

THE ARAB LEFTS



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Histories and Legacies, 1950s–1970s

Edited by Laure Guirguis

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CHAPTER ABSTRACTS

Chapter 1, by Orit Bashkin

My chapter traces the development of anti-Zionist thought among Iraqi Jewish communists. I begin in the second half of the 1940s, when middle-class and poor Iraqi Jews join the ranks of the illegal Iraqi Communist Party. I pay special heed to the League for Combating Zionism, which, albeit active for a brief period of time, played a seminal role in the conceptualisation of a radical Jewish-Arab identity. I then follow these Iraqi Jewish communists to Israel where, in the early 1950s, more than 80,000 Iraqi Jews rotted in Israeli transit camps, living in tents and wooden shacks. In response to these conditions, many of the former Iraqi Jewish communists joined the Israeli Communist Party, MAKI (*miflaga kumunistit israelit, al-hizb al-shuyu'i al-isra'ili*). During the 1950s, the members of the party, Jews, Muslims and Christians, consistently challenged the state's decisions relating to the Palestinian and migrant Jewish populations, especially the military regime under which Palestinians lived, Palestinian land confiscations, and Israel's decision to embark on war with Britain and France against Egypt in 1956. In the 1950s, MAKI won some 20 per cent of the vote in slums, poor cities and, especially, the transit camps.

I argue that looking at the neglected activities of Iraqi Jewish communists suggests a different periodisation of the region's history, in which leftist

trends and commitment to leftist, communist and Arab Jewish ideas persist even after these radicals have left their Arab nation states. I likewise suggest that transregional and transnational networks are essential to understanding communist activities; we need to look regionally and, indeed, globally to understand how these radicals framed their identities.

Chapter 2, by Hana Morgenstern

After 1948, Arab and Jewish Marxists from various backgrounds met under the auspices of the Communist Party, where they co-founded its Arabic cultural and political journal, *al-Jadid*. In the aftermath of the destruction wrought by the Palestinian *nakba*, members of the group articulated the importance of a literary initiative that could address both the near-total destruction of Palestinian society and culture and the colonial repression and cultural erasure within Arab Jewish communities. This chapter examines this activity, discussing the ways in which they utilised the journal, as well as popular communist organising strategies such as intellectual clubs and festivals, to plant the seeds for the formation of a movement that aggressively opposed Zionist ideology, culture and policies. Simultaneously it strove to form a Palestinian-Jewish culture that supported the goal of democratic coexistence. The tension between these goals and the de facto segregation of Palestinians and Jews in 1950s Israel was dynamic in the journal, as was the struggle to define the precarious position of Arab Jews in relation to the Israeli mainstream, on the one hand, and the Palestinian minority on the other. Nonetheless, in the years to follow, a shared Palestinian-Jewish Arabic-language literature – which was simultaneously engaged with the reconstruction of Arabic cultural life and with shaping a Palestinian-Jewish aesthetics – was fostered by these collaborations.

Harnessing socialist realist and anti-colonial aesthetics in the service of this popular literary project, writers produced the first local corpus of oppositional, minor literature in Hebrew and Arabic, struggling to articulate the intersections between the working classes, Palestinians under military rule, refugees, Arab Jewish communities and other outliers of the Israeli state. The group's cultural and political work provided the only democratic cultural alternative to Zionist nationalism within Israel during the 1950s, formed part of the root system for the emergence of the movement for Palestinian

national liberation in the 1960s, and bolstered Mizrahi (Arab Jewish) radical politics, literature and culture.

Chapter 3, by Matthieu Rey

This chapter aims to identify the main values shared by the Baathist founders, and how they affected their political practices. Lucien Febvre's concept of 'hierarchy of value' will help us to understand how these intellectuals intended to meet the main challenges of post-independence Syria. They were calling for an Arab renaissance that involved a moral revolution, based on socialism. In 1947, when legislative elections were set up, they turned their club into a political party. They were advocating liberal ideas and identified a constitution, free elections and a parliamentary system as key tools required to implement their programme. They nevertheless progressively adopted new stances, accepting military actions and ultimately supporting Nasserist ideas. Exploring this reversal of policy requires a thorough analysis of ideas, practices, political positions and context. From 1946 to 1955, liberal Baathist ideas vanished and a new revolutionary ethos emerged from the struggle.

Chapter 4, by Sune Haugbolle

The existing literature on Khalid Bakdash, long-time leader of the Syrian-Lebanese Communist Party, often sees him as the embodiment of the way in which the Soviet world communist movement ostensibly dominated Arab communism, leading to the uncritical acceptance of the canons of Soviet Marxism and the concomitant failure to formulate independent social analyses of the specific conditions of Arab societies. The evaluation of Bakdash as 'implanted' is symptomatic of a broader tendency to place non-Western communists on the fringe of local knowledge production, if not completely dismiss them. This chapter argues that such sweeping conclusions rest on methodological dominance of top-down history, in which party doctrine is made equivalent with (the lack of) party-society relations. If we instead pay attention to the micro-biographies of Arab communists, and to their internal disagreement and debates, a different picture emerges, namely that of everyday ideology. Inside the Syrian-Lebanese Communist Party, a rich contestation of the Moscow line took place. The chapter focuses on the deep disagreements surrounding the Syrian-Lebanese Communist Party's fatal decision to sup-

