea that the Haitian revolution more completely fulfilled Enlightenment ideals casts Haitians in the role of bringing racial inclusivity to a pre-existing concept of equality among citizens. Instead, echoing Trouillot, Getachew stresses that Haitian revolutionaries imagined – and set about creating – something unprecedented: a political order without chattel enslavement or empire based on racial hierarchy.[48] Rather than "completing" Enlightenment categories and ideals of freedom and equality, as some scholarship has suggested, the Haitian Revolution espoused a vision that in the context of the Enlightenment's defence of colonialism, racism and enslavement, was "unthinkable."[49]

The fact that Enlightenment thinkers upheld colonialism, racism and enslavement is a reminder that a decolonising agenda must contest colonial violence and hierarchies – not only in Enlightenment ideals, but also in counterrevolutionary violence as well as *within* revolutions.

Counterrevolutionary violence has long taken colonial forms. A survivor of the Paris Commune argued that the brutality of the execu-

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47 Adom Getachew, "Universalism after the Post-colonial Turn," *Political Theory*, 44, no. 6 (2016): 821-845.
48 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*; Getachew, "Universalism after the Post-colonial Turn."
49 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*.

tions of communards took inspiration from the French colonial state's violence against colonised Algerians.[50] A decolonising approach interrogates coloniality in both physical and epistemic counterrevolutionary violence. A powerful case through which to explore these concerns is an anticolonial revolution and colonial counterinsurgency that, in contrast to renowned contemporaneous anticolonial struggles in Vietnam (1955-1975) and Algeria (1954-1962), saw colonial counterinsurgency prove victorious: namely, the conflict in the southern Dhufar region of today's Oman (1965-1976). Under changing names and, from 1968, under Marxist-Leninist inspired leadership, Oman's liberation front fought for political and social emancipation against British-backed Sultans and a British-led, increasingly internationalised counterinsurgency.[51] In contrast to the widespread condemnation of horrific colonial counterinsurgency violence in Vietnam and Algeria, in Dhufar the war's outcome led to dominant conventional narratives that have legitimised counterrevolutionary violence and dismissed the revolution.[52] As such, Dhufar epitomises the urgency of a decolonising analysis of counterrevolutionary violence.

To that end, critical reinterpretations have exposed colonial practices and narratives in the Dhufar counterinsurgency. The campaign deployed extensive, ongoing and indiscriminate counterinsurgency violence – ranging from air strikes to food and water blockades, mass forced displacement and the destruction of the local subsistence economy.[53] The extent of this violence belies eulogistic claims of an allegedly "model campaign" that putatively minimised harm to civilians while "winning hearts and minds."[54] Indeed, in the context of such widespread violence, attributing counterinsurgency success to "hearts and minds" measures is a disturbing dismissal of colonial violence. Mean-

50 Ross, *Communal Luxury*, 33.

51 See Abdel Razzaq Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution: Republicans, Sultans and Empires in Oman, 1965-–1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

52 For a discussion, see Wilson, *Afterlives of Revolution*, 29-35, 54-61 and 98-136.

53 E.g. Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*; Jacqueline Hazelton, *Bullets Not Ballots: Success in Counterinsurgency Warfare* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021).

54 See Wilson, *Afterlives of Revolution*, 29-36.

while, "saviour" narratives about the Dhufar counterinsurgency, that position – to paraphrase Gayatri Spivak – white men as saving brown men and women from other (here, communist) brown men and women, justify colonial violence.[55] In parallel, assertions that the revolution was unpopular among Dhufaris, in particular because of revolutionary violence, similarly serve to legitimise colonial violence. The point of a decolonising analysis is not to deny revolutionary violence – even as any discussion should *contextualise* revolutionary violence within the very transformations of indigenous categories of political violence that accusations of "red terror" overlook.[56] Rather, the point is to recognise that one of the functions of "red terror" accusations, similar to "model campaign" and "saviour" narratives, is to legitimise colonial violence. This reflects the colonial imperative to rationalise colonial violence.[57] A decolonising approach to revolution, then, contests counterrevolutionary reliance on colonial violence and its legitimisation.

