



## Research Article

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# Temporal Diffraction as Methodology for Resisting Binary Narratives of Young Courageous Resisters: The Journey from Anna Campbell to Şehîd Hêlîn Qereçox

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## Abstract

Youth who are courageous resisters are often portrayed in binary ways in the media. This study draws from the author's own lived experiences of having known Anna Campbell- otherwise known to the world as Şehîd Hêlîn Qereçox. The BBC documentary "Anna: The Woman Who Went to Fight Isis" will be analysed through psychological theory (post- traumatic growth and group membership) and temporal diffraction as methodology offer a more nuanced perspective on the making of a courageous resister than the binary hero/victim narratives situated in orientalism that are often in the media. Findings indicate how post- traumatic growth and group membership were factors in that shaped Anna's decision to become a courageous resister in adulthood.

**Keywords:** Courageous resistance; media; Early attachment; Ggroup membership, post-traumatic growth, Temporal diffraction

## Introduction

A feminist revolution is happening in Rojava (Northern Syria) as this paper is written (Pavičić-Ivelja, [1]). Seeking redress for injustices rooted in colonialism, gender patriarchy, anti-fascism, anti-capitalism and education, the YPJ is an all-female protection unit that is leading the Rojava revolution (Martin, 2021). The education component of this movement is known as Jineology. Jineology refers to the Science of Women and traces the history of the enslavement of women over 5000 years (Grønstad and Grønstad [2], Piccardi [3]).

In the media, Eastern and Western members of the YPJ are often portrayed in binary victim/hero ways. In reference to Arab societies, Said (1978) coined the term "orientalism" to describe Western patterns of portrayal depicting Eastern civilizations as "culturally

and historically inferior" (Drummond et al. [4]). Orientalism is embedded in and perpetuated through binary victim/hero media narratives (Said [5]). Such narrative undermines the sovereignty, allyship and self-determination of the Rojava revolution (Kızılkaya [6], Yesiltas [7]).

## Courageous Resistance

Courageous resistance is a form of altruistic behaviour defined by Shepela et al. [8] as "voluntary selfless behavior in which there is significantly high risk or cost to the actor and possibly to the actor's family and associates, the actor makes a conscious decision to act, and the behavior is sustained over time" (p. 786). As a form of altruistic behavior, courageous resistance involves empathy and the volition of undertaking a sustained period of risk (Shepela et al.

[8], Thalhammer et al. [9]). It is this sustained level of risk over an extended period of time that distinguishes courageous resistance from a single act of heroism (Fagin-Jones & Midlarsky [10]).

The focus of this study is the life journey of Şehîd Hêlîn Qereçox but I know her as my dear friend Anna Campbell. Anna was the first Westerner killed while fighting ISIS with the YPJ in support of the Rojava Revolution (Nabiyyin, [11]). I met Anna when I moved to England and her family and I cultivated a lifelong friendship. Through temporal diffraction as methodology, this paper explores factors influencing the course of Anna Campbell's journey of becoming a courageous resister (Barad, 2014).

### Anna

Anna Campbell was born on June 12, in East Sussex, England on a sunny day in 1991. The second of four children to Adrienne and Dirk, Anna came into this world earlier than expected and arrived six weeks premature. Anna's mom Adrienne was her role model in many ways -including her involvement in various community and social justice projects.

Anna's mom Adrienne fought cancer for many years and passed away in October of 2012. Anna briefly attended university but her life of activism was her calling. Anna eventually left university to dedicate herself to activism. At this time, the YPJ in Northern Syria were facing off with ISIS and fighting for freedom and the protection of innocent citizens.

In May of 2017, Anna travelled to Syria and joined the all-women Kurdish protection unit known as the YPJ. It was there that she became a courageous resister and stood in allyship alongside Kurdish women. On March 15, 2018, Anna was killed by Turkish airstrikes while evacuating Kurdish civilians to safety.

### Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) and Courageous Resistance

Post-traumatic growth (PTG) is defined as "positive psychological, change those results from highly challenging life experiences" (Tedeschi et al, 2018, p. 3). PTG is a lesser-known condition that occurs with PTSD (Canevello et al. [12]). Post traumatic growth derives meaning from loss and is a form of coping rather than an outcome (Davis, 2008). Thus, PTG expands ones' wisdom, compassion and capacity to cope (Elam & Taku [13]).

Where resilience is about adapting to adversity, post-traumatic growth "focuses on transformative changes resulting from psychological struggle caused by shattered beliefs or worldview" (Elam & Taku [13]). PTG involves the integration of difficult event(s) into ones' understanding of their own life journey and can lead to an extraordinary sense of personal strength (Janoff-Bulman [14]).

It is important to note that those who experience the most growth following trauma are also more likely to be empathic (Elam & Taku [13], Cofini et al. [15]), Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Yet, while a study by Elam & Taku (2022) did not find a correlation between PTG and empathy, it did not rule out an improved ability to recognize the emotions of others and exercise compassion. In turn,

this contributes to prosocial, helping or altruistic behaviours such as courageous resistance (Canevello et al, 2022; Hartman & Morse, 2018). Through post-traumatic growth, we embrace vulnerability which cultivates strength and compassion for others (Tedeschi et al, 1998).

There are many instances where PTG can occur. Although the loss of a parent is traumatic (Arnett et al, [16]; Lindberg et al, [17]), there is research to support the positive psychological effects of PTG (Calhoun et al, 2010). Furthermore, after the death of a loved one, research has shown that young adults demonstrate the capacity for PTG (Lundberg et al, [18]; Şimşek et al, [19]). PTG is not the absence of grieving, rather, it is the result of overcoming psychological distress (Lumb et al, [20]). Following the loss of a loved one, PTG can lead to clarifying and/or resetting priorities in life (Lumb et al, [20]).

As well, people who experienced the death of a loved one due to cancer were found to be more likely to report PTG (Weiss, [21]) and positive outcomes from PTG were more likely to occur with the passing of time (Linley et al, [22]). PTG may carry positive implications for relationships, spirituality, strength and personal growth (Hensen et al, [23]). PTG can positively impact a persons' ability to relate to others and deepen their sense of personal strength while cultivating a new outlook on life (Elam & Taku, 2022).

### Group Membership and Courageous Resistance

Group identity can be a strong motivator to empathize with and protect fellow group members (Miyazono & Inarimori, [24]). Furthermore, a sense of within-group identity gives rise to altruistic/empathetic behavior towards fellow members of the group such as courageous resistance (Canevello, 2022).

Early Adulthood can be a time of transition and uncertainty (Lewis, [25]). The sense of belonging that group membership offers may bring stability and strength at a time of change and uncertainty. As well, the relationships that are built through group membership tend to make life more meaningful (Frankl, [26]; Lambert et al, [27]). Group membership connects individuals with society and a social identity while cultivating a sense of belonging (Mead, [28]; Olsson & Gustafsson, [29]).

Group membership positively impacts self- esteem and instills the confidence to stand in collective resistance in the face of danger (Hannah et al, [30]; Tajfel, [31]). Self-esteem rises through feelings of connectedness and the sense that one can succeed at their social role and related duties within the group (Deaux & Martin, [32]; Kyprianides et al, [33]). The human brain is designed for living purposefully (Lambert et al, [27]). Group membership offers support in the fulfilment of goals and a sense of purpose that comes from pursuing a collective vision (Lambert et al, [27]).

Membership with an organised movement can also cultivate a political identity in young adults (Bliuc et al, [34]). When we perceive similarities in those around us, this is conducive to stronger relational bonds and within-group altruistic tendencies (Stürmer et al, [35]).

When we are part of a group, we are more likely to relate closely with one another and stand up for each other to ensure the best interests and well-being of group members (Levine et al, [36]). As a result, collective political action is more likely when people consider themselves to be affiliated with a group (Bliuc et al, [34]).