port the international partition plan of Palestine in 1947, despite previous resistance to partition within the party. By reading biographical literature on Bakdash in Arabic and contemporary debates in sources such as *al-Sakha* and *al-Tariq*, the chapter attempts to reconstruct the full extent of disagreement that was terminated when Farajallah al-Helou was forced to toe the party line in his infamous *mea culpa, risalat salim*, and ensuing doctrine under Bakdash's dominance. How did Bakdash deal with this discord? Which personal experiences and contacts with Palestine and Palestinians within the party influenced the debate? What was the role of everyday ideology in determining the party in line on such a crucial question as Palestine?

Chapter 5, by Daniela Melfa

At its onset, internationalism has been the horizon of struggle of communism and the spearhead of its strategy. In the Third World, however, it has been remoulded due to the spread of the nationalist wave and the challenge of underdevelopment. By focusing on the Tunisian Communist Party (PCT), this chapter examines key features of its commitment to the external front, notably in the 'tricontinental' arena, subsequent to the nationalist turn of the mid-1950s. After analysing the PCT's stance towards the Arab movement of national liberation, special attention will be devoted to the Palestinian and Sahrawi causes. The different stance adopted by the PCT – activism in the first case and taciturnity in the second one – sheds light on the party's priorities and networks, where pride of place was given to the Soviet Union and the Maghrebi communist parties.

Chapter 6, by Jakob Kraiss

Algerian delegations participated in World Youth Festivals from the first event in Prague. Their members represented communist, nationalist and even Islamist youth groups, but all used the festivals to publicise the cause of national self-determination. At the same time, they came into contact with representatives from other (former) colonies and from socialist countries, as well as with delegates of left-wing organisations from Western-oriented countries. The assertion of Algeria as a nation among others thus went hand in hand with the formation of international solidarity in an emerging network of leftist, anti-imperialist movements. In my contribution I present,

on the one hand, the evolution of this kind of internationalist nationalism in the Algerian press (e.g. the communist *al-Jaza'ir al-jadida* or the Islamic scouts' paper *al-Hayat*) and, on the other, the development of views about the Algerian struggle (which was becoming a symbol of anti-imperialism) in the host countries, exemplified by the press in the GDR and Austria in 1951 and 1959, respectively.

Chapter 7, by Nate George

This chapter recovers the key contribution of the Moroccan revolutionary Mehdi Ben Barka – while touching upon other Arab militants, movements and states – in building the tricontinental coalition and framework for action. By emphasising the transformative role of political practice upon the development of Ben Barka's thought over several distinct conjunctures, it uses his political evolution to illustrate the historical trajectory of global anti-colonialism from national independence movements that drew upon liberal political traditions into national liberation revolutions operating in a dense internationalist and socialist framework, the framework of tricontinentalism. Central to both of these themes is Ben Barka's role in defining the concept of neocolonialism, institutionalising it within tricontinentalist milieux, and organising revolutionary action to overcome it. Finally, it also recovers the dialectical relationship between revolution and counterrevolution, absent in many accounts of the radical left, and how the relationships between these antithetical forces shaped one another. In sum, it argues that Ben Barka was pivotal in building a workable tricontinentalism that – for a brief yet crucial period – co-ordinated many of the anti-colonial forces of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Chapter 8, by Gennaro Gervasio

The trajectory of the New Left in Egypt is peculiar within the history of Arab radical Marxist politics. In 1965, Egyptian communist parties decided to officially dissolve themselves and be absorbed into Nasser's (pseudo-)revolutionary platform. While both Nasser and these co-opted communists of the 'Official Left' somehow survived the June Defeat of 1967, a new wave of younger and more radical Marxists made its appearance on campuses and, later, in the factories, challenging the established 'revolutionary credentials' of the regime and their older comrades.

On the basis, mostly, of unpublished archive material and personal interviews, this chapter aims to shed light on the theory and political praxis of the Egyptian Radical Left in the 1970s. In particular, this chapter focuses on the experience of the 'far left', embodied by the *al-tanzim al-shuyu'i al-misri* (TshM), formed in 1969, which became the Egyptian Communist Workers' Party (ECWP, *hizb al-'ummal al-shuyu'i al-misri*) in 1975.

While this group attracted many radical intellectuals, and helped to spread the ideas of the new radical Third World Left (Vietnam, Cuba, Mao's China, etc.), this chapter argues that both TshM and ECWP remained trapped within a nationalist and pan-Arabist discourse, by de facto focusing on the national question at the expense of the social question.

