"We always have a hope that one day we'll go back"

A qualitative interview study of life and activism in exile

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Abstract

In English: In the aftermath of the 2011 Bahraini uprising, many activists were forced into exile. This thesis is based on Skype interviews with exiled activists from Bahrain, who continue to engage with activism in exile. By discussing the research question of how political voice changes when an activist is forced into exile, the aim of the study is to better understand the dynamics of activism in the context of forced exile. Both the personal and the political life in exile is studied. The theoretical framework that is employed is based on the concepts of exit and voice, as originally coined by Albert Hirschman and developed by Guillermo O'Donnell. The qualitative interview is followed by grounded theory analysis, which is used to categorize the interview material. In short, the analysis addresses the themes of responsibility, reach in exile, credibility of voice, ethics of engaging with activism in exile and safety. Additionally, feelings of distance and guilt, time, and thoughts on exile and return are themes that address the more personal aspects of exile. The analysis shows advantages and disadvantages of using political voice in exile, as well as the difficulties and challenges of life in exile.

Keywords: Exile, activism, Bahrain, repression, political voice, Hirschman, qualitative interviewing

Abstract

In Swedish: Efter revolutionen i Bahrain 2011 tvingades många aktivister i exil. Denna uppsats baseras på Skype-intervjuer med exilaktivister från Bahrain som fortsätter att engagera sig som aktivister i exil. Genom att diskutera frågeställningen om hur politisk röst förändras när en aktivist tvingas till exil, är syftet med den här studien att bättre förstå aktivismens dynamik i samband med tvångsflykt. Både det personliga och det politiska livet i exil studeras. Det teoretiska ramverket som används är baserat på begreppen "exit" och "voice", som ursprungligen myntades av Albert Hirschman och har utvecklats av Guillermo O'Donnell. Den kvalitativa intervjun följs av "grounded theory analysis", som används för att kategorisera intervjumaterialet. Kort sagt behandlar analysen temana ansvar, tillgänglighet i exil, röstens trovärdighet, exilaktivismens etik och säkerhet. Dessutom är känslor av avstånd och skuld, tid, och tankar om exil och hemkomst teman som tar itu med den mer personliga delen av exil. Analysen visar fördelar och nackdelar med att använda politisk röst i exil, liksom svårigheterna och utmaningarna i livet i exil.

Nyckelord: Exil, aktivism, Bahrain, förtryck, politisk röst, Hirschman, kvalitativ intervjumetod

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1   Introduction

In the early 2010s, the world witnessed what was later termed the Arab Spring. In 2011 in Bahrain – a small Gulf country with a long history of regime oppression against its own population – many people took to the streets to demand democratic reforms and human rights. Bahraini authorities, with the help of military forces from Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait, cracked down on the protests, killing, hurting and jailing many people. In the aftermath of the uprising in Bahrain, the regime also forced many activists into exile. Because the situation is still dangerous and many activists have multiple cases and sentences against them in Bahrain, these exiles cannot return to the country. For this thesis, I have interviewed exiled activists from Bahrain to explore the themes of life and activism in exile.

Although exile can be self-enforced, it is mostly involuntary. Exile can refer to many things, such as exile politics and exile as an existential condition. It is both a means of politics for states like Bahrain and for activists who are forced into exile. As an existential condition, exile concerns the feelings and perceptions of displacement. Activism is here defined as an act of opposition against the regime. This opposition can take different forms, but is in this context essentially about articulating dissent against the authoritarian regime's violations of human rights.

In this thesis, the concept of voice is used to capture each individual's expression of opposition. Voice is both an analytical tool as well as the expression of thoughts about a lived experience. The concept of voice can therefore be approached in different ways, but is here understood as a political expression, as explained by Albert Hirschman and developed by Guillermo O'Donnell. In the exiled activist figure, there is both personal and political, and they intersect in ways that make it hard to separate between them.

The question of how we should classify a political exile is a topic under study, which scholars from different fields debate. In this thesis, I use the terms 'exiled activist' and 'activist in exile' instead of the term 'political exile', as this does not encom-

pass the sample of activists interviewed. One criterion for classification that has been brought up is the activist's "will to return by any means".[1] Yossi Shain, an influential scholar in exile politics, defines an activist in exile as someone who "engages in political activity, directed against the policies of a home regime, the home regime itself or the political system as a whole, and aimed at creating circumstances favorable to his return."[2] In line with this, exiled activist is here defined as a person who continues with activism from exile and has a strong will to return to the country of origin.

1.1 Thesis statement, purpose and research question

As introduced above, the focus of this thesis is the political voice of activists in exile. Activism in Bahrain brings to light the meaning of voice – and silence. Activists voice their dissent against the Bahraini government, but they are silenced by threats, by imprisonment and by getting killed. In a way, exile is also a tool to silence opposition. However, it's likewise an escape for activists out of the dichotomy of voice and silence. In exile, activists are able to use their voice and at the same time avoid becoming a direct target of the authoritarian regime. Yet the transition to activism in exile is more complex than that.

Being an activist in many ways defines life in exile. Exiles from Bahrain are on one hand in exile because of the activism they carried out in Bahrain. On the other hand, the activism they engage in now, in exile, is both facilitated and confined by this environment. As exile is also an existential condition, it entails many challenges in the personal sphere. Activism in exile therefore involves a linkage between the political and the personal, even though the activism in this case does not necessarily have to concern politics as such. This linkage or relationship between activism and exile – political and personal – is of interest in this thesis.

The main purpose of the study is to better understand the dynamics of activism in the context of forced exile. This is done through listening to exiled activists from

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1 Beaugrand, Claire, "In and Out of the Bahraini Opposition: How Years of Political Exile Led to the Opening of an International Front During the 2011 Crisis in Bahrain" in *Transit States: Labour Migration & Citizenship in the Gulf,* Khalaf, Abdulhadi, AlShehabi, Omar & Hanieh, Adam (ed.), Pluto Press, London, 2015, p. 205.
2 Shain, Yossi, "Who is a Political Exile? Defining a Field of Study for Political Science," *International Migration*, vol. 26, no. 4, 1988, p.394.

Bahrain. Through collecting experiences from a number of individuals, another aim of this research is to attempt to 'fill in' the concept of exile activism. Although there is already much academic work in this area, "exile activism" does not seem to be a concept that is being used. However, in order to understand the whole picture, I believe that the concept could be useful, and thus contributing to the field. To meet the main purpose of this study, the thesis addresses the following research question:

How does political voice change when an activist is forced into exile? This question cannot be answered directly from the interviews in this study. It is rather a question that opens up for discussion. The dynamics of voice will naturally change in a different context with other circumstances, but how? In exile, the activist has possibilities to affect new structures, but is also limited to many others. What follows from the context of exile, as discussed above, are also personal struggles. In order to understand how they influence political voice, they are necessary to take into account.

1.2   Material and delimitations

The primary material in this study consists of interviews conducted via Skype with exiled activists from Bahrain. The primary material is determined by the design and the procedure of the methodology, which consequently means that I, as a researcher, can somewhat control the content of the material. This is further addressed in the methodology section. When it comes to the sample, it is important to note that *I make* the participants a group, based on their background and experiences.

Participants

The sample of interviewees consists of seven Bahraini activists, including four men and three women, living in four different European countries – United Kingdom, France, Denmark and Germany. They have various backgrounds in human rights organizations, political parties, journalism and organizing protests. As a result of different measures by Bahraini authorities, they were forced into exile in the aftermath of the 2011 Bahraini uprising. Although not all of them choose to define themselves in terms of "human rights activist" or "human rights defender", they have in different ways engaged with human rights issues, such as freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Most of them have been arrested several times in Bahrain and some are victims of torture. All of

them have continued with their activism abroad, albeit as we shall see mostly with a different approach compared to when they were still in Bahrain.

Another aspect of the sample is the phase of exile. All participants except for one, who grew up in exile, are in a relatively early phase of exilic life. They have spent a few years abroad, of which the first have involved the asylum-seeking process. The fact that they are still settling down in some way affects their activism as well as how they perceive the exile community, if they consider that there is one.

Furthermore, thinking of exile as in several phases brings forward the concept 'diaspora'. This is a debated concept and one which mostly links to a later phase of exile, and therefore less relevant for this study. A diaspora is more of a community with orientation towards a certain country or land, with emphasis on community.[3] It is difficult to identify whether there is a Bahraini diaspora, especially when considering the activists that were forced into exile after 2011. Nevertheless, some of the activists in my interviews depict a transition from a temporary to a permanent state of exile. I would say that most of them live in a more permanent exile environment, as they have permanent residency in their respective countries, but that the transition to this environment was quite recent. For most, it is still a matter of getting accustomed to a life and activism in exile.