Group membership shapes how we behave socially and the norms of a group inform the actions of group members (Charness et al, [37]). If a person identifies strongly with group membership, they are more likely to adhere to the norms of the group and define who they are in terms of in and out group dynamics (Bliuc et al, [34]). Oftentimes, groups that hold strongly cultivated opinions engage in collective action. Furthermore, a group that holds a collective vision for justice is more likely to take action (Bliuc et al, [34]; Simon & Klandermans, [38]).

### Methodology: The Linguistic Turn and Temporal Diffraction as Methodology

This study draws from excerpts from BBC documentary footage (journal entries, interviews, photographs) on Anna's life titled "Anna: The Woman Who Went to Fight Isis" (Parker, [39]). Then, I will offer a material-discursive, auto-ethnographic snapshot of a moment in time I experienced with Anna. Last, through temporal diffraction (Barad, [40]), I will read one moment in time through another for entanglements of matter and patterns of resonance and dissonance in order to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the making of a courageous resister (Barad, [41]).

As part of a "linguistic turn", new materialism resists linguistic imperialism and centres on material-discursive intra-actions (Clark, [42]). Instead of interaction, Barad coined the term "intra-action" (Barad, [43]). Intra-action holds that discrete entities do not preclude their relationships. Rather, entities come into being with and through relationships or intra-actions. Because of this, agency is not something we possess or enact, rather, it is the dynamism of intra-actions [43,44]. Similarly, when the boundaries between researcher and participant dissolve, this allows for the seemingly disparate roles of researcher and participant(s) to coalesce, synergize and (re)emerge anew in the process of becoming (Barad, [41]).

Barad refers to the "linguistic turn" (Barad, [41]) as a way of turning toward matter yet not turning away from language entirely. Instead of critiquing, a linguistic turn is a shift to explore how the discursive and the mutual entitize one another in the synergistic process of becoming (Barad, [41]). As mentioned, a linguistic turn does not connote turning away from language entirely. Rather, it values language in symbiosis with material while moving away from research that elevates language to the exclusion of material intra-actions (Alaimo and Herkman, [45]). Further, matter and language intra-act to compose the discursive, such that, matter "is not a linguistic construction but a discursive production" (Barad, [41]).

A focus on language exclusively is limited. This approach to qualitative inquiry dissolves material-linguistic boundaries. Interactions within and among the material were drawn from my own

lived experiences with Anna as well as photographic, video and interview footage from the documentary. Subsequently, the language accompanying these experiences was explored as a way of resisting linguistic imperialism while not turning away from language entirely. A linguistic turn does not mean describing the material of an experience image or video, etc./observation. Rather, it involves shifting focus from language to the material or matter involved in each data segment. Language can be misleading or engender hegemony (Brock, 2019; Gramsci, 1971). In this study, matter and phenomena coalesce with language and my auto-ethnographic experience of personal experiences with Anna (Clark, [42]).

Diffraction is a tool of analysis that looks to differences. In quantum physics, diffraction is the physical phenomenon that occurs as waves emerge, and differences in flow occur when the waves are broken by a different object such as a rock. Thus, diffraction involves "reading diffractively for patterns of differences that make a difference" (Barad, [41]). Barad [41] also describes how "reverberating at different frequencies...differing lines of thought can productively be read through one another for the patterns of resonance and dissonance that illuminate new possibilities for understanding and for being" (p. 142). Instead of stark contrast, diffractive analysis sees and interprets insights in order to bring differences to light across time(s), gather ideas and/or continuously (re)cultivate theories. Temporal diffraction enables us to understand how the past, present and future are inextricably entangled (Bozalek and Murriss, [46]). Through temporal diffraction as a methodology, I will read one moment in time through another to analyze material-discursive intra-actions. Specifically, I will read the time *before* Anna became a courageous resister through the times *during* and *after* to show a continuum of formative experiences in her life that shaped her decision to become a courageous resister. Data include documentary footage, encompassing Anna's journal entries, interviews and photographs as well as the autoethnographic entries of my own lived experiences with Anna.