Chapter 9, by Maha Nassar

Today, there is much debate about the extent to which Palestinians should engage with the Israeli Left. However, these debates elide a deeper history of strategic and discursive engagements that Palestinians have undertaken with Palestinian, Mizrahi and Ashkenazi leftists inside the Green Line. In this chapter, I recover the ways in which Palestinian nationalists circulated these leftist discourses throughout the Arab world through a close reading of the PLO Research Center's publications, including *al-Yawmiyyat al-Filastiniyya* (Palestinian Diary) and *Shu'un Filastiniyya* (Palestinian Affairs). I argue that by including the activities of an array of leftist and progressive groups inside Israel, from Rakah to Matzpen to the Red Front, these publications played a key role in writing Israeli leftists into the Palestinian cause, albeit with widely differing results. Examining these dynamics highlights the important historical cross-fertilisation of leftist and nationalist discourses and shows how Palestinians critiqued the relationship between Zionism and colonialism within a global leftist context.

Chapter 10, by Laure Guirguis

'Action Committees' and 'Militant Enquiry': these two words summarise the framework set up in 1969 by militants of the Organisation of Communist Action in Lebanon (OCAL, 1971) in-the-making in order to co-ordinate different fields of struggle and to anchor the Palestinian resistance in Lebanese social struggles at a time of intense mobilisation throughout the country.

A few years later, the chief initiator of this endeavour, the sociologist Wad-dah Charara (b. Lebanon 1942), settled with a few comrades in the Beirut 'poverty belt' to carry out militant enquiries in the area. By turning my gaze towards these two experiments, with a special focus on Charara's militant and intellectual trajectory, I trace the reframing of the Maoist notion of 'militant enquiry' as it is displaced and transformed between Europe, the Arab world and Afro-Asian geographies of resistance. I would like to show how militant circulations and processes of the re-signification of representations and know-how have shaped all the elements under study, beginning with the milieu of action up to the militants themselves, and their way of framing problems, defining actions to be taken, and locating themselves in this breadth of local/global interconnectedness. I combine three approaches: mapping the main channels of transmission of the notion; tracing the redefinition of the notion; and studying the intertwining of theorisation processes and bodily involvement in various milieux. The chapter draws on face-to-face and online interviews with former militants carried out between 2016 and 2019. It brings into conversation militant theoretical writings and memoirs, as well as the publications released by the organisations under consideration.

Chapter 11, by Philipp Winkler

This chapter examines the case of the Iraqi revolutionary Khalid Ahmad Zaki, who went to study in London and came into contact with radical left-wing groups active there in the 1960s, eventually joining Bertrand Russell's entourage. Inspired by their fascination with revolutionary movements in the Third World, Zaki returned to Iraq and attempted to launch his own revolutionary war in the southern marshes, only to be defeated by the Iraqi army after a few weeks. However insignificant his actions may have turned out to be within the greater picture of history, Zaki's memory lived on as the 'Che Guevara of the Middle East' far beyond the borders of Iraq, as he turned into a symbol of resistance against the prevalent trends among Arab communists for collaborating with existing regimes in their countries. Drawing on Enzo Traverso's reflection on left-wing melancholia, the chapter shows that, while remembering Zaki initially served the purpose of inciting further actions in his spirit, later commemorations portray him as a symbol of a bygone hope that never materialised.

Chapter 12, by Jens Hanssen

This chapter revisits two moments of crisis and critique in twentieth-century Arab intellectual history: a public debate between Arab leftists and nationalists in Cairo in 1961, and the appearance of Arab Marxists' scholarship on Materialism and Arabic-Islamic philosophy in 1971. Both moments are embedded in their global and regional contexts but are articulated by two sets of intellectuals. The first pits Muhammad Hasanayn Haykal against Clovis Maksoud over the relationship between the organic intellectual and the state. The second moment focuses on the Arab Left's historical-philosophical turn launched by the late Tayyib Tizini and culminating in Husayn Muruwwa's work *Materialist Tendencies in Arabic-Islamic Philosophy* of 1978. I am interested in the twin concepts of 'crisis' and 'critique' and what it tells us about the intellectual struggles within the Arab Left during the age of decolonisation and the global Cold War.

Chapter 13, by Samer Frangie

Surveying the past from an 'authoritarian' and 'sectarian' present, the episode of leftist militancy of the 1960s and 1970s appears as an anomaly in the history of the Levant. From the perspective of such a present, it seems that the afterlives of the Left can be apprehended solely through the register of melancholia. By tracing the various and often contradictory afterlives of the assassinated communist intellectual Husayn Murruwah, this chapter attempts to contextualise this present perspective and to historicise the current melancholia towards this past. The chapter is not about Muruwwa's autobiography per se, but about the travel of texts across changing political conjunctures and their interpretations against the shifting contours of the present. More specifically, the afterlives of Muruwwa's text provide one of the ways through which we can understand what is at stake in the manifold ways we inhabit the 'futures past' that haunt our present.

