



# Between Avoidance and Resistance

Exploring  
the Role of the 'Bubble'  
through Narrative Practices

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## Initial Conversation

15 July 2021

**Zain** My primary practice involves the preservation and restoration of now-absent cultural fragments from my Palestinian hometown. Over the course of the past year and a half, it has led me to define a number of ways to retell my heritage through contemporary modes of digital modelling and visualisation. Therefore, the preservation of cultural principles and objects through archival and narrative practices has become a central research scope for my architectural projects. These are the themes that I wish to further explore throughout this digital collaboration with you.

**Reyhaneh** This sounds quite compelling. My practice engages with exploring the public dimension of everyday acts of resistance. It is a niche interest that I am trying to better understand through the concept of political agency in academic research and artistic practices. This especially includes participatory approaches in dilemmatic socio-political situations. My primary interests lie in finding the space to carry out my explorations of modes of resistance in everyday life practices.

**Mutually** *Our initial introductions to one another and our academic backgrounds revealed a mutual interest in performing everyday acts of resistance in our artistic fields. We have both considered the role that 'resistance' could play in an individual's personal space and its socio-political agency over the wider social and communal contexts*

in the public realm. We also both expressed *a vested interest in discussing the political influence of resistance in public spaces. We both felt that it was crucial to incorporate our personal socio-political viewpoints in our future conversations and artistic collaborations.*

**Zain** So how do you think that two artists from different backgrounds can collaboratively form a new social agency? Personal viewpoints and aspirations, shaped through upbringing, education, and lived experiences, can play a significant role in establishing social justice. It is up to us to find an intersection in our artistic and socio-political aspirations.

**Reyhaneh** In my opinion, your question is also contextualized through our local identities and geographical positions overseas since they are both heavily charged in every decision and action that we carry out. These connotations determine our limitations as well.

**Mutually** *We both reflected on the following question: What are our limitations in directly confronting and resisting oppression in our homelands, from afar? What forms and methods can resistance be performed from a privileged distance?*

**Zain** I also think that documentation has become more important than ever in both politically-charged and socially-charged modes of resistance. I tend to reflect on how documentation

can solidify the sense of affirmation/existence. Archival practices, for example, are markers of history and preservers of culture and identity. This is a conclusion that I eventually arrived to after consolidating a Palestinian archive using very limited research and sporadic testimony.

**Reyhaneh** I think that we should also consider the differences in politically charged and non-politically charged acts of resistance, including non-violent and passive modes of resistance. What qualifies as a problematic or an acceptable form of resistance?

**Zain** I also believe that the strive to protest and resist can emerge from a single question: what frustrates us the most? This can be followed by: how do we intend to challenge/deny tyrannical and insensitive practices in our areas of expertise?

**Reyhaneh** This is definitely a complicated question. It's worth thinking further about, as there are physical limitations in living away from home. Although I live away from the oppression that my community directly experiences in everyday life, I still experience it at times in my own isolated bubble but to a smaller extent. Often formed in privilege and isolation, the bubble can create an idealised reading of real-life events. This makes it harder to place a bubble of this kind, in the context of reality and truth.

**Zain** This sounds like the 'bubble' could become a central research interest for the

both of us. As two creatives living in the Western World, our indirect experiences with the challenges of our homelands shapes an isolated bubble of its own. 'Living in a Bubble' implies naivety due to the lack of direct exposure to challenging life experiences, like our counterparts who live in close range. This privilege allows us to turn on and off these intense feelings of pain and frustration, as we selectively tune in with the privileged ability to tune out, whenever convenient.

What makes it more difficult is that in many cases, the bubble is really hard to contextualise in our reality as it will always present selective understandings of factual truth. We can think of it as 'cherry-picking', and that could often become an aspect of ignorance.

**Reyhaneh** What is sometimes very confusing and irritating for me is the feeling that the language of the bubble can also be very different to that of my everyday life. Sometimes it seems like the bubble does not exist when the lived experiences of everyday life match the context. But the moment that the new context and the context of the former lived experiences don't match, a bubble or 'divide' is formed. At that time, there is no undoing. It cannot be dissolved into its context anymore. I believe that part of this relationship goes back to the fact that when the context changes, the experience, the follow up, and the engagement become a second-handed experience and the interval will start to be fed more and more in every incident by our privileges, positions, situations, etc.