Through temporal diffraction as a methodology, this study moves away from critique to analyse one moment in time through another to explore patterns of resonance and difference (Barad, [41]). Moving beyond critique and reductionistic binaries, examining if/why/how such differences bear meaning is of equal or greater importance than the differences themselves (Barad, [41]). Seeking "new possibilities for understanding and being" (Barad, [41]) in the data excerpts, boundaries will dissolve between researcher (myself) and participant(s) and I will be intra-acting with the world-as part of it and not as a separate entity. In this study, intricate material-discursive readings of one period of time through another will cultivate the potential for transdisciplinary intra-actions (Dolphijn & Van der tuin, [47]). Temporal diffraction is a methodology for discerning what has been included and excluded in terms of media binaries and narratives. Shared differences in material-discursive entanglements evoke the processes of becoming all that is. This approach to analysis unsettles the sediments of victim/hero binary narratives in the media that reduce Anna to a victim or hero.

## Analysis

### Post-Traumatic Growth as a Cultivating Factor that Contributed to Anna's Decision to Become A Courageous Resister

Below, I offer a material-discursive snapshot of a moment shared between Anna's mom and I that brings insight into the importance of social justice work:

Anna's mom Adrienne and I would go for walks in the English countryside at night. I have memories of the dirt path beneath my feet and the scent of the fresh rosemary sprig she would pick for me. When we reached our lookout, we would sit and watch as the train moved through the darkness in the valley below like a glowing serpent. On the walk home, Adrienne spoke of an eco-justice project she was working on that would help lower carbon emissions in our community. With every step, I sensed her growing excitement as she used the term 'birthing' to describe the value and importance of this project. (Liana Clarysse, personal communication, Autumn, 2007)

Eco-justice works invigorated Anna's mother with passion and purpose. Tragically, cancer took Adrienne before she was able to see these projects through to completion. My intra- actions with rosemary, the path beneath my feet, the darkness of night and the light of train (material) shaped this moment of trust where Anna's mother shared her (not-yet public) vision for a social justice project involving that would reduce carbon emissions. Following the death of her mother, Anna's demonstrated post-traumatic growth (PTG) through her renewed sense of purpose and strength (Elam and Taku, 2022; Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Anna was aware of how her mother felt about not being able to continue her justice work. In keeping with PTG theory, Anna's empathy for her mother was the motivation for continuing her mother's legacy and joining the YPJ (Elam & Taku, 2022; Cofini et al, [15]; Tedeschi & Calhoun, [48]; Weiss, [21]).

In the BBC documentary "Anna: The Woman Who Went to Fight Isis", Anna's father describes how "she probably felt that she had to take on her mother's role as a kind of pioneer activist which she might not have done to the same extent if her mother hadn't died" (Parker, [39]). This expresses how, in keeping with post-traumatic growth (PTG), the death of Anna's mother deepened her empathy and sense of purpose in life (Davis, [49]; Elam and Taku, 2022; Lumb et al, [20]).

In the above example, language is used to convey the increased empathy and defined sense of purpose in Anna's life that is consistent with PTG (Şimşek et al, [19]; Lundberg et al, [18]; Lumb et al, [20]). Five years had passed since the death of her mother from cancer, thus, increasing the likelihood that Anna would exhibit some of PTG's characteristics such as empathy and a sense of purpose (Hensen et al, [23]; Janoff-Bulman, [14]; Linley et al, [22]; Lundberg et al, [18]; Simsek et al, 2023; Weiss, [21]). Furthermore, PTG does not connote an absence of grieving and joining the YPJ may have been Anna's way of coping with the loss of her mother and overcoming of psychological distress (Lumb et al, [20]; Davis, [49]).

Because "the past is never finished" (Barad, [41]), I now offer a material- discursive snapshot of how Anna valued group membership long before joining the YPJ:

It was an uncharacteristically sunny day in England. We were feeling festive as we strolled back home from the restaurant where we had just celebrated the birthday of Annas' brother. In addition to plumbing, Anna confided that she was studying how to be a Blacksmith through an apprenticeship. As we strolled, she pointed to the ornate ironwork along the way. Anna spoke of the trades and how she was proud to be a member of the union (Liana Clarysse, personal communication, August, 2010).