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INTRODUCTION
THE ARAB LEFTS FROM THE 1950s TO THE
1970s: TRANSNATIONAL ENTANGLEMENTS
AND SHIFTING LEGACIES

Laure Guirguis

Scholarship's long neglect of Arab left-wing trends in the 1950s–1970s is in keeping with the near-complete erasure of Arab radical and democratic traditions in public culture.¹ In 1989, the reassessment of Marxism that followed the collapse of the USSR and of a world perceived as bipolar epitomised the disorientation of the Left on a global scale.² Even ten years before the 1989 systemic collapse, the revolution in Iran, the Egypt–Israel peace treaty and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan marked a watershed in the history of the Middle East and the demise of the Left as a leading force and a dominant imaginary. These structural changes disrupted the rules of knowledge production and the definition of the fields of knowledge,³ while intensive media and political focus on the short term, and the apparently more threatening face of Middle Eastern societies, enhanced scholars' interest in political Islam. The defeat and 'left-wing melancholia'⁴ henceforth appeared

¹ In this introduction, the names in parentheses in the text refer to authors of chapters included in this volume; other references are placed in footnotes.

² Jabar (ed.), *Post-Marxism*.

³ Bozarslan and Guirguis, 'Presentation', *Alain Roussillon*.

⁴ Traverso, *Left-wing Melancholia*; Brown, 'Resisting Left Melancholy'.



as the main appropriate ways in which to address the history of the Left, as evidenced by the sometimes contradictory afterlives of the assassinated communist intellectual Hussein Muruwwa (Frangie) and of Khaked Ahmed Zaki, the ‘Che Guevara of the Middle East’, whose rebellion in Iraq’s southern marches is first remembered as having ‘instigate[d] further action . . . whereas later commemorations have a rather resigned, mournful and depressed tone’ (Winkler). Militants themselves were often the first to slip into auto-criticism, if not self-flagellation. These defeated leftists, though, have not been completely eradicated, nor have they remained silent. As Takriti observes in this volume, they made noticeable contributions to the history of the region, and militant experiments have shaped the sensibility as well as the intellectual and analytical skills of leading figures who fostered the development of social sciences and the renewal of literature and cinema in the Arab world.

Yet, the Arab Lefts of the 1950s to the 1970s recently surfaced in scholarship and revived in militant memories and multi-faceted archival practices, from the flourishing of novels, memoirs or fictional biographies to the digitisation and dissemination of militant documents through various channels, up to the writing of histories on these revolutionary times.⁵ More strikingly, academics as well as former militants started raising new questions, adopting innovative approaches and searching for uncharted narrative spaces. For instance, the histories covering the period from the 1950s to the 1970s henceforth focused on the state and, from this perspective, addressed the histories of the Left through the prism of state and communist parties’ power plays in the dynamics of global and Arab Cold Wars. Now, historians start painting a more complex picture of Arab communist parties’ relationships with the state

⁵ To mention but a few texts and initiatives carried out by former militants over the past years: Sawah, ‘Hikayat’; al-Ulaymi, ‘Memoirs of an Egyptian Communist’ (al-Ulaymi also disseminated online numerous documents of the Egyptian Communist Workers Party); al-Bizri, *Sanawat*; Manna, *Les Parias de Damas*; al-Ikri, *Dhakirat*; Ben Haji Yahia and Abdessamad (eds), *Georges Adda. Militant Tunisien*; and Beydoun, ‘Liban Socialiste’. Having preserved the entire collection of the clandestine journal *Socialist Lebanon*, published between 1966 and 1971 by the eponymous Marxist-Leninist group, Beydoun recently digitised it and made it available online at adrajariyah.home.blog. For his part, the historian and former militant Habib Kazdaghli started digitising the archives of the Tunisian Communist Party in co-operation with Dijon Fondation Maison des Sciences de l’Homme.

and the USSR (Haugbolle, Melfa), deciphering leftist anti-state movements, and following individual trajectories. Further, new relationships with these past stories and histories are being forged, which involve re-imagining the temporal configuration or ‘the manifold ways we inhabit “the future past” that haunts our present’ (Frangie). In the *Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault acutely pointed out the constitutive interactions between the institution of the archive, the definition of what is sayable and valuable, and the meaning of the present:

L’archive, c’est d’abord la loi de ce qui peut être dit, le système qui régit l’apparition des énoncés comme événements singuliers. Mais l’archive, c’est aussi ce qui fait que toutes ces choses dites . . . se groupent en figures distinctes, se composent les unes avec les autres selon des rapports multiples . . . ; c’est ce qui, à la racine même de l’énoncé-événement, et dans le corps où il se donne, définit d’entrée de jeu le *système de son énonçabilité* . . . c’est ce qui définit le mode d’actualité de l’énoncé-chose.⁶

Why have the long-eclipsed histories of the Left become enunciable and valuable, and why now? How does the re-engagement with this past relate to today’s political landscape and conception of history and temporality? For whom?

To leftist militants as well as to academics, the 2011 momentum obviously marked a turning point, insofar as we consider it an apogee in a decade of dissent and deep social and economic change; in a regional, manifold, revolutionary process, still ongoing. Since the early 2000s, various kinds of protests have regularly erupted throughout the region, eventually leading to the collapse of long-lasting but nonetheless internally divided regimes. Revolutionary dynamics would sometimes reactivate structuring tendencies, such as identity politics. Sometimes, they would allow an overcoming, be it momentarily, of the multifarious cleavages and allegiances within societies, first and foremost the borders of class, gender, religion and sect. Whereas the mottoes ‘The end of history’ and ‘There is no alternative’ embody a stalled temporality that keeps people ‘between an “intolerable present” and an

⁶ Foucault, *L’Archéologie du Savoir*, 170–1.

