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Noor Ghazal Aswad, **Searching for Solidarity: Revolutionary Dreams and Radical Social Movements,** Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2025, 186 pp, $26.36 (paperback).

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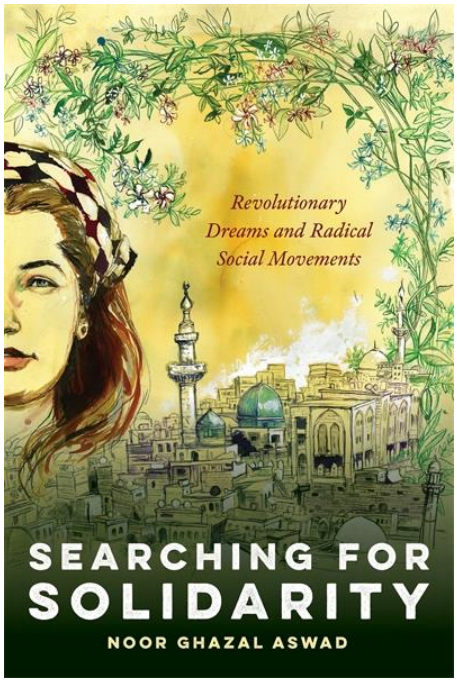

Noor Ghazal Aswad's ***Searching for Solidarity: Revolutionary Dreams and Radical Social Movements*** is motivated by what can best be described as an international failure in solidarity: the lack of a meaningful global response to the Syrian revolution. Despite widespread atrocities, torture, and mass civilian deaths, there was almost no intervention to protect Syrians who were fighting oppression. Little was done to hold Bashar al Assad's regime accountable, even after over a million Syrian lives were lost and half the country's population displaced. Given this context, Aswad offers an urgent rethinking of solidarity as something shaped by the precarious circulation of emotion and attention and by the misinformation and hostile narratives that surround those engaged in resistance (p. 7).

Whereas prior scholarship on solidarity often begins from questions of identification or shared belief, Aswad foregrounds affective dynamics and meaning-making practices to theorize solidarity as the "emotional, ethical, and political capacity cultivated through attention to certain bodies" (p. 7). The book draws on affect theory, social movement, and rhetorical studies to productively theorize the affective connections between critical inquiry and ethical responsibility to mobilize solidarity with those at the heart of liberatory struggles.

Central to the book's contribution is what Aswad terms the "radical subject," a specific category of "subject-in-revolution" acting at the risk of injury, imprisonment, or death to create liberatory social change (p. 46). Crucially, the radical subject does not exist a priori but comes into being through revolutionary exigency. Aswad details many of these exigencies in Syria, with historical examples dating from the rise of the Ba'ath Party in the 1960s, the "Events" and ensuing violence of the 1980s, to the murders, tortures, and disappearances inflicted upon protestors and civilians by the military-dominated state through 2024.

Among Aswad's most compelling moves is her description of a central paradox: Radical subjects are often deemed impediments to solidarity, yet simultaneously they represent the very condition of its possibility. This productively reconceptualizes solidarity as dependent on figures who unsettle normative political and moral expectations and often struggle for recognition in international arenas. In so doing, *Searching for Solidarity* provides a needed corrective at a time when those invested in social justice may nonetheless dismiss the experiences and agency of radical subjects and ultimately exhibit indifference to the very radical politics they claim to uphold.

The book is organized around five dimensions of the affect of the radical subject—orientation, testimony, postmemory, peripherality, and hope—with each chapter unpacking a dimension in the context of liberatory struggle. The dimensions build chronologically on one another to create a heuristic for critical inquiry that will resonate with scholars focused on whose experiences have epistemic salience and authority, under what conditions, and with what consequences.

Across these chapters, Aswad identifies the radical subject through a multi-sited analysis of texts that offer a wide-ranging and textured account of "real subjects in struggle" (p. 146). In her analysis of oral histories and interviews, documentaries, grassroots pro-revolutionary news, social media activity, and protest-related images and writings, Aswad emphasizes affective intensity, what she describes as the "visceral affect necessary to induce the solidarity process" (p. 13), offering an important corrective to purely rhetorical or instrumental accounts that fail to recognize the "lived knowledge" of the radical subject.