Such a move has wider implications beyond colonially-backed counterinsurgency campaigns such as Dhufar's. Liberal understandings of counterinsurgency in the 20th century, drawing on interpretations of counterinsurgency campaigns that include conventional understandings of the Dhufar conflict, have asserted that counterinsurgency victory requires a "hearts and minds" campaign – despite compelling evidence that, to the contrary, counterinsurgency victory in the campaigns in question *requires* violence against civilians.[58] It follows that a decolonising approach to (counter)revolution enables a broader problematisation: namely, of the extent to which condemnations of revolutionary regimes as threats to liberal international society may serve as a justification of, and figleaf for, the counterinsurgency violence that liberal governments deploy and yet disavow.

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55 Wilson, *Afterlives of Revolution*, 6.

56 See Wilson, *Afterlives of Revolution*, 32-33.

57 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

58 Hazelton, *Bullets Not Ballots*.

At the same time, a decolonising approach must not overlook how practices within revolutionary movements can reflect coloniality, the "darker" side of modernity.[59] In the worlds that colonialism, settler colonialism, dispossession, chattel enslavement and global capitalism shaped over five centuries, the resulting condition of intertwined coloniality and modernity has produced and relied on a reordering of relations along intersecting hierarchies of race, class and gender.[60] Revolutionary reorderings of social relations also articulate hierarchies in which race, class and gender intersect. Revolutions of various stripes – including anticolonial and/or socialist – that have mobilised women, often with explicit discourses of gender liberation, nevertheless reproduce gendered hierarchies and exploitation: socialism's "triple burden" of women's responsibilities for waged labour, domestic labour and activism;[61] the making of gendered male behaviours into exemplars of revolutionary action, with implications that women either conform to masculine norms or are reduced to secondary revolutionary actors;[62] and the promotion of a heteropatriarchy that disciplines or marginalises non-conforming persons.[63] Notions not only of gender but also of class and racialised identities can be at stake when revolutionary vanguards, echoing the hierarchies of a colonial "civilising mission," look down disparagingly on those in whom they identify a "backwardness" that they judge incompatible with true revolutionary consciousness.[64] A decolonising approach must problematise colonial hierarchies and legacies that revolutionaries can reproduce.

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59 Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

60 Quijano, "Coloniality of Power"; María Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (2007): 186-219.

61 Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 65.

62 E.g. Victoria Bernal, "Equality to Die For? Women Guerrilla Fighters and Eritrea's Cultural Revolution," *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 23, no. 2 (2000): 61-76; Wilson, *Afterlives of Revolution*, 87; Al-Khalili, *Waiting for the Revolution to End*, 59.

63 E.g. Rosario Montoya, *Gendered Scenarios of Revolution: Making New Men and New Women in Nicaragua, 1975-–2000* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012); Joshua Tschantret, "Revolutionary Homophobia: Explaining State Repression against Sexual Minorities," *British Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 4 (2020): 1459-1480.

64 E.g. Wilson, *Afterlives of Revolution*, 88.

This does not imply that the purpose of a decolonising analysis would be to "rid" revolutionary movements of colonial influence. Being "outside" coloniality may be "impossible."[65] Indeed, David Scott, commenting on the imbrication of colonial relations and anticolonial projects, including revolutions and the subjects who pursue them, has shown that colonialism reconfigures the very grounds on which persons articulate themselves as "modern" subjects who claim the right to self-rule.[66] Instead, a task for a decolonising approach may be to repurpose colonial concepts for liberatory purposes, as for instance some indigenous feminists have advocated.[67]

The problematisation of colonial dynamics and hierarchies within revolutionary movements lays grounds for the retrieval of actors, agencies and experiences that colonial(ist) accounts neglect. Such a decolonising move again concerns revolutions with a range of outcomes, from the establishment of a revolutionary state, to "silencing" and overwhelming repression.[68]

Across these varied denouements, a decolonising perspective retrieves the agencies of minoritised subjects, such as the colonised, enslaved, peasants and women, and highlights them as revolutionary actors. The colonised and the enslaved are not merely "awakened" by western ideas, but create and pursue their own emancipatory roles, visions and values, as global south revolutions in Haiti and beyond demonstrate.[69] Although socialist-inspired revolutionary thinkers and vanguards centre revolution in proletarian class identities, peasant modes of production and resistance have sustained revolutionary actors and movements.[70] Women do not simply "join" or "support" male-dominated

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65 Mignolo, "What Does It Mean to Decolonize?," 114; Moosavi, "The Decolonial Bandwagon," 341-3.