Secondary material

In the process of writing this thesis, different books and articles from scientific journals have assisted me in coming closer to what activism in exile means. In this section, I address the form of the secondary material, while the content of it is discussed throughout the thesis.

When it comes to the theoretical framework of the thesis, I have based it on the book *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* by Albert Hirchman. In order to apply his economic theory, I have used Guillermo O'Donnell's article on political voice in Argentine. *The Politics of Exile* is a research-based book written as a novel. This book has helped me tremendously in comprehending exile as an existential condition and given me insight into the art of listening. The subject matter of the book is very different from Bahrain, but the theme is similar: displacement and exile.

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3 Olsson, Erik, "From exile to post-exile: the diasporisation of Swedish Chileans in historical contexts", *Social Identities*, vol. 15, no. 5, 2009, p. 661-662.

In order to conduct the interviews, I have read both methodological books on qualitative interviewing as well as articles in which the method is put to use. The books have generally acted as the starting point for developing my own method. One example of an article that has been helpful and which I discuss in the section on previous research is *Exit and voice in a digital age: Iran's exiled activists and the authoritarian state* by Marcus Michaelsen. This has been useful both as inspiration for my interviews and for understanding how the theoretical framework can be applied in a similar context.

Furthermore, in the chapter about Bahrain's historical context, the main source I have used for gaining an understanding about the background is *The Modernization of Autocracy* by Fred H. Lawson. Similarly, J.E. Peterson writes about the historical development of Bahraini politics in the edited volume *Political Liberalization in the Gulf*.

1.3   Research ethics assessment

When conducting interviews, I deal with people directly, which always involves ethical considerations. Here, I mention the three main considerations of my interview and research process: informed consent, the use of online interviewing and vulnerability of interviewees.

When interviewing people, whether on Skype or face-to-face, it is important to keep the communication as transparent as possible, not least before the actual interview. One part of achieving this is to obtain informed consent from the interviewees, which sounds more complicated and formal than it actually is. Informed consent essentially means that interviewees receive information about the study that they are agreeing to participate in. Before initiating my interviews, I made sure that the interviewees approved of the conversation being audio recorded. The information given to the interviewees first and foremost concerned the purpose of the research. I also informed them about the length of the interview, which I said would not be longer than an hour. They were told that they can stop the interview at any time and that they can withdraw their participation at any time and for any reason up until the thesis is made public. I said that they will not be identified with their name, unless they want to, and that their contact details will not be archived. Lastly, I promised that they will be able to access the thesis when it is finished.

Doing interviews on Skype entails some additional ethical considerations. Online interviewing means that there can be uncertainty about how the data is stored and whether conversations are monitored.[4] Most activists participating in my study have been threatened personally in exile as well as some indirectly through their relatives. Some of them assume or even expect that their actions are monitored by Bahraini authorities. It can therefore be considered dangerous for them to participate. However, because of their background in activism, the interviewees in my study are aware of the situation and know what they can and want to disclose. Their reflections on the topic have also been collected in other interviews with the media and with other researchers. Moreover, Skype interviews can also alleviate some ethical risks, for example the right to withdrawal. It is easier for an interviewee to withdraw and hang up in a Skype interview, than to physically leave the room of a face-to-face interview.[5]

The last ethical consideration is the vulnerability of the participants. The participants are activists in exile – an identity which is associated to many personal challenges. Most of them were also participating in protests during the Bahraini uprising, which some of them mention in the interviews. When they are talking about these subjects, it can bring back memories from the past and concern about the future, putting them in an uncomfortable position. What I need to focus on as an interviewer is to establish rapport between me and the interviewees and make sure that they are comfortable. This is further addressed in the methodology section.

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4 Lo Iacono, Valeria, Symonds, Paul and Brown, David H. K, "Skype as a Tool for Qualitative Research Interviews", *Sociological Research Online*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2016, p. 9.
5 Deakin, Hannah, and Wakefield, Kelly, "Skype interviewing: Reflections of two PhD researchers", *Qualitative Research*, vol. 14, no. 5, 2014, p. 610.

2 Theory and methodology

This section presents the main theoretical framework and the methodology of the thesis. The theory I use is based on the concepts of exit and voice, as originally coined by Albert Hirschman and developed by Guillermo O'Donnell. This was chosen in order to approach the concept of political voice, which is the topic under study. The purpose is not to explain how political voice changes when an activist is forced into exile, but rather to understand which factors play a role in this context. The method, which is qualitative interviewing and subsequent interpretation and analysis of data, assists me in gathering data and categorizing the interview material. How theory and methodology are employed more specifically is addressed in the analysis section.

2.1 Theory

The main theoretical framework of this thesis is based on Albert Hirschman's work *Exit, voice and loyalty.* Hirschman was an influential economist, who's field, at first glance, may not be the obvious choice for this thesis. However, both Hirschman himself and other scholars have applied the concepts of exit, voice and loyalty to other fields of study, such as transnational migration and exile politics.[6]

In this thesis, I am less inspired by Hirschman's original work and more so by the scholars who use Hirchman's theory in the field of exile politics. One of them is Guillermo O'Donnell, who applies and develops Hirschman's concepts in the context of the 1976 Argentine coup d'état. In O'Donnell's article *On the Fruitful Convergences of Hirschman's Exit, Voice and Loyalty, and Shifting Involvements. Reflections from the recent Argentine Experience,* he distinguishes between "vertical voice" and "horizontal voice". Vertical voice is the voice citizens use to communicate with the government.

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6 Hoffman, Bert, "Bringing Hirschman Back In: Conceptualizing Transnational Migration as a Reconfiguration of "Exit", "Voice", and "Loyalty"", *German Institute of Global and Area Studies Working Papers*, no. 91, 2008, p. 6.

Horizontal voice is the communication between citizens. [7] Apart from "political voice" and "exile", these concepts act as the main point of departure in this thesis. In order to understand how scholars such as O'Donnell apply Hirschman's ideas, and to explain the application of the theoretical framework in this thesis, it is useful to first provide an outline of Hirchman's theory.

In *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*, Albert Hirschman explains that all companies and organizations, at some point, will experience a deterioration in their performances, as it naturally fluctuates over time. Hirschman argues that the members of the company or organization can act in two ways when such a downtrend occurs. Either they can choose to *exit* and leave the organization or they can choose *voice*, which means expressing dissatisfaction directly with the administration.[8] *Loyalty* is not relevant in this case, as it concerns staying in an organization despite discontent. Activating *voice* is a way of trying to change the activities of the company or organization.[9]

Applying his schemata to politics, Hirschman explains that *exit* means leaving a country. *Voice*, as described above, means articulating dissatisfaction. In this case it is against a regime. Hirschman argues that *voice* is a concept that is broad, and in this regard more public than private.[10] Although Hirschman originally contended that exit undermines voice, he later revised this causality into a more complex framework, in which he means that exit instead can lead to more participation and voice.[11]

The relationship between exit and voice is of interest when looking at activism in exile, as this topic deals with both voice and exit – activists are continuing with their activism also in exile. Bert Hoffman, a researcher on transnational migration politics, applies Hirchman's paradigm to research on transnational social spaces and political exile. In line with Hirschman's modification of exit and voice, Hoffman argues that using voice from abroad can both be more direct (than earlier) as a result of modernized communication and transport. Using voice in exile also helps to shape the attitudes of inter-

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7 O'Donnell, Guillermo, "On the Fruitful Convergences of Hirschman's Exit, Voice and Loyalty, and Shifting Involvements. Reflections from the recent Argentine Experience", *Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies*, University of Notre Dame, Working paper 58, p. 3-4.
8 Hirschman, Albert, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1970, p.3-4.
9 Hirschman, Albert, 1970, p. 30; 37.
10 Hirchman, Albert, 1970, p. 16.
11 Hirchman, Albert, "Exit, Voice, and the Fate of the German Democratic Republic: An Essay in Conceptual History", *World Politics*, Vol. 45, No. 2, 1993, p. 176-177.

national actors towards the homeland.[12]

This conceptual frame needs further adaption to the specifics of the case of Bahraini exile. In order to do this, I adopt the perspective of Guillermo O'Donnell. He "transplants" Hirschman's ideas to a "deeply repressive and authoritarian context". Although O'Donnell bases some parts of his research on interviews with individuals who are not in exile, his approach is helpful for this thesis. This is partly because the authoritarian context, to which he applies the modified Hirschmanian scheme, resembles the Bahraini context before and after the uprising in 2011. Bahrain, like Argentine, can be classified as a "bureaucratic-authoritarian regime". In both countries, popular mobilization took place across all social sectors which formed massive demonstrations. In the aftermath of the 1976 Argentine coup d'état as well as the 2011 Bahraini uprising, the regimes targeted many activists, and forced many of them into exile. [13]

O'Donnell is primarily valuable for studying life and activism in exile because he applies the theoretical framework to a specific context. He also makes a clearer definition of voice by distinguishing between vertical and horizontal voice. Vertical voice implies that citizens address the government. Although citizens can do this individually, the most common way to address the government is collective. Horizontal voice captures the way citizens address each other, which is both verbal and non-verbal. I believe that O'Donnell's categorization of voice explains a difference between political and personal voice.