“impossible future”,⁷ Cairo in January 2011 and Lebanon in October 2019 offered a glimpse of hope for envisaging the possibility of a future and defining the present, whatever actually happened next. By epitomising the revival of revolutionary hopes, and the sense of urgency, the urgency of long-awaited social and political change, 2011 unexpectedly connected the nascent and fragile possibility of a future to past revolutionary desires.

The connections between our present political landscape and the heyday of revolutionary hopes in the 1950s–1970s took various shapes. To restrict myself to the Egyptian case, extensive research could be carried out on the multi-layered impact of the Egyptian uprisings on the complex interactions between younger and older militant generations, as well as on the remobilisation of activists of the 1960s–1970s or on their changing stances towards their past. The year 2011 led militants of both generations to reconsider this long-despised period and its leading figures. Arwa Salih is a case in point. A leader of the Egyptian Communist Workers Party, she was considered, in leftist milieux, a controversial figure for her role in the internal struggles that split the party and for her harsh critique of leftist militants’ dogmatic stances and attitudes towards women.⁸ She committed suicide in 1997, leaving behind her a series of essays, and recently captured the attention of newborn militants who have developed numerous narratives revolving around this fascinating and tragic figure.⁹

The same year, 2011, also highlighted scientists’ dependence on obsolete analytical tools and triggered a renewal of methods, categories, questions and approaches. This is especially true in political sciences; scholars in the field of SMT, transitology and regime types expressed the need to forge new analytical tools and models allowing them to provide relevant explanations of Arab societies and politics at a time of multi-layered disruption.¹⁰ This spurred historians to further examine the dynamics of rupture and continuities in militant and intellectual trajectories, as well as in the framing of

⁷ Wright, ‘Mutant City’.

⁸ Salih, *The Stillborn*; Hammad, ‘Arwa Salih’s The Premature’.

⁹ Ramzy, *Renegotiating Politics on Campus*, Chs 3 and 6.

¹⁰ POMEPS, *Arab Uprisings*; Beinin and Vairel (eds), *Social Movements*; Della Porta, *Social Movements in Times of Austerity*.

revolutionary hopes on the long term. Whereas the Left had, since the late 1970s, been analysed mainly through the lens of its relationships with political Islam,¹¹ 2011 fostered the desire to shed light on the resilience of Arab radical and democratic traditions that took shape in spite of local and global wars, state coercion, neoliberal globalisation and repeated failures,¹² and to further rethink the Left beyond the secular and religious divide.¹³

The critical stance of this collection of essays lies in the authors' commitment to interrogating commonly accepted categories. First and foremost, how to capture the category of 'Left'? In a narrow sense, one could flatly define the Left by relying on individuals' and organisations' claims to belong to the Left, considered as a diverse field consisting of various trends in Marxism, socialism and anarchism that have emerged in the Arab World since the late nineteenth century.¹⁴ Although these claims might in some cases appear contestable, this definition would not allow for deciphering what the Left actually meant at that time. Rather, I propose conceiving of the Left as a matrix of meaning and values, and opt for a dynamic process of definition. From this perspective, studying the Left in the 1950s–1970s requires locating it in the discursive and normative field of the time, which was structured by a series of debates between competing or convergent political forces and ideologies, in the interplay between local, regional and global challenges.

Let me sketch out a brief overview of the evolving power play in the 1950s–1970s. Discredited for having accepted the 1947 UN partition plan for Palestine, the Arab communist parties nevertheless remained powerful organisations in Iraq, Soudan, Tunisia, Syria, Algeria, Syria and Lebanon.¹⁵ However,

¹¹ Dot-Pouillard, 'De Pékin à Téhéran' and 'Les Relations entre Islamismes, Nationalismes et Mouvements de Gauche au Moyen-Orient Arabe'; Sing, 'Brothers in Arms'; Abisaab, 'Sayyid Musa al-Sadr'; Ayari, 'Le Prix de l'Engagement'.

¹² Bardawil, 'Dreams'; Hanssen and Weiss, *Arabic Thought against the Authoritarian Age*.

¹³ And before 2011, see Roussillon, 'Égyptianité, Arabité, Islamité'.

¹⁴ Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean*.

¹⁵ On the Arab communist parties see: Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*; Beinin, *Was the Red Flag Flying There?*; Botman, *The Rise of Communism in Egypt*; Budeiri, *The Palestine Communist Party 1919–1948*; Feliu et al., *The Communist Parties in the Middle East*; Franzén, *Red Star Over Iraq*; Halliday, *Arabia without Sultans*; Hamza, *Communisme et Nationalisme en Tunisie*; Ismael, *The Communist Movement*; Warburg, *Islam, Nationalism and Communism*.

