

Between Bahrain and Europe: A Qualitative Interview Study of Life and Activism in Exile

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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. In the aftermath of the uprising in Bahrain, the regime also forced many activists into exile. Since 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 article, I have interviewed seven exiled activists from Bahrain on the themes of life and activism in exile. Activism in Bahrain brings to light the meaning of voice – and silence. Through the concept of political voice, this article aims to deepen our understanding of the dynamics of activism in exile. In many ways, exile activism is also affected by the individual challenges of fleeing and building a new life in another country. Drawing on literature on exile politics and exile as an existential condition, I argue that there are advantages and disadvantages of being an activist in exile. I emphasize the intersection between the political and the personal aspects of exile.

Exit and *voice*: theorizing political voice in exile

In *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*, economist Albert Hirschman writes about three different strategies that members of a company or an organization can employ when a decline occurs within that organization. Either they can choose to *exit* – leaving the organization – or they can *voice* their dissatisfaction by expressing complaint to the administration.¹ The concept of loyalty is not discussed in this article. Applying his schemata to politics, Hirschman explains that *exit* means leaving a country, and *voice* means articulating dissatisfaction, which in this case is against a regime.² Although Hirschman originally contended that *exit* undermines *voice*, he later revised this causality into a more complex framework, in which he means that *exit* also can lead to more participation and *voice*.³

In this article, I adapt Hirschman's conceptual frame to the specifics of the case of Bahraini exile. The concept of political voice is further divided into *vertical* and *horizontal voice*, as introduced by Guillermo O'Donnell, who in a similar vein has applied Hirschman's ideas. O'Donnell means that *vertical voice* is the voice citizens use to communicate with the government. Although citizens can do this individually, the most common way to address the government is collective. *Horizontal voice* is the communication between citizens. In a democratic context where people can 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. In an authoritarian context, by

¹ Hirschman, Albert, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1970, p. 3-4.

² Hirschman, Albert, 1970, p. 16.

³ Hirschman, 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.

contrast, *vertical voice* is not allowed and *horizontal voice* is often severely restricted.⁴

In this article, I complement the theoretical conceptualization of political voice and exile with the book *The Politics of Exile* by Elizabeth Dauphinee. Her framework covers the personal aspects of exile. Through different fictional characters, Dauphinee presents research that helps to illustrate some themes of this study. One of the characters is Milan Milanović, who feels responsible for another man's death in the Yugoslav Wars. Both at home and in exile in Canada, he feels his heart beating in his mouth and how guilt fills the space between his ribs.⁵

Another character is Stojan Sokolović, who also lives in exile in Canada. Throughout the book, he discusses homesickness and whether he feels at home in Canada, and at one point he says: "It's like being trapped between two worlds [...] But more than that, it's like being trapped in two different times. It's strange."⁶ From the themes of guilt and perceptions of time, it is possible to draw parallels to the personal reflections from the activists in this study to gain a better understanding of activism in exile.

Interviewing seven exiled Bahraini activists

This article is based on semi-structured interviews on the topics of life and activism in exile, conducted in November 2017 via Skype. The sample of interviewees in the study consists of seven Bahraini activists, 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.

⁴ 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, 1986, p. 3-4.

⁵ Dauphinee, Elizabeth, *The politics of exile*, Routledge, London, 2013, p. 94.

⁶ Dauphinee, 2013, p. 112.

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. As a result of different measures by Bahraini authorities, they were forced into exile in the aftermath of the 2011 Bahraini uprising. 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.

The participants are activists in exile – an identity which is associated with personal challenges and vulnerability. Talking about sensitive subjects can bring back memories from the past and concerns about the future, putting interviewees in an uncomfortable position. This is an ethical issue that I considered when framing and asking questions. Conducting 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.⁷ Most activists participating in this 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. However, because of their background in activism, the interviewees are aware of the situation and know what they can and want to disclose. In order to keep the communication between interviewer and participants as transparent as possible, I asked for, and obtained informed consent.