What is discernible from the account above is the relativity of political voice. In a democratic context where people access politics, vertical voice is a fundamental element. Vertical voice as a collective expression also requires unrestricted horizontal voice – that people can organize themselves to affect those "on top". The horizontal voice is therefore also an important feature of a non-repressive and democratic context.[14] O'Donnell also argues that horizontal voice demonstrates "the irreducible core of political involvement"[15]. In an authoritarian context, vertical voice is not allowed and horizontal voice is often severely restricted. However, people who live under the most authoritarian regimes still have ways of expressing dissent. Furthermore, activists who are forced into exile mostly end up in a context that is non-repressive, which means that

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12 Hoffman, 2008, p. 6; 11.
13 O'Donnell, 1986, p. 1; 6-8.
14 O'Donnell, 1986, p. 3-4.
15 O'Donnell, 1986, p. 16-17.

they are free to use their political voice. However, the government and the people, who are the recipients of their activism are not present. This means that political voice takes a different form in exile.

O'Donnell limits himself to the *political* social communications of horizontal voice.[16] This is a point where our perceptions on the topic diverge. In this thesis, it is relevant to also look at social communication that concerns the personal life in exile, as I believe it is inextricably linked to the activism. This is a point that O'Donnell later makes himself by describing the "capacity [of horizontal voice] of linking the most personal with the most public."[17] The reason why O'Donnell approaches voice in a mere political sense is perhaps because the focus is not on 'exit'.

I am aware that the theoretical framework covers more exile politics than exile as an existential condition. This is a conscious choice. The purpose of my study is to give attention to the political voice and the activism, which in itself is linked to personal challenges in exile. It is also difficult to systematically study exile as an existential condition. In order to have some theoretical reference to the parts of the interview material that deal with the personal aspects of exile, I use themes from the book *The Politics of Exile* by Elizabeth Dauphinee. This is addressed in the section on literary review and previous research.

2.2   Methodology

The methodology used in this study is semi-structured qualitative interviewing. Semi-structured interviewing is a method that, although structured by a set of questions, allows the researcher flexibility to meet the individual interviewee's story.[18] This lends itself well to exploring the complexities of life and activism in exile. Although there are also other methodological alternatives to studying the topic of exile, I believe, that in order to answer the research question of how the political voice changes when an activist is forced into exile, the qualitative interview is most helpful as it invites thoughts on the entirety of a situation. It allows insight into the personal and the political, which is of in-

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16 O'Donnell, 1986, p. 3-4.
17 O'Donnell, 1986, p. 17.
18 Ryen, Anne, *Kvalitativ intervju: från vetenskapsteori till fältstudier*, Liber ekonomi, Malmö, 2004, p. 46.

terest in this thesis. In accordance with literature on qualitative interviewing, I explain the procedure as well as the interpretation and analysis of the data, following the time-line of the interview process.

The procedure

The procedure of a semi-structured qualitative interview is flexible. In this thesis, the procedure implies the process that begins with choosing the sample of interviewees to conducting the interviews. Convenience sampling was used to get in contact with possible interviewees. Through a previously existing contact, I was able to get in touch with Bahrainis, who are engaged in activism in exile. A few others were contacted after looking into Bahraini activism on Twitter. The potential interviewees received an email with an invitation to participate, including the purpose of the study, my background and information about consent. During the interviews, some of the interviewees offered to spread the word about the study to other Bahraini activists in exile. These interviewees were contacted again after the interview to obtain the contact details of the new possible interviewees. This way, I was able to reach a larger community.

The individuals who agreed to participate were sent a list of topics before the interview. The reason for this was to prepare the interviewees and give them some time to reflect about the topic and possible answers. It was also a good way for me as an interviewer to formulate the questions for the interview guide. I divided the list of topics into two themes: activism and exile. These themes were each further divided into five smaller categories. Although the themes are overlapping, I believe that the categorization helped to make the topic clearer. There were no specific questions as this would result in a too rigid structure that would most likely restrict rather than open up for reflection. The list of themes is included below:

Activism

- Type of activism
- How the activism differs in exile
- Communication: Internet and social media
- Media
- Working with other activists in exile

Exile

- What it means to you
- Relationship to home country (Bahrain)
- Relationship to exile country
- Bahraini authorities and repression
- Generations in exile

The common ground for different semi-structured qualitative interviews is the interview guide, which is a tool that is comprised of the questions that are to be asked during the interview. [19] As mentioned above, the questions in the interview guide for this study were formulated with the help of structuring themes and sub-themes of exile and activism. Conducting interviews and formulating my own questions as an interviewer is an advantage, because it allows me, by some means, to decide on a tentative research question before knowing the material. I could steer the material in certain directions depending on what questions I asked. When organizing the questions, I also took into account the situation for the interviewees. Because questions about the interviewees' activism can be considered less intimate, I decided to put them in the beginning of the interview guide. The qualitative interview is supposed to be exploratory. In keeping with this, the questions in the interview guide are also generally open-ended. The full interview guide is included in the appendix on page 40.

The interviews were conducted in November 2017 via Skype. Before starting to ask questions, I gave the interviewees a recap of the purpose of the study as well as practical information about the interviewee's rights. I began with asking some everyday questions, so as to 'warm up' the interviewees. During the interviews I also took notes in order to start processing the material and as backup in case the recording was not working. The interviewees were personal in their reflections and were given time to develop their responses. Sometimes they came back to earlier questions to elaborate. In line with literature on qualitative interviewing, which emphasizes the importance of the interviewer's ability to focus on the individual in each interview,[20] I tried to remain as

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19 Ryen, 2004, p. 44.
20 Ryen, 2004, p. 46.

flexible as possible.

During the interviews, I opened up for different follow-up questions depending on the context of each interview. My approach to the interview responses was to keep in mind the interviewees' "insider" knowledge of the situation in Bahrain and in exile.[21] This meant that I adjusted some questions to fit their response. In the first interviews, it was more difficult to structure the conversation and to know how to approach the responses. I developed my skills over time, which meant that each interview got a slightly different character. In qualitative interviewing, as it is a conversation between people, this is expected.

The interview length ranged from 30 minutes to 70 minutes, depending on how much the interviewees shared. After the interviews were finished, the interviewees were asked if they would be okay with keeping in touch if more questions would come up. All agreed to this and some of them offered doing a second interview as well. Doing more than one interview is encouraged in qualitative interviewing, as it grants the interviewer time to establish rapport and to acquire more precise material in regards to the research question. However, I did not find the time to do this in the framework of this thesis. The activists that I interviewed were also very used to the format of the qualitative interview, which meant that they quickly got into the issues of relevance for this study. The interviews thus generated much material already the first time I spoke to the interviewees.

Interpretation and analysis of data

The next part of the interview process is the interpretation and the analysis of the data. It is important to note that the collection of data intersects with the subsequent interpretation and analysis.[22] This means that the procedure and the analysis and interpretation of data, as I have structured it here, are two components of a process rather than two separate parts of the methodology. In order to assist the reader and clarify what is to be done, I have chosen to approach the interpretation and analysis of the data through *grounded theory analysis* as explained in the *Handbook of Interview Research*. I will approach the material in a constructionist way, which entails looking at the data as shared experiences

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21 Ryen, 2004, p. 49; 106.
22 Ryen, 2004, p.108-109.

between me as the researcher and the interviewees. The context of the interview is also important.[23]

Before I could start to interpret and analyze the data, I transcribed the interview recordings into text form. Thereafter the first question was: "What is happening in the data?", which initiated the coding process. Coding means "distill[ing] events and meanings without losing their essential properties".[24] The first step of coding is to start to think of the data analytically and try to systematize it.[25] When I read through the transcripts the first time, I highlighted the sections relevant to the topic under study.

The second step of coding consists of generalizing and categorizing the material.[26] Both of the steps of coding, as explained here, converged in the interpretation and analysis of my data. I started categorizing the material thoroughly and put labels on the themes that emerged. Sometimes, I combined two themes, as they describe two sides of one issue. What is important, which is stressed in the grounded theory analysis, is that the researcher is reflexive throughout the process.[27] The themes that came out of the interpretation of the material act as the base of the analysis.