**Zain** That's a good point. The nature of the bubble can be very circumstantial to who we are and where we are. It's worth considering that the bubble can be reinterpreted as a partial distraction or complete avoidance from surrounding events, up close and from afar.

A bubble can equally be an aspiration that is unfortunately out of reach in the immediate future. This won't stop me from carrying out my restorative cultural practice for example, as it provides me with an incentive to educate Palestinian exiles worldwide about the vernacular architecture that their grandparents experienced. In addition, when I reflect further on my restorative digital reconstructions of demolished Palestinian hometown and its cultural aspects, I understand that although they are really important to preserving my cultural identity and resisting the erasure of my heritage, the reality is completely different. This is primarily because this neighborhood has been completely demolished and replaced by Zionist real-estate. In many cases, the bubble will almost never find an intersection with reality. That is where many hopes and dreams lie; ones that cannot be fulfilled due to a number of limitations. This means that my artistic and cultural efforts of resistance, in my field of study against the occupation, can only conceptually resist the ongoing occupation in Palestine.

**Mutually** *We further reflected on how our individual bubbles develop/transform, and under what conditions can they expand/contract/burst completely? What could potentially happen if two conflicting 'bubbles'*

*meet in dialogue or a public setting, in foreign land?*

**Reyhaneh** Maybe this relationship could be highlighted through mapping the intersections and points of contention between the bubbles. This could also include the inner connections and dialogues with opposing or compatible beliefs and thoughts. It happens sometimes that I read about others' thoughts and concepts, and through the disagreements and agreements, I have a clearer understanding of how my bubble functions and evolves. On the other hand, sometimes it happens that the thoughts and concepts give an illusionary context to the bubble. I am not sure to what extent that can be deceptive or helpful, especially when it comes to articulating the means of oppression and the position of oppressor.

**Zain** I can see how subjective and personal this matter could become. It will be interesting to attempt the representation of some of these conditions. We could consider incorporating digital storytelling in our collaborative practice, whereas the 'bubble' could be visually represented as abstractions of the truth. It would also be interesting to hear our personal narratives alternating between us. This could take the form of a verbal dialogue between our individual and mutual understandings of the bubble's role in how we avoid, process, or resist our immediate and distant surroundings.

**Mutually** *We both agreed that the conversational text and abstracted animation can be two separate components to present*

*as final artwork.*

## Follow-up Conversation

17 July 2021

**Zain** I was wondering, if we could start jotting down individually and then collaboratively what our interpretations of the bubble could be. I think that if you could start writing down a few examples that can be visually translated into an animated sequence or a collaged image, or any other relevant media, it would help to have a few key words or visions of what the bubble's forms, functions, and abstractions could be. These exercises will help us consider modes of resistance against the oppressive conditions of our hometowns that we wish to shield ourselves from and/or challenge, using the versatile functions of our bubbles.

At the same time, it's important to express the commonalities between our bubbles, as two women living in the Western world, away from the injustices back home. I think that we should use this as an opportunity to dig deeper into our personal agencies as women of our cultural identity and international experience. Once we think about this phase of this project as well, it will help us determine how to make this intervention a powerful digital product.

**Reyhaneh** I definitely agree with this approach. I think that we are definitely settled with the central idea. It would also be helpful to write our thoughts and dialogue as we go, and document this process as a way to narrate the exploration



that we will develop over the next two weeks. It's great that we started documenting our dialogues early on. It will also be fascinating to see how in this process we will collaboratively identify the concept of the bubble and will introduce our situational bubbles.