In the above material-discursive recollection, the lines between researcher and participant dissolve (Barad, [41]). Anna's passion for group membership is evident in this intra-action that occurred a decade before she joined the YPJ, became a courageous resister and was martyred. The intra-actions of material and linguistic factors in the above excerpt offer more insight than language alone (Barad, [41,43,44]). Intra-acting with the ironwork (material), Anna expresses a sense of belonging, identity and purpose (Frankl, [26] Kyprianides et al, [33], Lambert et al, [27]; Mead, [28]; Olsson and Gustafsson; Tajfel, [29]). In addition, group membership impacted Anna's self-esteem (Tajfel, [31]) and sense of belonging which became evident through the intra-actions between us and the ironworks (Olsson, and Gustafsson, [29]). Anna's affinity for group identity and belonging predates Anna's empathic motivation for her fellow YPJ members which is consistent with courageous resistance (Stürmer et al, [35]; Canevello, [12]).

Now, I will offer a material-discursive excerpt from the BBC documentary "Anna: The Woman Who Went to Fight Isis" (Parker, [39]) to demonstrate how Anna's group membership and empathy for fellow members motivated her to act in courageous resistance:

"OK, I'm ready" she says. Anna is seated in front of the camera in the uniform she has worn daily since her arrival to Rojava, but something is noticeably different. Her blond hair is now dyed black and she is wearing a heavy, protective vest. With eyes soft, calm and content, she smiles gently. Then she continues "my name is Hêlîn Qereçox. My name before was Anna Campbell. I'm very happy and proud to be going to Afrin. The attacks of the Turkish state against the Kurdish people are very shocking and heavy, and I'm happy to join my friends to defend ourselves. With the memory of the friends that have fallen in this operation and in the whole war, then I will fight even stronger. As Anna speaks, she smiles gently, her gaze remains steady, yet relaxed. On the words 'friends' and 'defend ourselves', Anna's smile widens and she nods her head with humble resolve as she says "I will fight even stronger".

Under the weight of her protective vest (material), Anna moves freely as she shifts back and forth (Hanna et al, [30]). Her human form (material), is now free to go to the front lines of the battlefield (Barad, [41]; Tajfel, [31]). Her words indicate that she is going to the front lines to defend fellow YPJ members and support their vision of justice (Frankl, [26]; Lambert et al, [27]). The change in Anna's hair colour from blond to black (material) reflects an inner transformation and outer resolve to stand with her YPJ allies on the

front lines where she would ultimately be killed (Deaux and Martin, [32]; Kyprianides et al, [33]; Lambert et al, [27]; Mead, [28]; Olsson and Gustafsson; Tajfel, [29]). The material-discursive in the above excerpt from the documentary titled “Anna: The Woman Who Went to Fight Isis” (Parker, [39]), demonstrates Anna’s inner and outer transformation and courageousness. In keeping with temporal diffraction, I read one moment in time through another by examining the final interview with Anna before her death through a moment we shared many years earlier.

## Discussion and Conclusion

In conclusion, this study explores how psychological theory (post-traumatic growth and group membership) and temporal diffraction as methodology offer insight into the factors influencing a young adult’s decision to become a courageous resister. Following the death of her mother, there is evidence of Post-Traumatic Growth that deepened Anna’s sense of empathy and purpose which are defining characteristics of a courageous resister. As well, Anna’s longing for group membership that was evidence a decade before she left for Rojava may have also shaped her decision to become a courageous resister. In conclusion, this study offered a more nuanced representation of courageous resisters than binary hero/victim narratives that are often in the media that undermine the sovereignty, allyship and self-determination of the Rojava revolution (Kızılkaya, 2021; Yesiltas, [6]) [50-73].

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## Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

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