23 Charmaz, Kathy, "Qualitative Interviewing and Grounded Theory Analysis" in *Handbook of interview research: context & method,* Gubrium, Jaber F. & Holstein, James A. (ed.), SAGE, Thousand Oaks, California, 2001, p. 677-678.
24 Charmaz, 2001, p. 684.
25 Charmaz, 2001, p. 684.
26 Charmaz, 2001, p. 684-687.
27 Charmaz, 2001, p. 692.

3   The historical context

The interviews with exiled activists in this study demonstrate the importance of understanding the historical context of their displacement and approach to activism. For example, all of the activists I interviewed who are based in the UK spoke about the exile country's historical relationship to Bahrain and its implications for their activism in exile. This overview is also necessary for the subsequent review of literature and previous research. In this section I provide a brief outline of Bahrain's historical context from the Al Khalifa's conquest of Bahrain in the late 1700s up until today.

The ruling family of today, the Al Khalifa, conquered Bahrain in 1783. In order to uphold its rule, the Al Khalifa sought support from Britain. Britain was in turn able to make use of the position of the Al Khalifa to protect its trade in the region. The British control expanded and in the beginning of the 20th century, Bahrain became a British colonial protectorate. As a result of this development, the Al Khalifa dynasty could consolidate its rule over Bahrain.[28]

During the 20th century, different oppositional movements challenged the Al Khalifa's authoritarian rule. In the 1950s and the 1960s, liberal and radical nationalists tried to force social and political reforms, and in 1971, Bahrain became independent. The Al Khalifa family however maintained their predominance by controlling most sectors of society.[29] In the 1980s and the 1990s, Shia Islamism emerged as another oppositional movement, responding to the unrestricted power of the Al Khalifa, who are Sunni.[30] Although the different movements did succeed in initiating discussions of reform and making some changes, the regime also severely repressed them. One way of doing this was to force activists into exile, creating what can be termed different "waves" of Bahraini exile.

After many periods of unrest and tensions between the regime and the majority of

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28 Lawson, Fred H., *The Modernization of Autocracy*, Westview Press, 1989, p. 27; 28-29; 31; 42-43.
29 Lawson, 1989, p. 64.
30 Beaugrand, 2015, p. 202.

the population, there was hope for change as a new Sheik acceded in 1999. He proclaimed himself King, and Bahrain went from Sheikdom to Kingdom. The King initiated several democratic reforms, starting with releasing political detainees and letting exiles back into the country in 2001. He called for a national dialogue about a new constitution and people started to talk about politics freely. The hopes and expectations about a new era were however shattered quickly. Reform was slow and the King's promises of change did not live up to the expectations of many activists. [31]

On 14 of February in 2011, in the context of the Arab Spring, people took to the streets to demand democracy and human rights. The uprising brought together people from different oppositional factions, which resulted in massive pressure on the regime. At first, it looked like discussions of reform would be revived. Instead, with the help of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait, Bahraini military forces violently cracked down on the protests, killing and hurting activists. Many activists were imprisoned and some received life-time sentences. During the uprising and in the aftermath of it, dissidents were also forced into exile. The situation now in Bahrain in 2016 and 2017 is different from 2011. The crackdown is not as visible now, but it is just as present, and human rights violations are more systematic than before. Bahraini authorities have also started to target families of exiled activists.

31 Peterson, J.E., "Bahrain: Reform – Promise and Reality" in *Political Liberalization in the Persian Gulf*, Teitelbaum, Joshua (ed.), HURST, London, 2009, p. 158; 160-161

4 Literature review and previous research

The selection of literature and scholarly articles in this thesis is based on two different, but overlapping themes – exile politics and exile as an existential condition. I have previously explained the purpose of connecting the personal and the political when analyzing life and activism in exile. The selection of literature and articles therefore reflect both of these topics.

Exile politics, as the title suggests, addresses the political side of exile. I focus on research that brings up perspectives of the activists in exile, the exile politics of the country that forced them into exile and the political environment of the host country. Research studies applying Hirschman's paradigm on the context of exile politics are reviewed here. The second theme addresses the personal side of exile. I discuss literature and research that bring up themes of time and space, loss, identity and guilt.

4.1 Exile politics

One perspective of exile politics is the exiled activist's ability to internationalize opposition. This means that although authoritarian regimes force activists into exile in order to silence opposition, the conflict reaches actors in other countries, as activists continue to speak up for their cause in exile. This subject is also discussed in research on Bahraini exile politics. The activists who were forced into exile between the 1950s and the 1990s brought Bahraini politics into their exile countries. When they were allowed back into Bahrain in 2001, they had maintained their networks and continued to develop international opposition in Bahrain. Consequently, they had widened and internationalized the Bahraini political space.[32] It can be argued that the activists' links to the international community, in addition to many other factors, helped to push the revolution in 2011 forward. It is true that activists can reach NGOs and other international actors to a greater extent in exile, which is an experience that the interviewees in my study describe as

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32 Beaugrand, Claire, 2015, p. 199-206; 213; 216.

well. However, activism also involves the relationships between activists, which is partly lost in exile, as activists are not in direct contact with each other. Hence, the question remains of what *cannot* be reached from exile. For example, which networks could the exiled opposition not communicate with before being allowed back into the country? What follows from this? These are important questions to ask, because they open up for a discussion about the conflicting aspects of exile politics.

One perspective of research which addresses a conflicting aspect of exile politics is looking at the relationship between the country that forces its citizens into exile and the country that accepts them. For the authoritarian regime, exile is a means of politics to silence opposition, which is what Albert Hirschman explains through the perspective of exit and voice. Several scholars have used this framework in different contexts of exile. One of them is Shu-Yun Ma who has studied Chinese exile politics. Ma argues that independent of the reason of exit – "leaving the country" – the voice of opponents is less influential in exile. In this way, exit becomes a "tool for managing voice" for the Chinese government. [33] This is similar in the case of Bahrain.

Furthermore, the exile politics of the home country does not end when dissidents have left; it targets opponents also when they are in exile. One subject of research that is in an early stage is the study of authoritarian regimes' use of the internet and new digital technology. Although the internet offers infinite possibilities for exiles to continue with their activism abroad, it also opens up for authoritarian regimes to exploit them. In an interview study with Iranian activists and journalists, Marcus Michaelsen employs the framework of exit and voice to highlight the repression beyond borders. He argues that Iranian state actors can use new technology to punish vertical voice and undermine horizontal voice. The regime is able to expand its power beyond borders and distance exiles from networks inside Iran. [34]

The other side of the relationship between the country that forces its citizens into exile and the country that accepts them is the exile politics of the host country. In the Bahraini context, the study of British-Bahraini relations would belong to this perspective. A central idea is that the political environment of the host country determines the

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33 Ma, Shu-Yun, "The Exit, Voice, and Struggle to Return of Chinese Political Exiles", *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 66*, no. 3, 1993, p. 371; 374-375.
34 Michaelsen, Marcus, "Exit and voice in a digital age: Iran's exiled activists and the authoritarian state", *Globalizations*, 2016, p. 2-3; 12.

reach of the work of the exiled activist or diaspora.[35] As I pointed out in the previous section, the relationship between Britain and Bahrain's royal family extends far back into the past. In the UK, there is political resistance to listen to the demands of Bahraini exiles, as this might complicate the friendly relationship with the Bahraini regime.[36] This is a significant part of the political environment in which UK-based Bahraini exiles find themselves.

4.2   Exile as an existential condition

In order to understand exile, scholars also study exile as an existential condition. This means that the focus of research is on the life in exile – how people act, feel and perceive the situation. Seteney Shami explains that when studying the social implications of displacement, it is imperative to take into consideration the dimensions of time and space. This constitutes a part of the entire process of displacement, which is further shaped by historical, economic and political forces, some of which I have already mentioned.[37] From her perspective, it is possible to see the intersection between personal and political.