66 Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*.

67 E.g. Renya Ramirez, "Race, Tribal Nation, and Gender: A Native Feminist Approach to Belonging," *Meridians* 7, no. 2 (2007): 22-40.

68 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*.

69 E.g. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*.

70 E.g. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 93; James C. Scott, "Revolution in the Revolution: Peasants and Commissars," *Theory and Society* 7, no. 1-2 (1979): 97-134.

revolutions, but are agents of revolutionary transformations.[71] Meanwhile, retrieving the experiences of marginalised actors has particular resonance for contesting colonial hierarchies and violence – perhaps most especially where revolutions meet with overwhelming repression. The very fact that actors of different backgrounds, with diverse motivations and interpretations, participate in revolution powerfully contests the colonial counterrevolutionary dismissal of revolution as "unpopular" and of revolutionaries as insignificant. A decolonising agenda reclaims the heterogeneity and significance of revolutionary agencies and actors.

Feminist analysis plays a key role in retrieving diverse agencies. Feminist scholarship emphasises how gender, class and other intersectional identities favour or foreclose participation in specific revolutionary spheres, resulting in a relative "privilege of revolution" that underpins access to (often the most iconic and male-dominated) spaces of revolution.[72] From this, it follows that feminist approaches also recognise alternative spheres as revolutionary, such as caring responsibilities in extraordinary circumstances.[73] Feminist-inspired analysis does not only address marginalised persons and experiences. It also rethinks the experiences of *hyper-visibilised* persons, such as, for instance, female fighters who become icons of revolutionary gender transformations. The hyper-celebration of such women is not only problematic for implying that "gender liberation" may require women to take on male behaviours. It also risks overlooking the potential burdens of militancy for women, such as bearing heightened responsibility for championing a movement while simultaneously facing new vulnerabilities.[74] Moreover, the impulse to celebrate icons of revolutionary gender transformations may mask a subtler story of how marginalised actors negotiate revolutionary pro-

71 E.g. Sherine Hafez, *Women of the Midan: The Untold Stories of Egypt's Revolutionaries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019); Al-Khalili, *Waiting for the Revolution to End*, 139.

72 Jessica Winegar, "The Privilege of Revolution: Gender, Class, Space, and Affect in Egypt," *American Ethnologist* 39, no. 1 (2012): 67-70.

73 Winegar, "The Privilege of Revolution," 67-70; Julie Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair: Palestinian Refugee Camps* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

74 E.g. Bernal, "Equality to Die For?"; "Between Publics and Privates," 163.

grammes and discourses.[75] Such negotiations imply that revolutionary social change is not a "neat" pre-ordained trajectory, but, as I have argued in relation to Oman, "messy" in ways that signal people's active engagement beyond official discourses – and that can lay foundations for future lasting legacies.[76] Feminist and feminist-inspired retrievals of different agencies and experiences decolonise understandings of revolution.

A decolonising agenda to retrieve diverse experiences also dislodges the "starring role" that revolutionary vanguards tend to assign to themselves.[77] Such a move again brings into view marginalised actors and experiences. Prior to and outside revolutions, people have made other attempts to pursue emancipation.[78] These alternative projects of liberation question official timelines of revolution. People also join revolutions for a variety of reasons beyond the class identities and oppression that vanguards envisage – which can push the leadership to expunge heterodox histories from official narratives.[79] Diverse experiences of revolutionary agency decentre unitary, teleological accounts of revolution.