In her first chapter, Aswad describes orientation toward the radical subject as a means of challenging hegemonic frames of reference. In one of the clearest examples of the book's central claim, Aswad analyzes reactions to the targeted killing of Qasem Soleimani, the commander of Iran's external operations "Quds" force, by a U.S. drone strike in Baghdad. She juxtaposes the moral outrage from the U.S. American "left" at the attack with the euphoria and celebration among Syrians who had suffered from starvation sieges and brutal massacres at Soleimani's hands. Aswad demonstrates how what she terms "reverse moral exceptionalism" functions to foreclose orientation and solidarity with radical subjects—in this case, Syrians in the region under Soleimani's influence—under the pretense of viewing the United States as the only source of evil in the world (p. 20). In showcasing this marked blind spot on the part of the U.S. American left, Aswad shows how the inability to orient toward the radical subject not only risks complicity with the status quo but also produces a second-order harm by leaving those already victimized without the support of people and institutions willing to come to their aid.

Chapter 2, on testimony advances the idea that "radical subjects" are often misunderstood and rendered illegible in public discourse because their forms of resistance do not align with dominant liberal frameworks. Public unease toward these subjects is shaped by competing interpretations of their liberatory efforts, which are filtered through racialized assumptions about who counts as credible, rational, or fully human. This chapter builds on the work of scholars such as Karma Chávez (2015) and Judith Butler (2009) to underscore how inclusion can uphold and reinforce dominant structures of power when recognition is limited to those who conform to culturally dominant (often Euro-American) norms of humanity.

In her chapter on postmemory, Aswad focuses on genealogies of affect, relying on autoethnographic inquiry and narratives about the murder of her family member by the Syrian state shortly before the Hama Massacre of 1982. Drawing on Marianne Hirsch's (2012) concept of "postmemory," Aswad unpacks how second-generation memories accumulate across time to inculcate "predispositions to revolution" (p. 96). This framing provides scholars with a critical analytic lens to explain how affect and memory cannot force a people down a path of resistance but can "put the path in" a people, creating a reservoir that sustains them in the face of future struggle (p. 96).

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Aswad's chapter on peripherality helps connect her theorization of solidarity within the Syrian revolution to other liberatory struggles worldwide. Drawing on what she terms "elastic periphery," she describes the affective territory in which the Syrian radical subjects she analyzes are positioned relationally within projects such as the Palestinian liberation movement and Black Lives Matter (pp. 121–123). In so doing, Aswad advances understanding of how affect enables solidarity across racial, ethnic, and geographic boundaries through the cultivation of oppositional politics.

Finally, Aswad's discussion of the affective power of hope draws on Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth's (2010) concept of the "affective bloom-space," an in-between space of the "not yet," to position the radical subject as central to the awareness, knowledge, and affect necessary to generate solidarity with revolutionary struggles and distant others. Here, hope and belief emerge as an emotional and intellectual disposition that enables both orientation toward and a suspension of skepticism, allowing the "bloom-space" of solidarity to materialize. This chapter contributes to existing understandings of affect as a vehicle for revolutionary resilience, the force that enables the persistence of struggle even when individuals fall, and others must continue against the odds.

Together, these tenets underscore the book's central analytic contribution: By mapping multiple, intersecting dimensions of affect, Aswad demonstrates that the affective life of the radical subject exceeds any single theoretical framework, positioning solidarity as a dynamic and irreducible process rather than a stable or unified condition. Through her careful engagement and reflexivity, Aswad offers critical scholars, especially those interested in social movements and resistance, a metaphorical roadmap for practicing more affective, attentive listening to foster genuine solidarity.

While the book thoughtfully engages the complexities of radical subjecthood, its treatment of religion as itself a racialized category could be further developed in the context of vernaculars that are often coded as "Islamic." Aswad's argument about how radical subjects' testimonies are "described in ways that elicit a sense of unease and limit our ability to acknowledge them" (p. 58) would be sharpened by a more sustained engagement with anti-Muslim racism as a distinct racialized structure, rather than as a subset of Eurocentrism. Expanding on these dynamics would clarify how racialization, especially of religion, not only structures epistemic hierarchies but also actively contributes to the marginalization, dehumanization, and discrediting of radical subjects and their political claims.

Overall, *Searching for Solidarity* is a rigorous and timely provocation that intervenes in contemporary debates about solidarity and inclusion. It offers rich theoretical and empirical contributions for students and scholars in political communication, social movements, rhetorical studies, and cultural studies. Activists and scholars alike will find pragmatic insights in Aswad's discussion of reverse moral exceptionalism and elastic periphery that extend beyond the book's case studies. By centering the radical subject as the principal locus of meaning-making, Aswad invites readers to, in her words, listen, feel, and think "with those whose voices echo the hopes of a world reborn" (p. 17).

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