With Shami's recommendation in mind I start with the perspective of time. In exile, the perception of time changes. The sudden breakup of environment creates a rupture in the timeline of exiles, who tend to think of time as "before and after" being forced into exile. Therefore, present time does not existent in the same way as before. [38] This is illustrated well in the book *The Politics of Exile* by Elizabeth Dauphinee. The two main fictive characters of the book – the professor and Stojan Sokolović, a refugee from Serbia – discuss homesickness. Stojan Sokolović responds to the question of whether he feels at home in Canada: "It's like being trapped between two worlds […] But more than that, it's like being trapped in two different times. It's strange."[39] This passage gives life to the confusion of time and space in exile. It explains something that

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35 M.S. Laguerre, *Diaspora, Politics and Globalization*, Palgrave MACMILLAN, New York, 2006, p. xi.
36 Holman, Zoe, "On the side of decency and democracy: The history of British-Bahraini relations and translational contestation" in *Bahrain's Uprising*, Shehabi, Ala'a & Jones, Marc Owen (ed.), Zed Books, London, 2015, p. 196.
37 Shami, Seteney, "The Social Implications of Population Displacement and Resettlement: An Overview with a Focus on th Arab Middl East", *The International Migration Review*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 1993, p.11.
38 Cornejo, Marcela, "Political exile and the construction of identity: A life stories approach", *Journal Of Community & Applied Social Psychology,* vol. 18, no. 4, 2008, p. 334; 340.
39 Dauphinee, Elizabeth, *The politics of exile*, Routledge, London, 2013, p. 112

is hard to understand, but is something that is often experienced in displacement.

Research in this field often links the perspective of time to the feeling and experience of loss. There is loss of time, but there is also loss of environment. Edward Said meant that exile is a loss of solidity. This loss takes up much of the exile's life, as it needs to be compensated for. [40] This is also illustrated in *The Politics of Exile.* Through another character, who is also a refugee in Canada, Dauphinee conveys the feeling of loss; "She [Jelena Milanović] felt that she had lost something that could not be regained, that she was looking for something that did not exist".[41] It is difficult to know what this "something" is, other than that it cannot be regained. It can be the experience of loss, like the passing of a family member or friend. It can also be the feeling of loss of certainty – the loss of what is familiar and solid.

Both the changed perception of time and the experience and feeling of loss are aspects that force an adaption of identity. In a way, identity involves how we feel, act and perceive a situation – the explanation I gave for exile as an existential condition. This is a research area that encompasses not only exiles, but also other types of refugees. In a study about identity and the Chilean exile experience, Marcela Cornejo concludes that there are three tensions in the relationship between identity and exile. First, identity changes as there is a conflict between continuity and discontinuity. Second, identity is affected by the exile's thoughts on what would be the ideal situation and what is real. Lastly, the construction of identity depends on the view of exile as temporary versus permanent state.[42]

Finally, I want to bring up the perspective of guilt. Feelings of guilt is a theme that is found throughout the book *The Politics of Exile.* It is described from the perspective of the fictive character Milan Milanović, who feels responsible for another person's death. Both at home and in exile, he feels his heart beating in his mouth and how guilt fills the space between his ribs.[43] This is a recurring episode of the book, which shows the difficulty to find peace in exile. It is not necessarily only about death in war. In many cases, it is also about the guilt of leaving loved ones behind.

In summary, I have identified two approaches of studying exile. Scholars using the

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40 Said, Edward W., "Reflections on Exile" in *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*, Said, Edward W. (ed.), Granta, London, 2001, p.179.
41 Dauphinee, 2013, p. 123.
42 Cornejo, 2008, p. 345.
43 Dauphinee, 2013, p. 94.

first approach focus on the political aspects of exile, namely how different actors pursue exile politics. The second approach is the study of the personal challenges of exile. My understanding of the academic field is that these approaches are generally separated, although there are some overlaps. Because of the inextricable relationship between the personal and the political, I believe that it is valuable to combine the two approaches to build a holistic understanding of exile – both of the life and the activism in exile.

5   Analysis

The interviews are analyzed by putting the method to use and by employing the theoretical framework and previous research. I employ the theoretical framework by applying and discussing "exit" and "voice" – both vertical and horizontal voice. I link it to the research question and focus on how the context of forced exile changes political voice. Throughout the analysis, I come back to the intersection between the political and the personal.

In line with the grounded theory analysis, I have grouped the material into different themes. The method plays a role in the background in the way I have chosen to categorize and order the themes. The analysis starts with the themes that address the activism and ends with the themes that address the more personal life in exile. Furthermore, I emphasize the interviews as shared experiences by describing the interviewees' responses in the context of the interview. The names that are followed by an asterisk (*) are fictitious names to protect the identity of some participants. The other participants explicitly said that they were okay with the use of their real names.

5.1 Responsibility

Some interviewees described feeling greater responsibility and more pressure to push for change in Bahrain when in exile. This was one response that I got after asking the question of what it means for exiled activists that the situation in Bahrain has deteriorated in 2016 and 2017. My intention was to inquire about an exile's perspective on ongoing developments in the country. The quote below shows one effect of the worsening of the situation on Nabil Al-Aseri*:

> It has impacted [it] in two ways. First of all, one feels more responsible, because things went much dangerous back home and lots of people have been prosecuted. So the activist in exile feels that he is more responsible and he has to double his activity.

Nabil Al-Aseri* presents a correlation between exile and responsibility. The meaning of responsibility for him is about the pressure to be more active in exile, as people inside Bahrain are targeted. The worsening of the situation also increases responsibility. In this case, it appears that pressure comes from the activist himself, as there is no clear requirements from the outside – the people in Bahrain or the international community. It is the situation of exile that creates pressure and responsibility. It is possible to think of it as expectations of the expansion of voice if it is transferred to another, less authoritarian context. If horizontal and vertical voice are present, as is anticipated in a democratic context according to O'Donnell, it follows that there are expectations to utilize them. This results in both internal and external pressure on the activist in exile.

Some interviewees also pointed to the pressure from the outside. Jawad Fairooz, a former member of parliament in Bahrain, described a clear indication that a political solution cannot be reached soon, which is what puts pressure on the exiled activist. He said that "people are depending on those activists who are in exile". "The people" he are talking are probably activists inside Bahrain, but could also be international actors. It is perhaps even clearer in this example that there are expectations on voice in exile, that create pressure on the exiled activist. If voice is suppressed to the degree that almost all political voice is cut off, dependence on the activist in exile increases. This is in line with Hirschman's revision of exit and voice, in which he argues that exit can lead to more voice and participation. One of the reasons for this would be the pressure that comes from leaving. Consequently, it is not only a question of how dissent and voice change and to what extent, it is also a matter of what expectations of voice follow from "exit".

5.2 Reach in exile

In exile, activists can reach many international actors directly. In Europe, and especially in the UK, there are numerous possibilities to get in touch with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that do advocacy work on countries like Bahrain. Likewise, exiles can communicate directly with the international media. The participants in my interviews agreed on that these actors, which are very valuable to their activism, are easier to reach in exile.

Mohammed Saeed Darini*, talked about how amazed he was at the number of NGOs available in the UK; "there are many many doors, you can pick up any door and open it, and you will have their hearing." He also said that it is very easy to apply for

funding. I interpret the NGO:s as tools that facilitate the use of political voice. They exist both in Bahrain and in exile, but they are more or less accessible, and engaging with them is more or less dangerous. The tools for using political voice are more accessible in exile, which means that on one hand, political voice is strengthened.

Similarly, the media is also easier to reach in exile, which Mohammed* further pointed out: "All of the big media outlets, they have their offices here." Because the international media is closer to the activists in exile, the communication is usually facilitated. This means that activists can more quickly give information on Bahrain. Furthermore, Hussain Al-Zatary*, said that in exile: "I'm just doing everything. Like flying, like I can speak, I can tweet, I can travel, I can go to the Human Rights Council. I can do everything." According to Hussain*, the opportunities in exile are endless in comparison to what he could do in Bahrain. One of the examples he mentions is traveling, which is restricted for many activists in Bahrain. The ability to travel in exile opens up for using political voice in various international forums.

The reach and the opportunities that I refer to in this section can be categorized under vertical voice – voicing dissent against the government's politics. Although activists are not present inside Bahrain and the government is not within reach, they can direct their vertical voice towards NGOs, the media and global institutions, such as the UN. In exile, there are fewer logistical obstacles to using political voice. However, this does not necessarily mean that the political voice is listened to.

After speaking about the freedom of cooperating with NGOs and the media in the UK, Mohammed Saeed Darini* said that "this is the field that the government is allowing us to play in". He expressed that he felt confined in his activism in exile. Many exiled activists are frustrated, because it is difficult to make an impact on what happens in Bahrain. I stated earlier that international actors can be reached more directly in exile. Although this is true, activists are not present in the context that they are trying to change. The vertical voice that activists use in exile has to pass through secondary institutions, such as NGOs and the media, which is the field that Mohammed* refers to. This is part of the confinements of activism in exile.