The second component of the methodology is the interpretation and analysis of the interview data. Through grounded theory analysis, I categorized the material and put labels on the themes that emerged. The themes that came out of the interpretation of the material structure the answer to how the context of forced exile changes political voice. The names that are followed by an asterisk (*) are fictitious names to protect the identity of some

⁷ 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.

participants. The other participants explicitly said that they were okay with the use of their real names.

Responsibility in exile

From the interviews, it was clear that there are expectations on *voice* in exile. Some interviewees described feeling greater responsibility and more pressure to push for change in Bahrain when in exile. This was a response that I received 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:

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 comment on 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 this 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,⁸ it follows that there are expectations to utilize them. This results in internal pressure on the activist in exile.

⁸ O'Donnell, 1986, p. 3.

Some interviewees also pointed to the pressure from the outside. Jawad Fairouz, 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: “people are depending on those activists who are in exile.” The people he mentions could both refer to activists inside Bahrain as well as international actors. It is perhaps even clearer in this example that there are expectations on *voice* in exile. 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.⁹ One of the reasons for this would be the pressure and responsibilities that come 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 *exiting*.

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. The voice I

⁹ Hirschman, 1993, p. 176-177.

refer to here can be categorized under *vertical voice* – voicing dissent against the government’s politics.

After speaking about the freedom of cooperating with NGOs and the media in the UK, Mohammed Saeed Darini* said: “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. Although international actors are easier to access in exile, 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.

Furthermore, Jawad Fairooz also said: “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, activists have to think about in what ways they can use their political voice. The political environment of the host country determines the reach of activism in exile.¹⁰ 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 thus on one hand strengthened through direct contact with international actors in exile, and on the other hand limited to them only. As these actors are not present on the ground in Bahrain, it can be argued that activists’ voices do not have a direct impact on the political situation in Bahrain.

Credibility of *voice*

I asked the participants to compare activism in Bahrain and in exile. Some participants expressed that the displacement affects the credibility of the political voice. Hussain Al-Zatary* talked about the loss of influence,

¹⁰ M.S. Laguerre, *Diaspora, Politics and Globalization*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2006, p. xi.

legitimacy and credibility when forced into exile. 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. He also 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 in 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, entails a higher degree of safety, which in turn affects *voice*. The risk of being inside Bahrain 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.¹¹ My interviews suggest that being in exile limits *horizontal voice*. When in exile, although the Internet allows communication with the people still living in Bahrain, the social interaction is distant and different.

The issue of credibility of voice puts the activist in exile in a difficult position. Although activists may have a strong background in the Bahraini cause and have maintained connections and communication with the local community, this information is not considered as valuable as when they lived in the country. *Voice* is maintained by the activist, and perhaps even fortified in exile, but the work they do is in many ways 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. Physical presence and exile can thus be understood to be in contrast to one another, and the former is perceived to be a prerequisite to the credibility of *voice*.

¹¹ O'Donnell, 1986, p. 13-14.

Ethics of engaging with activism in exile

Three of the participants in my interviews brought up 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 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 – 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 a protest online. However, this does not happen. 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.

What kind of voice *can* an activist use in exile? 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. As a result, *exiting* causes changes to not only the activities, but also to the moral compass of the exiled activist. 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 political voice can and should be managed.

The dilemma of safety

The theme of safety was covered throughout the interviews. Apart from what has already been 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. 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.

Nabil Al-Aseri* said: "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 experience from exile, which in a good way summarizes 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* is safer personally, but explains that safety is still a significant worry also in exile, as there is a concern about those who are still in Bahrain. 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. The interviewees had different responses to how they manage this dilemma.

Amyrah* mentioned that she is more careful on social media and continued: “it’s logical that they [my family] don’t have to pay for what I’m doing.” Maryam Al-Khawaja, also described feeling more nervous about the safety of family members in Bahrain, because of the Bahraini authorities’ new tactics of targeting families of exiled activists. However, she argued that the authorities do not need an excuse to go after families of activists in exile. 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.

The theme of safety demonstrates 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, which reflects the intersection of the personal and the political in exile.