**Mutually** *We both decided to reflect further on the role of our personal bubbles in shaping our individual thoughts, dreams, fears, avoidance, and, or confrontations of surrounding events.*

*We both began to experiment with different modes of visualising differences and intersections in our respective bubbles, with regards to opposing belief systems and viewpoints. This was done through sketching, animation, and written reflections.*

## Independent Reflections

17 July 2021

**Zain** *The bubble can be understood as: A decolonised lens that validates my existence and identity / An act of everyday cultural resistance / An aspiration to preserve what has actively been erased / A measure to honour the memories and cultural rituals of my exiled Palestinian relatives / A stubborn denial of a brutal colonial reality / An idealised perception / An evolving selective memory / The undoing of cultural erasure / The reversal of oppressive power structures / The revival of what cannot be salvaged in the present / The desire to make my cultural identity remembered and appreciated for as long as possible / An inaccurate*

*time travel to the now-forgotten past / Fleeting recollections and nostalgias re-experienced as my own / A tenacity to resist oppressive practices by raising awareness and artistic intervention.*

*The bubble can take the artistic form of: A digital walkthrough of precious cultural aspects of 'home' / An overlaid narration of ideas and beliefs (verbal narration) / Personal narratives alternating between two voices / Ambient sounds of occupied spaces, conversations, and events.*

**Reyhaneh**      *The bubble is a vague state of mind / A lost context, where it used to be everyday life / A reminder for resisting the oppression / A repressed fear, anger and pain from the tools of oppression / A continuous sway between agonism and antagonism / An parallel lost life in another location / A pretext to stay/be/feel attached / An abstract connection to people who you know / A reality that exist outside the propagandized western dream / An abstraction of the homeland and everything included / A compression of all the injustices, oppressions / A barrage of inequalities and discriminations / A hopeless state of being / A place to hide-in when oppression is beyond tolerance / A reminder that I am afar.*

*The bubble although is connected to what is happening is Iran, but it is not about Iran. Instead it is about the people, and their relation to the oppressed regime. The bubble doesn't empower the sense of patriotism, but instead empowering the importance of resistance as an everyday practice, the importance of lived experience in knowing the context.*

## Follow-up Meeting about Visual Representation

18 July 2021

**Zain** I propose that the visual translation of our concept is experienced as a connected series of bubbles, alternating between my viewpoints and yours, and then our mutual viewpoints as a concluding component. The enclosed space of each bubble can be designed to contain the idealisations or our selective understandings of reality sealed inside, whereas the external scope displays video snippets of events that have been documented.

**Reyhaneh** I am a little surprised that you started displaying the bubble from an interior perspective. This begs the question: do we want to see inside the bubble? For me, I imagine that we experience the bubbles from the exterior, with bubbles colliding/overlapping. That was the image that I had in mind at least. Mainly because the inner thoughts and feelings are so abstracted that I am not sure if we know how to explain what is inside our bubble to an unfamiliar audience. I actually believe that we are also observers of our bubbles from outside.

**Mutually** *We mutually proposed several iterations of how this dialogue could be established using different bubble volumes, transition spaces, filtering material, and sounds. Starting with looking inside the 'bubble' a few artistic representations were explored using digital rendering software*

*and presented. After forty more minutes of deliberation and idea exchanges, we have unanimously decided to display the bubble's intersections and collisions, in the animation, from an external perspective. Abstraction has naturally become an important aspect of the animated component's overall aesthetic. We also decided to keep the aesthetic simple and organic to reflect the filtering qualities of the 'bubble. We agreed to use the subsequent days to individually test out motion graphics, projections, and filter effects that would be useful in the final animation. Reyhaneh agreed to spend more time exploring how text and dialogue could be presented as a secondary component to the animation.*

## **Follow-up Conversation**

22 July 2021

**Reyhaneh**      What if the bubbles will be migrating throughout the city? For example, London and Gothenburg, or any other city that activates the bubbles for us and highlights the distance of the navigation or transition. I also would say that not only does migration cause our bubbles to interact with opposing viewpoints and actions, but also the bubble can be created in the friction between the public space and our experience as a woman or a member of a minority group in our hometown. So instead of showing the bubble in the head space, we show where the headspace is living - the public urban space. Because, we are living in a different context than the bubble's context, and the bubble continues its existence abstractly

in our head with the friction that it has with this Western context. But I would say not limiting it to the Western context, because we can have it from different spaces. For example, I can say that I walk in Tehran and I can feel that the bubble exists from another perspective.