As is the case for revolutionary agencies, a decolonising approach retrieves plural notions of revolutionary thought and interpretation. Paying attention to marginalised actors, who, compared to vanguards, have limited opportunities to disseminate their interpretations, qualifies master narratives of revolution. For instance, rather than conceptualising Ethiopia's Marxist revolution as the instigation of a new social order, the southern Maale ethnic minority interpreted the revolution as the restoration of divine kinship that previous imperial rule had disrupted.[80] The Maale are a reminder of the diversity and breadth of revolutionary thought – and the challenge for scholarship to engage with

75 E.g. Solana, "Between Publics and Privates"; Wilson, *Afterlives of Revolution*, 90-97.

76 Wilson, *Afterlives of Revolution*, 63-64.

77 Natalya Vince, *The Algerian War, the Algerian Revolution* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

78 E.g. Alpa Shah, *Nightmarch: Among the Guerrillas of India's Revolutionary Movement* (London: Hurst, 2018).

79 Scott, "Revolution in the Revolution."

80 Donham, *Marxist Modern*.

that diversity. If it is well known that revolutionary leaders have vernacularised concepts for new audiences, as for instance Mao Tse-Tung vernacularised Karl Marx for rural China, we often know relatively little of grassroots actors' reinterpretative repertoires. Yet non-vanguard participants in revolution, who rethink and adapt programmes to their own lives, engage in their own "everyday revolutionary vernacularization," as I have explored in Dhufar.[81] With regard to Syria's revolutionaries, Charlotte Al-Khalili emphasizes the act of "theorising," echoing wider anthropological interest in indigenous theorising. She expands the idea of who is a theorist of revolution. She argues that working and lower middle class pious Sunni Syrians are "theorists" of revolution, such as when they draw on Islamic beliefs about predestination to reinterpret revolutionary action as the playing out of as-yet unknown futures.[82] The point here is not to "elevate" revolutionaries to being theorists as if their noteworthiness derived from participating in activities, such as "theorising," that Euro-American perspectives privilege – just as Trouillot is cautious that C. L. R. James' title *Black Jacobins* attributes significance to Haitians' actions in relation to a European benchmark.[83] Rather, at stake is an effort to reconceptualise – and decolonise – the kinds of actors, experiences and ideas that shape, vernacularise and theorise historically specific understandings of revolution.

These various initiatives for decolonising revolution – that interrogate Enlightenment-centrism, contest colonial hierarchies and retrieve neglected agencies – have in common a tendency to focus on events during, or before, a revolution. How can a turn to afterlives of revolution extend decolonising analysis?

Afterlives and decolonising revolution

By reconfiguring "problem-spaces," afterlives open up further avenues for decolonising revolution. They suggest not only new ways to interro-

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81 Wilson, *Afterlives of Revolution*, 65.

82 Al-Khalili, *Waiting for the Revolution to End*.

83 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 93.

gate Enlightenment universals, but also to contest colonial hierarchies and dynamics, including violence, and to retrieve diverse agencies.

Afterlives of revolution unravel teleological notions of time as progress. Paradigmatic of these possibilities is the Grenadan revolution (1979-1983), the fall of the revolutionary government, and the execution of its leaders in circumstances that to date remain unexplained. For David Scott, this speaks of a wider condition of what it means to live in the wake of political tragedy and its unending aftermaths.[84] Here, revolutionaries' efforts to create "a more just and egalitarian world out of the colonial and neo-colonial past" have *both* "succeeded" and "failed."[85] Such a scenario of political tragedy is especially pronounced in the Grenadan case, because of the unending aftermath of unresolved questions about the demise of the revolution. In such circumstances, a notion of time as progress, and a future of greater promise than preceding times, collapses.[86] Afterlives foreground non-teleological understandings not merely of revolution but of political temporalities more broadly.

In parallel, afterlives of revolution contest colonial hierarchies and violence, and retrieve diverse revolutionary agencies that colonialist approaches marginalise. Revolutions with diverse outcomes, including the establishment of a revolutionary state, have had lasting impacts in which historically marginalised actors contest longstanding structures of violence and come to understand themselves as new kinds of subjects.[87] But the paradigm-shifting possibilities for revolutionary afterlives to contest colonial hierarchies and violence, while retrieving marginalised agencies, are especially pronounced when colonial discourses and violence suppress revolution – as the case of Oman's liberation movement demonstrates.

Postwar Oman poses many challenges for the mere possibility of revolutionary afterlives and surviving legacies: from government re-

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84 Scott, *Omens of Adversity*.