Feelings of distance and guilt

The personal aspect of exile affects political voice. Feelings and perceptions of exile – which I address as exile as an existential condition – are deeply intertwined with political work. One example that was referred to is the sense of distance to the struggle. 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. At the same time, exiled activists are 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 as bridging actors.

The distance between exile and Bahrain also creates feelings of guilt. During the interviews, I asked the participants what exile meant to them. 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 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 you 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.

From the quote above, it can be argued that survivor’s guilt affects the ability to retain the same kind of political voice in exile. Survivor’s guilt puts a lot of mental pressure on activists, which could make it hard for them to find motivation to work. However, it is also possible that survivor’s guilt can have the effect of feeling greater responsibility and the need to work harder. In *The Politics of Exile*, Elizabeth Dauphinee depicts guilt through letting the character Milan Milanović experience how his heart is beating in his mouth. This can be interpreted as an embodiment of guilt and distance, and a way to show how the feeling also can have a long-lasting physical effect. This interpretation is reflected in the way that Maryam describes survivor’s guilt as being hard to “shake off.”

Survivor’s guilt relates to the discontinuity of *horizontal voice* in exile. The physical distance of exile means that activists are not connected to each other in the same way. The social interactions that characterize horizontal voice are

different in exile, relating back to some of the ethical dilemmas discussed above. The feeling of “not being there [in Bahrain]” is constant in exile and sometimes activists make the connection between their absence and the dangerous situation in Bahrain. I believe that this forms the foundation for the feelings of guilt, that some exiled activists experience.

Perceptions of time

For many activists in exile, the perception of time changes. When reflecting on time, many participants in my study expressed feelings of frustration and sadness. The participants’ thoughts on the topic can roughly 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 relation to what is happening in Bahrain. Third, time also normalizes the feelings about the situation in Bahrain. How activists reflect about time affect how they use their political voice.

Amyrah Ebrahim* said: “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. Asma Darwish said: “you’re very much caught up in this bureaucracy,” referring to the asylum-seeking process. Seeking asylum entails waiting, which becomes an obstacle of using political voice in exile.

The second aspect of time in exile refers to 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. 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 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, exile is truly feeling the distance from what is happening in Bahrain. *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: “it’s like being trapped in two different times.” This gives us an idea of 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. It could be difficult to find a strong political voice whilst feeling the frustration of living in two different times.

Lastly, time seems to normalize the situation in exile. Maryam Al-Khawaja said: “you can only keep being angry all the time for so long and frustrated all the time for so long.” Although she hesitated 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.

Thoughts on exile and return

Closely related to the reflections of time is the exiled activist’s prospect of return and the possible end of exilic life. The responses from the interviews circled around the hope of returning, exile as a temporary or permanent state and the difficulties of raising children in exile. Asma Darwish 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- Zatory* declared: "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 – using *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. 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. 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." It is interesting from the quotes above that *exit* is not as stable a concept as intended by Hirschman. These reflections show that exile can be temporary and more or less permanent, and also that feelings of hope add new dimensions 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. It is not always a solid hope, because exiled activists have to consider 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.

Adding complexity to activism in exile

Shu-Yun Ma argues that exile is a "tool for managing voice" for the authoritarian regime.¹² Forcing activists in exile is a way of silencing dissent. I have argued that there are also benefits of activism in exile. The activists mentioned a safe environment and access to important actors and institutions as advantages of activism in exile. Exile therefore also becomes a tool for dissidents to manage their political voice.

I argue that these advantages are an expression of a strengthened *vertical voice*. However, it seems that forced exile specifically harms *horizontal voice* in the way that activists are cut off from the social networks that they were part of in Bahrain. The internet and social media limit this effect, but add other

¹² Ma, Shu-Yun, "The Exit, Voice, and Struggle to Return of Chinese Political Exiles", *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 66, no. 3, 1993, p. 371.

dimensions, such as monitoring activists' online work. Because exiled activists are not present in the repressive context, their political voice is also questioned from Bahrain and from the international community. The activists in my interviews also reflected on guilt, time and the hope of return, which affect the will and ability to speak up. The result is a more complex understanding of activism in exile, in which the personal and the political continuously intersect.

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