they did not represent the sole, or even the major, leaders of the Left in the new world order that took shape under American hegemony in the aftermaths of the Second World War. In the 1950s, pan-Arabism in its Baathist and Nasserist veins had become the driving ideology in the Arab world and, at a time when the hero of Bandung and Suez was still embodying both opposition to imperialism and the establishment of a new political order, the creation of the United Arab Republic (UAR) momentarily raised most people's hopes for a pan-Arab anti-Western front. Nasser had actually monopolised the discourse of liberation. The failure of the Egyptian–Syrian Union in 1961 therefore created a deep sense of loss. It fostered a turn to the Left in pan-Arab movements: socialist claims shaped the Egyptian National Charter of 21 May 1962 (Hanssen) and the final document of the Baath Party's sixth National Congress (1963).¹⁶ Further, it led to splits and withdrawals and, for instance, increased tensions within the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM), resulting in the creation of radical left-wing groups in the whole region.¹⁷ As for the Arab communist parties, they similarly went through political and organisational crises that triggered the formation of dissenting groups. Yet, the processes of decolonisation and the emergence of the Third World had brought to the forefront the Algerian, the Chinese, the Cuban and the Vietnamese revolutionary examples;¹⁸ and the Sino-Soviet struggle for supremacy furthered the search for new models along Marxist lines in a critical move against Stalinism and the communist parties, but also against pan-Arab movements. Fuelled by hopes and scarred by successive defeats, the Arab New Left was born in the 1960s from the loss of faith in the ability of Arab regimes to achieve the long-awaited social, political

¹⁶ On Nasser's socialism, see Rami Ginat, *Egypt's Incomplete Revolution*. On the ambivalent relationships between Communists and Free Officers/the Nasserian State, see Botman, 'Egyptian Communists and the Free Officers' and Tewfik Aclimandos, 'Officiers Libres et Officiers Communistes'. Before establishing the Arab Revolutionary Workers Party with Ilyas Morqos, the Marxist Syrian thinker Yasin al-Hafiz, who had affiliated with the Syrian Communist Party and thereafter with the Syrian Baath Party, contributed the writing of the documents of the 6th Congress and the socialist turn in the Party. On al-Hafiz, see Frangie, 'Historicism', and 'Exiled from History'.

¹⁷ On the ANM, see Barut, *Haraka*; Kazziha, *Revolutionary Transformation*; Ibrahim, *Limadha*; Sayigh, 'Reconstructing the Paradox'; Takriti, 'Political Practices in the Gulf'.

¹⁸ Mokhtefi, *Algiers, Third World Capital*; Guirguis, 'Vietnam'.

and national emancipation and the liberation of Palestine.¹⁹ It is worth noticing that the numerous left-wing groups that grew out of pan-Arab movements and the Arab communist parties in the 1960s–1970s remain under-studied, although numerous documents and testimonies are available or easily accessible (Gervasio, Guirguis, Nassar, Winkler).²⁰

What is the Left among these political and ideological trends spread between numerous organisations, which, certainly, often competed for political power or ideological hegemony, but also typically shared a set of overlapping or convergent values, goals and assumptions? ‘Left’ does not merely name one of these groups and trends according to a fixed definition. Rather, ‘the Left’ characterises a stance adopted in a specific situation, as well as the principles and values considered socialist or Marxist, to which the involved protagonists referred at that time.

One may state that Nasser, the Baath or dissenting groups inside the ANM have adopted leftist stances, but is that to say that they were leftist? The question is not aimed at listing groups and individuals in categories, but at opening up the discussion on these categories, and especially on the categories that name the major ideological trends existing within that period: Third-Worldism, Marxism, communism, Baathism, Nasserism, socialism, and nationalism in its *qawmi* and *watani* guises. What is the Left, then, if not a transregional and even transnational, though diversified, universe of meaning and values, a dynamically constructed universe of shared references? In the 1960s, the leftist matrix of meaning became prevalent in the discursive and normative field structured by debates on the best ways to lead the Arab/Palestinian revolution and achieve economic, social and political emancipation. Beyond the ‘isms’ and beyond academic turf battles, the study of the Left in the 1950s–1970s therefore implies a re-engagement not solely with

¹⁹ For further discussion on the Arab versus the European and North American New Left, see Guirguis, ‘Vietnam’ and ‘May ’68’.

²⁰ On the New Left in the Arab world, recent scholarship includes: Bardawil, *When All This Revolution Melts into Air*, *Dreams* and *Revolution and Disenchantment*; Fiedler, ‘Israel in Revolution’; Guirguis, ‘Vietnam’ and ‘May ’68’; Gervasio, *Al-haraka al-markisiyya fi misr*; Hammad, ‘Arwa Salih’s The Premature’; Hendrickson, ‘March 1968’; Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, ‘The Origins of Communist Unity’; Haugbolle, ‘The New Arab Left’.

the history of the Arab communist parties (Haugbolle) but also with the political and intellectual history of Nasserism and the Baath, which have long been analysed through the narrow lens of nationalism.²¹ Taking seriously the debates on moral and political values that stirred the Baath Party between the late 1940s and the early 1950s, Rey in this volume deciphers the framing of the Baathist founders' evolving political stances and practices. For his part, Hanssen revisits 'two moments of crisis and critique' (Hanssen), the first being the debate on the relationships between the intellectual and the state, which confronted Clovis Maksoud and Muhammad Hasanayn Haykal in 1961, and eventually contributed to the so-called socialist turn in Nasserian policy as evidenced in the Egyptian National Charter (1962).