85 Scott, *Omens of Adversity*, 29.

86 Scott, *Omens of Adversity*, 9.

87 E.g. Laura Enriquez, *Children of the Revolution: Violence, Inequality, and Hope in Nicaraguan Migration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022).

pression of (former) revolutionaries, to the government's attempt to erase them from official history, and the restriction of all Omanis' freedoms of expression and association. Despite these obstacles, afterlives of revolution emerged in diverse forms in postwar Oman.[88] Some former militants in Dhufar reproduced revolutionary values of social egalitarianism in everyday interactions, such as kinship, daily socialising and unofficial commemoration.[89] Beyond such intimate inter-personal spheres, revolutionary afterlives also emerged when female former militants pioneered extra-domestic waged labour force participation for women of diverse social backgrounds.[90] Meanwhile, lasting revolutionary values that call for the promotion of the "common good" (*al-maslahah al-'ammah*) motivated former revolutionary school pupils to work in postwar development projects that would benefit multiple tribes – when other Dhufaris, who had been more familiar with counterinsurgency development projects that stoked tribal rivalries, were reluctant to support initiatives that would benefit tribes other than their own.[91] These diverse afterlives of revolution in the wake of colonial counterinsurgency decolonise conventional narratives about revolution: they contest triumphalist accounts of colonial violence, and retrieve the ongoing significance of revolutionary agency beyond military defeat.

The lens of afterlives, that foregrounds the lasting effects of revolutions that meet with overwhelming repression, thereby brings into question the efficacy of colonial violence for erasing oppositional political dispositions. Rather than aggrandising counterrevolution as a means of undermining revolution, afterlives of revolution highlight the *limits* of projects of colonial and colonialist violence for silencing, erasing and condemning revolution.[92] In Dhufar, revolutionary afterlives destabilise claims of a "hearts and minds" counterinsurgency victory, in that some Dhufaris continued to engage long-term with revolutionary values of

88 Wilson, *Afterlives of Revolution.*
89 Wilson, *Afterlives of Revolution.*
90 Wilson, *Afterlives of Revolution*, 188-189.
91 Wilson, *Afterlives of Revolution*, 124-127.
92 Wilson, *Afterlives of Revolution*, 15-17.

social egalitarianism that contrasted with local and national political, economic and social hierarchies. Contrary to conventional portrayals of Dhufar as an *exemplar* of counterinsurgency success, revolutionary afterlives instead recast Dhufar as a paradigm of the *limitations* of the colonial project and of counterrevolution for dissipating revolutionary engagement and for achieving epistemic erasure.

At the same time, afterlives of revolution retrieve revolutionary agency and its ongoing impacts in extended times and spaces, beyond conventional timelines of defeat. In Oman, "saviour" narratives have given Sultan Qaboos bin Said (ruled 1970-2020) and the counterinsurgency starring roles in enabling Oman's postwar development. But from the point of view of revolutionary afterlives, it transpires that postwar social change and development projects *relied* on Omanis – such as female workers, their male kin who supported their actions, and development workers – continuing to act upon revolutionary agency and values.[93] Where conventional and official histories have erased the revolution from Oman's history, afterlives retrieve revolutionary agency as significant not only during the revolution, but also thereafter.

More broadly – as Dhufar, viewed through a lens of revolutionary afterlives, so powerfully suggests – a focus on afterlives of revolution is profoundly decolonising in its disruption of the very hierarchies of knowledge that contrast "successful" and "failed" revolutions, according to whether or not a movement takes over the state. By such criteria, the majority of "revolutionary situations" become "failed" revolutions, as political scientist Mark Beissinger has charted for movements since 1900.[94] A focus on afterlives, though, brings to the fore the lasting and multi-scalar legacies of "failed revolutions." Non-revolutionary ruling authorities can adopt policies of militarily defeated revolutionary movements (e.g. the Paris Commune). Meanwhile, not only in Oman, but also among exiled Syrians, among Egyptians living under President Sisi, as Youssef El Chazli has explored, and beyond, revolutions that meet

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93 Wilson, *Afterlives of Revolution*, 135.
94 Beissinger, *The Revolutionary City*, 442-461.