Furthermore, Jawad Fairooz also said that "there is a limitation to this feeling [of freedom of space] when you are living in a country like the United Kingdom where they have a special relationship with Bahrain." Because of the close relationship between the UK and Bahrain, activist have to think about in what ways they can use their political voice. The political environment of the host country, as mentioned in the section on pre-

vious research, determines the reach of activism in exile.[44] Although activists have more opportunities to find good networks, they do not know how their work is monitored by the UK. This uncertainty limits that reach, which was described above. Activists' vertical voice is strengthened in exile, but it is also limited to those structures that do not have a direct impact.

5.3 Credibility of voice

I have explained that exiled activists are not present in the environment to which they direct their activism. In the interviews, I asked the participants to compare the activism in Bahrain and in exile. Other than the effect of not being in contact with the government of Bahrain, some participants expressed that the displacement also affects the credibility of the political voice.

Hussain Al-Zatary* talked about the loss of influence, legitimacy and credibility when forced into exile. He pointed first to the reach to international actors, which was analyzed above. He said that some people will only believe you if you are speaking from the ground, referring to what I believe is the international community. Secondly, he addressed the relationship to the people who are inside Bahrain:

> People just basically will say if you really believe in what you are saying, just come and join us under the fire, instead of sitting here in the cold cities.

Hussain* said that the issue of not being believed and having experienced a loss of credibility hurts. He mentioned that you cannot act in the same way when you are considered safe. Exit, in this context, means safety, which in turn affects voice. The risk of being inside Bahrain, which is lost in exile, becomes a constituent of the credible voice. The quote above also illustrates the theme of warmth versus cold, which is something that O'Donnell addresses in his article. O'Donnell writes about the warmth of social life, which is suppressed if horizontal voice is not allowed. The cold symbolizes the suppression of this sociability.[45] My interviews suggest that being in exile limits horizontal voice, which is also understandable. When in exile, although the Internet allows communication with the people still living in Bahrain, the social interaction is distant and different.

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44 See page 19.
45 O'Donnell, 1986, p.13-14.

The issue of credibility of voice puts the activist in exile in a difficult position. Although the activist has a strong background in the Bahraini cause and has maintained connections and communication with the local community, this information is not considered as valuable as before. Voice and loyalty is maintained by the activist, and perhaps even fortified in exile. However, the work they do is dependent on presence in Bahrain. At least, those who are on the receiving end of political voice – such as the media – do not consider the political voice of exiled activists as credible when they are not present on the ground.

The participants in my study also expressed that because of the loss of credibility, they have to be more active as activists, as explained in the theme of responsibility. Jawad Fairooz means that it is more challenging to be active in exile as "the outcome you are giving should be considered." He also said that "you should give enough proofs and evidence that you have something new to say to the international community". In order to compensate for the loss of credibility, exiled activists have to work harder.

Another aspect of the credibility of political voice in exile is the issue of having one's identity questioned. Many activists in my interviews described that they have been asked who they are supported by or whether they are agents from another country. Asma Darwish, a human rights activist based in France, described comments on social media against the exiled activist; "'you're Iranian agents, you are Shia, you are like that." She said that she does not take comments like these seriously, and instead blocks and deletes them. Other interviewees expressed more frustration about comments on social media and also by the traditional media. Irritation concerned being questioned continuously about their background and from where they received money.

The credibility of political voice is questioned after exit from Bahrain. This is the case because the opposite of exile is presence, which perceived from the international community, is what makes the political voice believable. It is again not the actual change of voice that is in focus, although this is also the case, but the issue of how voice is perceived by the outside – the international community and people in Bahrain.

5.4 Ethics of engaging with activism in exile

What kind of voice *can* an activist use in exile? This is a question that can be categorized under several themes. The theme I turn to now concerns the ethical dilemmas that many activists face in exile. Three of the participants in my interviews brought up different aspects of protesting, and whether an activist in exile can call for a protest inside

Bahrain. Although none of the activists said that they had called for protest from exile or would do it, they expressed thoughts that I believe form part of an ethical discussion. Mohammed Saeed Darini* specifically mentioned ethics when discussing protesting:

> There are some ethics that I cannot call for a protest inside Bahrain, because I'm outside. It's kind of shame on me to ask others, to put their lives in danger, but I'm protecting myself.

Mohammed* brings up the ethical aspect of safety when calling for a protest. Public protest could be understood as an expression of the political vertical voice, that is enabled by people coming together socially – thus also using horizontal voice. Because of connections to other activists in Bahrain, it is possible for exiled activists to use political voice indirectly, for example by calling for protest. However, the exiled activists do not do it. Mohammed* explains that it is the "shame" that stops him from doing it. How activists view ethics determines the scope of the political voice, because activists do not want to engage in activism if it puts other activists in danger. Another interviewee likewise said: "you are putting them in danger by themselves, while you are being safe outside". Shame is not necessarily a component of *exit*, but it is in various ways involved when linking exile with activism.

The question I asked in the beginning of this subsection – What kind of voice *can* an activist use in exile? – is probably also a question that activists in exile ask themselves. Maryam Al-Khawaja, a human rights activist based in Denmark, said that one of the differences of activism in exile is "being very conscious about the role you play". Because of the networks and the technology, activism in exile is not necessarily that much different from the activism in the country of origin. However, how you look at your role as an activist changes. Maryam continued: "Once you leave you have to recognize where you are and what your role is, and your role is no longer directing". An example of this could be going from organizing protests in Bahrain to doing advocacy work in exile. Recognizing what your role is and what it should be can be understood as reflecting about what kind of voice to use in exile. This includes reflections about the vertical voice – how activists think about which activities that they can organize in exile. In turn, this is connected to the horizontal voice and thinking of how activities or actions affect the people in Bahrain and in exile.

As a result, *exiting* causes changes to not only the activities, but also to the moral compass of the exiled activist. This is individual and personal, but about political mat-

ters which are collective. Other than organizing protests, which is perhaps a topic on which most activists agree, there are also other issues where it is harder to draw a line. What is clear is that the activist is forced to think about the effect of activities in exile ethically. Being away from family and activists brings another sort of consciousness of relationships to people and politics, and of how voice can and should be managed.

5.5 Safety

Safety has been discussed in several themes. Apart from what I have already mentioned, the participants in my study mainly spoke about safety in two different ways – feeling safer in exile and worrying about the safety of family and friends in Bahrain. This was brought up by almost all interviewees. After asking the question of how their activism differs in exile, some interviewees pointed to the feeling of safety, or at least feeling safer in comparison to when living in Bahrain. Engaging in activism in exile, they explained, is less connected to fear and threat. Activism is not inhibited by the fear of persecution, which means that activists can be more free in their work in exile.

Nabil Al-Aseri* said that "you will feel more free and be able to speak louder and clearer to whatever you want, rather than talking diplomatically when you are inside." Nabil directly addresses political voice and the difference it makes to be safe. Activists do not have to think about controlling their political voice in the same way in exile. This is however accompanied by the fear of safety for family in Bahrain. Amyrah Ebrahim* shared her experiences from exile, which in a good way summarize the dilemma of safety:

> […] I don't have to think about somebody breaking into my doors at 3 am to arrest me. I'm at least free when it comes to that. I don't feel the danger, that kind of danger. I still feel the danger to my family, to my colleagues, to my friends, to people which I know. But yeah, at least I can sleep myself without being scared.

Amyrah* feels safer personally, but feels that safety is still a significant worry also in exile, as there is a constant concern about those who are still in Bahrain. Because of Bahraini authorities' recent reprisals against family members of exiled activists, she also mentioned earlier in the interview that she is being more careful on Twitter. Although safety in exile facilitates activism, voice is in this sense consequently also restricted. Continuously, there seems to be a balancing between being able to use the political voice, which is more accessible in exile as fear is not as present, and the fear of using it

as it might hurt loved ones.

It is hard to know how this balancing of political voice in exile in regards to safety affects voice in the end. The interviewees had different responses to how they manage this dilemma. As pointed out before, one way to manage it is to be more careful when it comes to using political voice, for example on social media. Amyrah* said that "it's logical that they [my family] don't have to pay for what I'm doing". I think that all interviewees agree on this, but some interviewees also offered other perspectives. Maryam Al-Khawaja, also described feeling more nervous about the safety of family members in Bahrain, because of the Bahraini authorities' new tactics. However, she argued that the authorities do not need an excuse to go after families of exiled activists. She continued: "I think it's just us having to come to terms with what we're going to do about it if it does happen". In this way, it is the reaction of the individual exiled activist which determines what happens to the political voice when faced with threats and reprisals to friends and family.

I think the theme of safety demonstrate very well the intersection between the political and the personal. Most activists in exile continue with their activism despite threats to both themselves and family and friends in Bahrain. If they alter their work slightly because of that, it is not a significant change to the voice in exile. However, the constant worry about loved ones reveals a deeply personal aspect of their work. It means that looking at the change in political voice, it is not always noticeable that there are many personal and political aspects intersecting.