All the authors in the book had to face the question of the relationships between nationalism and internationalism/socialism, be it at the core of their argument or more at the margins. The interplay of tensions and convergences between nationalism and internationalism/socialism did not consist in a problem that could be solved. Rather, it formed an aporia that arose from a double bind: from the changing stance of the USSR on this issue in theory and practice, and from the original sin, so to say, of post-Second World War internationalism that ultimately relied on nationalist claims since it took shape in the decolonisation processes. This aporia structured the debates and the political stances at local, regional and international scales, in various and complex ways. Kraiss traces the FLN's successful use of World Youth Festivals to construct Algerian nationhood in an international setting. Similarly, Melfa argues that the Tunisian Communist Party's nationalist turn in the mid-1950s 'did not erase its international commitment to socio-political changes, but rather channelled it into the defence of liberation struggles worldwide', albeit sometimes reluctantly as evidenced in the use of a double standard with regard to the Sahrawi cause.

The authors relocate the Arab Lefts in transnational dynamics and revolutionary networks, by paying thorough attention to the circulation of people, symbols, ideas and know-how in the region, as well as in the interplay between Europe, the Middle East and Afro-Asian geographies of resistance.

²¹ Weiss, 'Left Out', and 'Genealogies of Baathism'.

In line with recent efforts in Middle Eastern Studies, this is a salutary move. Attempts to better understand the historical processes that made the 1960s a critical juncture, a ‘transnational moment of change’,²² had given birth in the late 1990s to a new epistemological framework that addressed, from the periphery, the issues of the Cold War, national emancipation struggles and the transformation of political subjectivities.²³ The Arab Lefts, however, have long been set apart from emerging scholarship on transnational communism and the Global Sixties. This is now changing. Historians of the Arab world began considering the Arab Left from a transnational perspective.²⁴ Several authors have pointed out the formation of a transnational, though diversified, revolutionary culture; they described it by referring either to the sense of belonging to a ‘global community of revolution’ or to the production of an ‘international language of dissent’.²⁵ So far, we still know very little about the formation of this transnational universe of meaning, as symbols, notions and know-how are displaced, translated and transformed through ever more complex itineraries.

In what follows, the authors typically share the assumption that the transnational, the local and the global do not consist in pre-existing scales of reference,²⁶ and interrogate their dialectical formation and local/global cross-fertilisation processes. Adopting a constructivist and dynamic approach towards transnational entanglements, most focus attention on the interplay between the main channels of transmission/translation, shifting theorisations, and militant experiments in context. This implies combining the study of transregional/transnational networks and venues of meetings with analyses of militant journals and theoretical or literary texts as well as of militant

²² Horn and Kenney, *Transnational Moments of Change*.

²³ Westad, *The Global Cold War*; Alinder et al. (eds), *The Long 1968*; Christiansen and Scarlett (eds), *The Third World in the Global 1960s*; Jian et al. (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties*; Suri, *Power*; Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*; AHR, ‘The International 1968’.

²⁴ On the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, see Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean*. On the 1960s–1970s, see Bardawil, ‘Dreams’; Guirguis, ‘Vietnam’ and ‘May ’68’; Pennock, *The Rise of the Arab American Left*; Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*.

²⁵ Borrowing from, respectively, Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*, 6 and Suri, *Power and Protest*, 23.

²⁶ Werner and Zimmermann, ‘Penser l’Histoire Croisée’.

actions. Indeed, numerous militants were committed both to theoretical analysis or literary writing and to action on the ground. Deciphering the processes of re-signification and de-/re-identification in this breadth of local/global interconnectedness therefore also leads us to place emphasis on the constitutive interactions between theorisation processes and bodily involvement in various milieux (George, Guirguis, Haugbolle). Three chapters focus on the framing of leftist anti-Zionist stances between Europe and the Arab world. Drawing on a thorough analysis of the PLO Research Centre's publications, Nassar deciphers how Palestinians engaged in common action with Palestinian and Jewish leftists inside the Green Line, circulated leftist ideas throughout the whole region, and elaborated their critique of the relationship between Zionism and colonialism within a transnational frame of reference. For her part, Morgenstern turns attention towards the Arabic cultural and political journal *al-Jadid*, the mouthpiece of the Palestine Communist Party, in which Arab and Jewish Marxists from various backgrounds struggled to address 'both the near total destruction of Palestinian society and culture and the colonial repression and cultural erasure within Arab Jewish communities' (Morgenstern). Following the trajectories of Iraqi Jewish Communists between the late 1940s and the 1960s, Bashkin shows how 'leftist trends and commitment to leftist, communist and Arab Jewish ideas persist even after these radicals left their Arab nation states' to settle in Israel (Bashkin).

To conclude, I would like to draw attention to little-explored paths of research that the study of the Arab Lefts can offer.