**Zain** As far as intersection is concerned, the friction that these bubbles could produce when they collide with compatible or opposing viewpoints (meaning other bubbles), is a compelling visual representation. I guess the question becomes that: even though we are looking at the bubbles at the moment from the outside as a very obscure, very abstracted and concealed identities, I wonder what really happens outside these bubbles when they merge with one another, almost like a soap bubble? On one hand, we have thoroughly experimented with and figured out the visual component. The same applies for the general idea of what a bubble could be and how it represents a concealed, selective, and personalised grasp on reality. It often becomes a little difficult, however, to express that without using words. With art, representation and interpretation are very subjective.

## Independent Reflections

24 July 2021

**Reyhaneh** *Aban 1398: a date that has a meaning only in the bubble. I accidentally started talking about how the "I" is and how the "I" feels about the narrations she has read. But at the same time I knew "I" was not the subject at all.*

*The common pain (?) we are suffering from is not at all about me reducing it to myself. Aban has not passed.*

*"But I'm in the car right now for the Christmas Eve family party. I have to embody the Christmas spirit for a week. I read about strikes, deaths, arrests, imprisonment, and air pollution, and my hands are tied. I do not know where to cling, or how to turn this anger into "action." My hands are very, very tied up."*

*"I" is collapsing. In the trilogy of the sadness, the indifference and the joy of here(s) and there(s), between the concerns and between the angers, "I" is painfully collapsing.*

*There is the point that the "I" becomes the flowing bubble in the new context. It becomes both the bubble and the new context. It all started there, when I made a note in my phone "Keep your bubble to yourself".*

## **Follow-up Conversation**

25 July 2021

**Reyhaneh** This is one way that I perceive my bubble: It feels like there is something occupying my mind all the time. A substance or lens that is part of me but I am not part of it anymore. An abstracted assembly of resistance that I only see from an outer perspective. A vague second-hand experience. Any small trigger can let the bubble occupy the living experience creating an erosive distance between me and reality. Give me an example of what you think the bubble could function as, based on all our previous conversations.

**Zain**

So maybe for example let's say one evening you are at a restaurant with your cousin and your sister and you are having a fantastic time in this safe and vibrant location and during this time. You are so comfortable, discussing family affairs, and how you would like to see each other again. You actively talk about exciting future plans and career aspirations that make you feel hopeful and elated. But at the same time, there is so much unrest and chaos that plagues your hometown, all the while you are enjoying your time at this given instant. And then, you return home and watch the news or check social media and you reflect on the second-hand pain and frustration that it makes you feel. In this case, there is a partial intersection between living afar in a privileged world and the reality that you could access virtually, to some extent. I think that this scenario sets an example of how a bubble can evolve with experience and exposure in everyday life.

But after reflecting on our discussion, I noticed that the bubble can serve so many other purposes. As expressed in the example earlier, the bubble of privilege could shelter us. It allows us to physically and mentally distance ourselves from what is most difficult and traumatic. The bubble, in a sense, is a distraction, based on the privilege that we have been afforded to not be in direct contact with political unrest and humanitarian trauma. But then at times, when you avert from that distraction, you start to reflect on the pain that your family, friends, and local community back home is experiencing, whether you read about it or remember it from past encounters. This shift in thought will prompt

a transition from distraction and avoidance to an urgency to resist and raise awareness, despite the geographical limitations.

**Mutually** *So despite living away from these first-hand injustices and having no direct influence on them from afar, we established that we can still use cultural or artistic media to devise our creative modes of resistance. To sum this up, the bubble can represent privileged, happy moments during the day, when you momentarily forget about what is happening, when you experience love and laughter and safety and acknowledge how lucky you are. But then there are other moments when you are instantly reminded, through social media, international news, or personal accounts close by, which thrusts you closer to an uglier reality. No matter what form it takes, the bubble is very circumstantial and represents a very selective understanding of what takes place amongst us and far away from us.*