5.6 Feelings of distance and guilt

I am now moving to what I consider belongs to the personal side of exile. Much of what I have already mentioned is also personal, but what I want to stress here is exile as an existential condition – the feelings and perceptions of the exile context. It does not necessarily need to be connected to activists' activism. In this thematic section, I address the feelings of distance and guilt, which I believe follow from one another. Distance is also further analyzed in the next theme.

All participants in my interviews in some way mentioned the distance between them and Bahrain. What they referred to is the sense of distance to the struggle, of which they are part of. Mohammed Saeed Darini* said that the distance "doesn't bring the feeling to live it". He continued: "when I was in Bahrain, I was smelling the tear gas, so I feel the struggle outside, but now I just read the news." Mohammed's*

thoughts show the contrast between being inside Bahrain and being in exile. The physical presence makes a difference as the struggle for freedom and human rights in many ways is physical, such as protesting. However, activists are still present to the cause, which means that they are somehow between Bahrain and displacement. This was something that Mohammed* also depicted; "I'm kind of in the middle between the people of Bahrain who live the struggle and the people who are not belonging to Bahrain, but they support Bahrain." This perspective adds to the understanding of the role of activists in exile.

Furthermore, the distance between exile and Bahrain is also something that creates feelings of guilt. Feelings of guilt were not explicitly mentioned by that many interviewees, but I think it is a theme worth exploring, especially because other researchers have given it attention. During the interviews, I asked the participants what exile meant to them. This was one of the broad questions, that generated mixed response. Maryam Al-Khawaja addressed, among many other aspects, the issue of survivor's guilt. She described having nightmares and feeling guilty about surviving and being able to leave when others did not and could not. From this background she developed her thoughts:

> If I had been there, if I had been the one to be arrested, maybe they wouldn't have been arrested. And so you start feeling like your not being there is part of the reason why they're going through what they're going through, and it's a very difficult feeling to shake off. So yeah, I think survivor's guilt is one of the worst things.

Survivor's guilt is a feeling that is connected to the life in exile and it is a feeling that presumably most forced migrants have at some point experienced. As it is difficult to get rid of these feelings, as Maryam explains, it ought to affect the strength to retain the same kind of political voice. However, survivor's guilt can also have the effect of feeling the need to work harder and feeling greater responsibility. This is a point where the theoretical framework presented in this thesis does not quite cover the material in its entirety. Therefore, I bring in *The Politics of Exile* and Elizabeth Dauphinee's fictive character Milan Milanović. As I mentioned earlier, Milan's heart beats in his mouth. I believe that it is possible to interpret this as an embodiment of the feeling of guilt. It shows how the feeling in fact has such a strong physical effect; mentally and physically the feeling of guilt can impact a person a lot. It is hard to "shake off", as the person's feeling of "not being there" is a constant feature of exile, at least as long as there is no possibility of return.

I do not want to apply too much theory to the feelings of distance and guilt, as feelings are best explained merely by description. However, I would like to mention O'Donnell and the discontinuity of horizontal voice in exile. Activists in exile feel distant because they are not connected to each other in the same way socially. I believe that this forms the foundation for the feelings of guilt, that some experience. As an effect, political voice becomes so much more complex.

5.7 Time

For many activists in exile, the perception of time changes. When reflecting on time, many participants in my study expressed strong feelings of frustration and sadness. According to my interpretation, the participants' thoughts on the topic can be divided into three categories. First, it is the time that it takes to get settled in exile. Second, it is the loss of time in regards to what is happening in Bahrain. Third, time also normalizes the feelings about the situation. All timely aspects have personal responses as well as political ones, in which the activists' reflections about time affect how they use their political voice. Once again, I include *The Politics of Exile* in order to gain a better understanding of how the personal and the political intersect.

Amyrah Ebrahim* said that "it was really difficult to get settled, it takes months and months." Getting settled into a new country both takes time and is frustrating because it *does* take a long time. The time it takes to get settled depends on the circumstances of the exiled activist as well as the situation in the host country. A few interviewees mentioned the time it takes to go through the asylum-seeking process. Asma Darwish said that "you're very much caught up in this bureaucracy", referring to this process. Going through an asylum-seeking process means waiting, which becomes an obstacle of using voice in exile. Not knowing for certain where you are going to end up means that it is almost impossible to start using your voice politically.

Similarly, Jawad Fairooz said that the everyday life in exile is much harder as "you are starting from the beginning and whatever you do, it will take a long, long time to be normalized". This regards finding job and housing and also making sure that your family is doing well. He said that he must spend more time with his family because "their social family life just will depend on him [you]". Consequently, the political activism is different in exile as a great amount of time goes to managing the personal life. The time it takes to get life back to "normal" leaves less time to give voice to Bahraini activism.

The second aspect of time in exile is the loss of it. Some activists described feeling frustrated and sad about not being in Bahrain during important family events, such as births, weddings and deaths. At the end of my interview with Maryam Al-Khawaja, she remembered that she wanted to add the loss of time to the question of what exile means to her:

> I think, aside from the issue of helplessness, which is what I mentioned, it's the loss of time. Time in the sense of memories that you should have had or could have had, but you won't have. I think, my biggest fear of being in exile is losing family members while I'm abroad.

Losing someone you know who is far away is losing the time you could have spent with them, as Maryam explains. *The exit* involves taking a new position in relation to time and what it means. In *The Politics of Exile*, the fictive character Stojan Sokolović is asked whether he feels at home in the country in which he has taken refuge in. As I have quoted earlier, he says that "it's like being trapped in two different times". I interpret this as dealing both with the time in exile, which includes the time it takes to get settled, and the knowledge that life is also continuing in Bahrain. The result is a kind of balancing, as to which time one lives in and considers most important. I believe that this can make us understand the frustration and sadness that many activists in my study expressed. Many of them were forced to leave very quickly, but thought that they would come back. Some left on their own and realized later that they were not allowed to return. Similar to Maryam, Asma Darwish expressed the fear of losing loved ones:

> You're talking to me in a very difficult time when, like during these past two years I never felt the sense of exile like I feel it this one month. Because my mum, who was like my best friend in Bahrain and she was very much attached to me, and when I left the country her health started deteriorating, and this month she was diagnosed with life-threatening cancer in her lungs.

What stood out to me when listening to Asma and transcribing the material is the phrase "the sense of exile". Apart from having others legally labeling you as an exiled person and you describing yourself in those terms, exile is also a feeling. For Asma, as she explains it in the quote above, exile is truly feeling the distance from what is happening in Bahrain.

Lastly, time normalizes the situation. Maryam said that "you can only keep being angry all the time for so long and frustrated all the time for so long." Although she hesi-

tated on using the word normalization, she said that to some extent, this is what happens. Everything that happens in Bahrain affects Bahraini exiled activists personally, which takes a great toll on their mental health. This in turn hinders using the political voice in exile, as the personal burden is heavy to carry. At the same time, one thing that distinguishes the exiled activists from other people who are reporting on the situation, is the personal connection that they have to the country. In order to work without breaking down completely yourself, you cannot react as strongly. However, that deeply personal response is also what strengthens the political voice of the exiled activist.

5.8 Thoughts on exile and return

Closely related to time is the exiled activist's prospect of return and the possible end of exilic life. In the academic debate on the definition of the exiled activist, exiles' will to return is a criterion that is brought up. The exiles' will to return derive from their strong connection to the country. In my interview guide, I did not have a specific question on the theme of return. However, this theme came up in different forms throughout almost all my interviews. The participants talked about the hope of returning, exile as a temporary or permanent state and children in exile.

The title of this thesis is a quote from Asma Darwish, who said: "We always have a hope that one day we'll go back." She expressed worry about the situation in Bahrain and said that it is hard to keep imagining that the time in exile will be short. The hope of returning is clearly a personal aspiration, but also something political. Hussain Al-Zatary* declared that "working from the ground is better for him [me] than living in exile" despite the opportunities that come with working in exile. The activism on the ground in Bahrain is very social. During the uprising, and the time before and after, people have organized protests and used horizontal voice in order to change the political and social structure of the country. This is something that many activists miss and what they wish to return to.

The activists in my interviews also expressed confusion and frustration about thinking of exile as a permanent state. Maryam Al-Khawaja said that in the beginning "it was always temporary, because, to a certain degree she [I] couldn't wrap her [my] head around the idea that that was it." At that time, it was perhaps more temporary, as the situation in Bahrain was unpredictable. Now however, most activists know what happens if they return, which means that they often cannot, as Maryam explains:

> I'm no longer in self-enforced exile. After that [having received multiple cases against her including one possible life sentence], I can't go back unless I'm ready to spend potentially the rest of my life in prison. And that changes everything, because suddenly you no longer have an option. So even the way you feel about being in exile and the way you perceive it completely shifts.