with overwhelming repression produce profound transformations: people adopt new understandings of themselves and of the kinds of lives that it is possible to lead, they continue to engage with revolutionary values, and they change the way they relate to spouses, children and colleagues.[95] Such legacies of "failed" revolutions disrupt bifurcated categories of revolutions, instead suggesting closer resonance and resemblance with "successful" revolutions. The latter's long-term impacts also transform persons, relationships, values and social, political and economic ideals and practices at multiple scales.[96] A focus on afterlives questions any implied dismissal of "failed" revolutions as insignificant, and is a reminder of how much a diagnosis of "failure" risks overlooking.[97]

This is not to dismiss the significance – perhaps most poignant for revolutionaries themselves – of whether a revolution transforms the nature of political, economic and social life according to the fullest extent of participants' hopes. Rather, it is to suggest that further insights lie alongside and beyond the categorisation of "successful" versus" failed" revolutions.[98] These include the implications of decolonising perspectives for wider practices of revolution.

Towards decolonising practices

If there can be "no discourse of decolonization... without a decolonizing practice," what differences can decolonising ways of thinking about revolution, including from the perspective of afterlives, make to revolutionary practices?[99] Even the present preliminary discussion makes readily apparent how decolonising moves – that question Enlightenment universals, contest colonial hierarchies, including violence, and retrieve marginalised agencies – have implications for praxis as a dynamic interaction between reflection and action. Attention to praxis also underscores how decolonis-

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95 E.g. Al-Khalili, *Waiting for the Revolution to End*; Youssef El Chazli, "Revolution as a Life-Altering Experience: The Case of Egypt," *Middle East Brief* 136 (2020).

96 See e.g. Cherstich, Holbraad, and Tassi, *Anthropologies of Revolution.*

97 Al-Khalili, *Waiting for the Revolution to End*, 14; Wilson, *Afterlives of Revolution*, 12.

98 Wilson, *Afterlives of Revolution*, 4.

99 Rivera, "Ch'ixinakax utxiwa," 100.

ing moves are interrelated and mutually reinforcing: the interrogation of Enlightenment universals enables the contestation of colonial hierarchies and the retrieval of marginalised agencies, and vice versa.

For instance, an impulse to interrogate Enlightenment universals, such as of time as linear progress towards emancipation, has implications for the very meaning of revolutionary experience – including disappointments and defeats. Approaching time as cyclical, rather than as linear, can reframe the meaning of disappointments and their implications for future action. When Syrian revolutionaries understand time as cyclical, the military defeat of the 2011 revolution ceases to be an endpoint, but anticipates recurring future uprisings against injustice.[100] More broadly, then, taking distance from an Enlightenment universal such as linear time can reframe political disappointments and transform them from being "the necessary end of politics" to "a possible beginning for a new politics."[101] Relatedly, acknowledging the diversity of revolutions' afterlives reclaims the idea of revolution from having to conform to a teleological leap forwards towards a known version of progress, and recognises instead multiple scales, processes and timelines. Just as revolutionaries who encounter overwhelming repression may still experience profound transformations, so their peers who experience disappointments while living under the rule of a revolutionary state may interpret this as a sign not that a revolution has failed, but that it "[has] not finished," as Natalya Vince has argued for Algerians.[102] Such reframings, that eschew Enlightenment-centric understandings of revolution and political time, may have a similar effect to that which historian Priya Lal ensivages when she calls for an analysis of the "complexities," rather than the apparent "failure," of revolutionary socialist projects: such reinterpretive moves can nourish a praxis for imagining, and striving to create, futures of greater social justice.[103]

100 Al-Khalili, *Waiting for the Revolution to End*.

101 Al-Khalili et al., "Introduction," 12.

102 Natalya Vince, *Our Fighting Sisters: Nation, Memory and Gender in Algeria, 1954--2012* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 174.

103 Priya Lal, *African Socialism in Postcolonial Tanzania: Between the Village and the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 239.