First, the literature on the 1960s has addressed an array of social, political and cultural issues, but has often neglected the economy.²⁷ In the aftermath of the 2008 crisis and the subsequent uprisings throughout the world, the question of capitalism and its discontents was put back on the agenda of social scientists.²⁸ Yet, socio-economic change in capitalist societies played a key role in the rise of new militant generations in the 1950s–1970s, and economic claims and critique lay at the core of militant writings. To mention but one significant text, the publication of *Class Struggles in Egypt* under the pen name of Mahmoud Hussein in 1969 impacted both Arab and France militant networks and contributed to raising the political awareness and analytical skills

²⁷ Nolan, 'Where Was the Economy in the Global Sixties?'

²⁸ For example Hanieh, *Lineages of Revolt* and *Capitalism and Class in the Gulf Arab States*.

of a militant generation in the making.²⁹ Further, in some instances, leftist militants initiated more or less successful actions in factories, in informal neighbourhoods (Guirguis), in the impoverished countryside or in Palestinian camps, to the degree that the ruling regimes reluctantly tolerated this.³⁰

Second, to what extent, and how, would the experiences of the Arab Lefts incite us to reframe the problem of revolutionary violence? For the Arab Lefts were embedded not only in transnational revolutionary networks but also in Cold War multi-centric dynamics of violence, and defined themselves as such against their enemy, and vice versa. The Cold War produced a matrix of war, which was also a matrix of meaning grounded in the exclusive distinction between friends and foes, that is, in an identitarian logic. For war, as an institution, puts to work a regime of truth, as Foucault would say, and this regime of truth has framed the formation of resistance discourses, symbols and strategies. From this perspective, shall we not consider the moving field of antagonistic discourses and strategies prevalent at that time, at global and local scales, and seek to identify the intricate dynamics of local and global processes within the formation of a global ‘matrix of meaning’?³¹ Did revolutionary struggles run the risk, from the outset, not only of being trapped in violence and identity politics, but also of contributing to the reproduction of this matrix of war? It would be worth deciphering the internal shifting frontiers in the Left considered as a diverse field, as well as its external frontiers – the ‘imperial discourse’ or religious-identitarian discourses which were also gaining momentum at that time – in order to assess whether, and if so how, the discourses on violence and the practices of violence – or violence as a transformative practice – might ultimately have held ‘revolutionaries’ and ‘conservatives’ ‘locked in an uneasy embrace’.³² How did militants make sense of revolutionary violence, and how did it structure or disrupt the consistency

²⁹ First released in French by Maspéro, the text was translated into Arabic by Waddah Charara and published by Dar al-Tali’a in 1970.

³⁰ In Lebanon, for instance, regarding solidarity actions in the Akkar see Chahal, ‘La Tourmente et l’Oubli’ and Seurat, ‘Le Quartier de Bab Tebbane’; and concerning leftist involvement in factories see Traboulsi, *Sura*, Charara, *Hurub* and the movie *A Feeling Greater than Love* by Mary Jirmanous Saba, which interrogates the role of the Organisation of Communist Action in Lebanon during the strikes at the Ghandour factories in 1972–3.

³¹ Jabri, ‘Critical Thought’.

³² Hanssen, *Critique of Violence*.

of the leftist universe of meaning? How have some militants attempted to disrupt the logic of violence or resisted resorting to violence?

Finally, in Europe as in the USA and in the Middle East, militants of the New Left were aiming at overthrowing interlocking systems of power and oppression, and have subsequently attempted to experiment with new forms of organisation, of leadership, of social life and of gender relationships. In this regard, it would be relevant to turn attention towards three cornerstones, the sectarian, the gender and the organisational issues, and to put into play once again the notion of transformative practices. For only the reiteration of practices, be they social, institutional or discursive practices, can ultimately transform structuring tendencies and social norms, as Butler would argue, and, before her, Kant. I would be tempted to argue that, in tackling these three issues, New Left militants have realised their most innovative experiments and experienced their greatest failure.

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UNFORGETTABLE RADICALISM: *AL-ITTIHAD'S* WORDS IN HEBREW NOVELS

Orit Bashkin

Introduction

In August 2012, the novelist and former communist Sami Michael (born 1926) created a local storm when he delivered a speech on ethnic relations in Israel. The left-leaning Israeli blog 972+, which later published it, called the speech ‘a “cri du coeur” that is full of love and grief’. In his speech, Michael, who was born and raised in Iraq and migrated to Israel in 1949, voiced important criticisms of the Israeli Left itself, as he reflected on the rift between Jews of Middle Eastern descent (known as ‘Mizrahim’ or ‘Eastern Jews’) and European Jews (known as ‘Ashkenazim’):

Until today, more than sixty years after the state of Israel was established, this rift has not been mended. Mentally, it takes the form of racism, and socially it expresses the gap in status . . . The salon leftists – and in Israel, it is worth noting, the leftists have never left the salon – repudiated Eastern Jewry as expendable ‘raw material’, or in the Communist jargon of that time: the ‘lumpen-proletariat’. This was in spite of the fact that immigrants from Egypt, Lebanon and Bulgaria, and especially from Iraq, held an impressive Communist record from their countries of origin. The Communist establishment in Israel treated these immigrants with blatant arrogance. At the beginning of the 1950s there were immigrant camps in which 20 per cent of their