When an activist is in self-enforced exile, there can be an option of return. It appears that having a small chance of returning upholds the understanding of exile as something temporary. When activists feel that there is no option, they are forced to perceive exile as something permanent. This is how I interpret the quote above. Like Maryam Al-Khawaja, Amyrah Ebrahim* also expressed that it was difficult to accept that exile became more permanent. She said that she had struggled with not wanting to describe herself in the terms of exile; "I don't like the word itself. But I find myself that I'm obliged to accept it in a way." What is interesting is that exit is not as stable a concept as intended by Hirchman. Exile can be temporary and more or less permanent, but feelings of hope add another dimension to it.

Lastly, for exiled activists with families, the prospect of return is even more complicated. If children are involved, it is difficult to go back even if there would be an option. Mohammed Saeed Darini*, who has children, said that if he had the choice, he would want to go back now. However, he would also have to think about his children, and whether it would be healthy for them to grow up in Bahrain. His children are also accustomed to the life in the UK; "They grew up here and they love this country and they don't want to go back in Bahrain. But I don't want to stay here for a long time." I think this demonstrates the complexity of exile and return, as there is so much to each issue. The hope of return is something that all participants in my interviews expressed. It is not always a solid hope, because exiled activists have to take into consideration many aspects, some that I have brought up in this analysis. It shifts depending on how they think or are forced to think about their situation, but some hope always remains.

6   Discussion

Before I started writing this thesis, I had a general interest in Bahrain and activism directed against the authoritarian regime of the country. I wanted to interview activists from Bahrain who are part of this fight for freedom, democracy and human rights. I realized the difficulties and danger of reaching out to the activists inside the country. This led me to think of interviewing activists who have the experience of opposing authoritarian rule on the ground, but who are not direct targets of the regime anymore, namely exiled activists. I started to reflect on activism in exile, which I developed into the questions of what voice means and how voice is affected by different contexts.

In this study, I focused on the political voice of activists and how this voice changes in the context of forced exile. The aim of the thesis was to better understand the dynamics of exile in relation to continuing activism abroad. By focusing on the agency in exile, it was also possible to look at how personal aspects of exile interfere with political voice. I believe that combining the personal and the political creates a more holistic understanding of exile. Another aim was also to fill in the concept "exile activism". I discuss this at the end of this section.

My interview study with exiled activists from Bahrain first and foremost gave insight into the complexities of life and activism in exile. Every aspect had a counterpart. Shu-Yun Ma argues that exile is a "tool for managing voice" for the authoritarian regime.[46] However, as there are benefits of activism in exile, exile also becomes a tool for dissidents to manage voice. As noted in the section on previous research, exile activists internalize political space, which support the cause inside the country. The activists in my interviews mentioned safe environment and access to important actors and institutions as advantages of activism in exile. These advantages increase the possibilities of using vertical political voice. Consequently, exile can strengthen voice. However, the context of forced exile also entails obstacles, such as the loss of credibility. Be-

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46 See page 18.

cause exiled activists are not present in the repressive context, their political voice is questioned. Political voice in exile is therefore also limited.

Furthermore, my study also addressed the existential condition of exile. The activists in my study mentioned feelings of distance and guilt, described how the perception of time changes and talked about exile and return. The feelings and perceptions of life in exile constitute factors that affect political voice. They can both strengthen and weaken the political voice. It was difficult to find a theoretical framework that covered both activism and how activists feel and perceive their situation. "Exit" and "voice" could not explain the existential condition of exile. That is why I brought in other theoretical references. This is not necessarily a disadvantage. The theoretical framework is not meant to explain exile, but to help us understand it, and if we can combine different perspectives that do that, it is positive. Furthermore, I realized that there are so many more dimensions to exile and voice, than Hirschman and O'Donnell can explain. This is what I tried to stress in the analysis.

As I mentioned in the beginning of this section, the process of this thesis started with interviews. Conducting interviews is challenging, but rewarding. It allowed me to come in direct contact with the experiences of the participants of my study. Their experiences are very far from mine, which meant that my most important task was not to ask questions, but to listen. This became especially clear when the participants talked about their most personal struggles. As with sharing any hardships in life, it is difficult to know how to respond as an outsider. Adding exile to the equation, it makes it even harder. This is something that is brought up in the book *The Politics of Exile*. When the main character of the book discusses homesickness with Stojan Sokolović, she realizes that she cannot know or feel what he knows and feels about being displaced – she can only imagine.[47] When conducting my interviews, I felt that I was not even able to imagine. Keeping this in mind when listening to voices that are personal, but yet so powerful and political, it helped me to recognize my position as an outsider.

How can we continue from here? The context of forced exile is also affected by improved technology. The internet is an important means of communication for activists in exile. They can keep in touch with each other and with activists inside the country – expressions of O'Donnell's horizontal voice. However, as Marcus Michaelsen points

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47 Dauphinee, 2013, p. 112.

out, the internet is also a tool for the authoritarian regime to extend its repression beyond state borders.[48] The development of new technology is therefore also a factor that, if it does not restrict activism, affects how activists reflect on their political voice. As technology is continuously evolving, it would be interesting and important to follow how it relates to activism in exile, and how activists respond to this, in future research.

Another issue that could open up for future research is how to more specifically conceptualize the topic of activism in exile. As I mentioned before, the second aim of this study was to try to fill in the concept "exile activism". When I started reading literature on exile, I realized that "exile activism" was not a recognized concept. Scholars instead use the concept exile politics. I believe that "exile activism" could be useful as it would specifically addresses one actor, namely the activist. From my study, it follows that certain aspects of displacement is specific for activists in exile. Therefore "exile activism" proves useful and contributing to the field. If I would fill in the concept exile activism, I would start with the themes that came out of the analysis of my interviews. Other scholars could continue filling in this concept by undertaking similar research with exiled activists from various backgrounds.

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48 See page 18.

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Appendices

Interview guide

Go through informed consent sheet

Ask 'warm up' questions

(The questions that follow will slightly differ in each interview)

Background:	Could you tell me about your activism and background in Bahrain?
	What kind of activism are you engaged with in exile?
	What is different about doing activism in exile?
	Was it clear for you to continue with your activism?
Communication:	How do you use the internet in your activism?
	How do you use social media in your activism?
Exile:	What does exile mean to you?
	The situation has deteriorated in 2016 and 2017. What are your thoughts about that from an exile's perspective?
	Does your host county encourage or hinder your activism?
Threats:	Have you experienced threats?
	Have your family experienced threats?
Exile community:	Do you cooperate with other activists in exile?
	If yes, how?

Email to potential participants

Dear_____,

I would like to invite you to participate in an interview over Skype about Bahrain's exile activism. I am contacting you because, if I understand it correctly, you are still an activist for a Bahraini cause, although in exile. I have met with my friend Zainab al-Khawaja, who has helped me to get your contact details. If you would like to participate, please reply to this email as soon as you can, and we can agree on a time for an interview, either on Skype or another platform, whichever works best for you.

I'm a student in human rights at Lund university in Sweden, and I'm currently writing my thesis for my bachelor's degree. I developed my interest in the Bahraini struggle during an internship at the Bahrain Center for Human Rights in Copenhagen last semester. I want to continue with Bahrain and the struggle for freedom and democracy somehow, so I decided to make it the topic of my thesis.

The purpose of this study is to collect experiences about living in exile and continuing activism from another country. I would like to explore topics such as how the activism differs from before, what difficulties arise in the exile country and thoughts on Bahraini authorities' response. I am interested in filling in the concept "exile activism", as it is not really a recognized concept, but a concept I believe can be very useful in research.

The method I will use in this study is semi-structured interviewing. This means that I have a set of open-ended questions, which in this case will be on the topic of activism, Bahrain and exile. I will send you the topics before the interview. Follow-up questions might be relevant, depending on how the interview moves on. You will be free to answer in any way that you like and skip any question that you do not want to answer.
The participation in this study is voluntary and it is in your right to stop the interview at any time and for any reason. It is also your right to withdraw your participation after the interview has been conducted and at any time up until the paper is published, which is at some point early next year (as a student paper on Lund university's website).

The interview will not be longer than an hour. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact me on this email:
ee.ydman@gmail.com
or call me on: +46707216875

Thank you for your time and I look forward to receiving your reply!

Kind regards,
Elisabet Ydman