The task of challenging colonial hierarchies and violence in counterrevolution has implications for contesting contemporary counterrevolutionary discourses. In postcolonial states, counterrevolutionary discourse can resonate with a colonialist project to legitimise state violence and pathologise the resistance of oppressed persons. Thus, in Egypt under President Sisi (in power from June 2014 to the time of writing), government discourse condemns the 2011 revolution as a threat to stability and morality, and positions the counterrevolutionary government as the country's saviour in the face of these perils. These discourses directly echo colonial stereotypes about revolution and counterrevolution, prevalent in Oman and beyond. These parallels may be familiar to those accustomed to critically engaging with state practices and discourses of violence. But these similarities may be less intuitive for those who, while used to condemnations of revolution, have had fewer opportunities to engage critically with those discourses (a phenomenon I have observed, for instance, when teaching about revolution in diverse classrooms that include students who have grown up in contexts of strict government censorship of media). In engagements with such audiences, pointing out the parallels between colonial discourses and contemporary representations of revolution as "threat" and counterrevolution as "saviour" may be a striking means of provoking critical interrogation of discourses and practices of counter-revolution.

An awareness of revolutionary reorderings of class, race and gender, together with efforts to retrieve diverse revolutionary agencies, has the potential to "regenerate" revolutionary movements – in the sense of diversifying militants' voices and experiences in ways that, rather than fracturing a movement, "[multiply] its future possibilities."[104] Anthropologist Vivian Solana has explored these possibilities in the case of Western Sahara's revolutionary liberation front that struggles against Morocco's partial occupation of the former Spanish Sahara (1973 to the present). Key claims of the liberation front include the emancipation of marginalised constituencies such as women and enslaved persons. Yet

104 Solana, "Between Publics and Privates," 163.

in recent years younger female militants in the Sahrawi refugee camps in Algeria, who face new vulnerabilities in changing conditions of exile, contest the gendered role of "respectability" that mainstream Sahrawi nationalism continues to assign women.[105] Meanwhile, Sahrawi refugees of formerly enslaved heritage mobilise for revolutionary authorities to address post-enslavement legacies of discrimination, including in the public sector.[106] These mobilisations – that are afterlives of revolution in the sense of being later stages of militancy – retrieve agencies and experiences that official histories have neglected. Some supporters of self-determination struggles, including some Sahrawis, might fear that mobilisations that "wash dirty laundry in public" risk undermining the movement.[107] Yet the prospect of making more, rather than less, room for diverse actors, visions and horizons of militancy surely strengthens, rather than weakens, the promises and potential of revolutionary engagement. Decolonising approaches to revolution may help "regenerate" a movement's transformative possibilities.

Conclusion

Approaching both revolution and decolonisation as unfinished processes, this article has taken the "new" age of decolonisation as an invitation to rethink revolution. Such a move invited reflection on what a project – however counterintuitive it might initially seem – to decolonise ways of thinking about revolution could offer. Thinking about revolution in ways that not only question Enlightenment universals, but also interrogate ongoing colonial dynamics, and retrieve agencies and experiences that colonialist approaches neglect, prompted me to make three contributions towards future discussions. First, I offered a preliminary sketch of interdisciplinary scholarship that decolonises revolution, thereby bringing visibility to that endeavour – while showing how those analyses have tended to focus on events during, or before, revolutionary

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105 Solana, "Between Publics and Privates."

106 Human Rights Watch, *Off the Radar: Human Rights in the Tindouf Refugee Camps* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2014), 3 and 64-69.

107 Solana, "Between Publics and Privates," 161.

times. Second, then, I argued that extending the temporal purview of inquiry to encompass revolutions' afterlives further decolonises ways of thinking about revolution. Especially – but not exclusively – in the cases of revolutions that meet with overwhelming repression, a focus on afterlives highlights both the limitations of the reach of colonial violence for erasing revolutionary engagement and the ongoing significance of revolutionary agency in postrevolutionary times. Third, I began a discussion of some practical implications of decolonising perspectives on revolutions and their afterlives in postcolonial times: for inspiring future engagement, contesting contemporary counterrevolutionary violence and fortifying movements as militants encounter new challenges.

Amid proliferating calls for decolonisation in postcolonial times, extending those calls to ways of thinking about revolution serves as a reminder of how both decolonisation and revolution remain unfinished processes. For those committed to those projects, their unfinished nature has been the cause of much disappointment and frustration. A turn to these projects' afterlives, and the possibilities therein for decolonising ways of thinking about revolution, can offer some steps towards a hopeful retrieval and revitalisation of these unfinished projects.

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