



**Laure Guirguis (editor).- *The Arab Lefts: Histories and Legacies, 1950s-1970s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 313p.**

Scholarship on Arab left-wing trends has remained scanty. Published in 2020, *The Arab Lefts: Histories and Legacies, 1950s-1970s* is an interesting volume which undertakes the study of the Arab Lefts as a milieu of meanings and values regarding the discursive structure of the period under study. Interestingly, ‘Left,’ in this book, portrays a standpoint adopted in a particular condition, as well as the principles and values considered socialist or Marxist, of which the involved politicians, intellectuals and militants spoke during that circumstance; it is a field that comprises various trends in Marxism, socialism and anarchism. The book is composed of thirteen chapters, a constellation of studies beyond the ‘isms’ and a re-engagement with a dynamically built universe of joint positions.

In ‘Unforgettable Radicalism: Al-Ittihad’s Words in Hebrew Novels,’ Orit Bashkin studies the significant role the League for Combatting Zionism played in conceptualising a radical Jewish-Arab identity. Iraqi Jews’ movement to Israel met a ‘painful welcome.’ The newcomers, however, actively protested against this unwelcome situation; they fought for preserving the Arab culture. Prominent leftist authors, like Shim‘on Ballas and Sami Michael, accentuated the pains the discriminated people experienced by emphasising the mistreatment of the Palestinian people’s rights in addition to other issues, including oppression, gender and ethnicity. As many Iraqi Jews, Muslims and Christians joined the Israeli Communist Party, MAKI, in the 1950s, voices against the Palestinian land seizure and the Israeli involvement in the Franco-British war against Egypt preoccupied the *al-Ittihad*’s writers.

The Communist Party attracted Arab and Jewish Marxists from a number of backgrounds. Through *al-Jadid*, these Marxists expressed a necessity to resist the colonial hegemony of the state and to spotlight the cultural marginalisation of the Arabs. Hana Morgenstern’s ‘Beating Hearts: Arab Marxism, Anti-colonialism and Literatures of Coexistence in Palestine/Israel, 1944-60’ analyses this approach, taking into consideration the employment of strategies of resisting Zionist ideology in its cultural and political contexts. The Marxist movement struggled for the making of a Palestinian-Jewish culture which sustained the objectives of democratic coexistence; however, the 1960s witnessed the escalation of disenchantment of many activists, like Sami Michael and Shim‘on Ballas, with MAKI. As the drama of disillusionment unfolded, Arabic culture in Jewish communities lost readership. Yet, a struggle for progressive Arabic literature flourished in the 1970s and took various styles which focused on themes of cultural exchange between Muslims and Jews, anti-Separatism, bilingualism and aesthetics on anti-colonial issues.

Matthieu Rey's 'Free Elections versus Authoritarian Practices: What Baathists Fought for' undertakes the study of the main standards and morals the forefathers of the Baathist party, such as Michel 'Aflaq and Salah al-Din Bitar, shared in common. Refined by Olivier Wiewiorka, Lucien Febvre's concept of 'the hierarchy of values' can be used for recognising the Middle Eastern activism. The Baathist intellectuals aimed to face the chief trials of post-independence Syria. Their plea, informed by socialism, was for an Arab renaissance that would encompass a major upheaval at the level of morals. They supported liberal ideas and they acknowledged the need for a constitution, non-discriminatory elections, and a parliamentary organisation as important components for the implementation of their programme. A change in values, however, came to the fore as the Baathists approved and endorsed Nasser's regime. Consequently, Baathist values disappeared and new radical tenets were born.

Sune Haugbolle's 'Dealing with Dissent: Khalid Bakdash and the Schisms of Arab Communism' deals with the slight differences of internal voices of dissent in the social history of Arab communism. Khalid Bakdash's biographies, in this regard, are relevant as they focus on the profound discrepancies which characterised the Syrian-Lebanese Communist Party's final resolution to endorse the international partition plot of Palestine in 1947, notwithstanding former opposition to partition within the party. Biographies on Bakdash enable this chapter to rebuild the complete disparity and the internal fights that followed and ultimately led to separation of the Syrian and Lebanese communist movements. Indeed, this study shows that Bakdash belonged to an opulent political milieu. His Arab communism went beyond the lengthy understanding of the Stalinist control in the Middle East, and it constituted a share of an interchange with socialist and nationalist agendas.

In her chapter, 'A Patriotic Internationalism: The Tunisian Communist Party's Commitment to the Liberation of Peoples,' Daniela Melfa examines main features of the Tunisian Communist Party's commitment to the external front and the PCT's position towards the Arab movement of national emancipation. In 1967, Mohamed Ennafaa, the Secretary-General of the PCT, declared that Tunisia was a country which also belonged to the globe. The PCT struggled against imperialist and colonial powers. Yet, it also showed an openness to outside inspirations for the sake of gaining a sense of self-esteem. The PCT persistently supported the struggle of minority groups for the recognition of their legitimate rights. Its internationalism demonstrated a shaped vision to the protection of nationalism and nation-state in the Third World.

Jakob Kraiss's 'Internationalist Internationalism: Making Algeria at World Youth Festivals, 1947-62' discusses the significance and importance of World Youth Festivals to build Algerian nationhood in an international scene. The participants in the event in Prague comprised communist, nationalist and Islamist youngsters. All of them employed national causes and self-determination. They met representatives of left-wing organisations from many countries. In this chapter, Kraiss studies Algerian, East German and Austrian press reports with the aim of discerning the mutual views of Algerians at World Youth Festivals during the French colonisation of Algeria.

Nate George's 'Travelling Theorist: Mehdi Ben Barka and Morocco from Anti-colonial Nationalism to the Tricontinental' is centred on the important contribution of the Moroccan activist Mehdi Ben Barka as well as some Arab revolutionaries, movements and states in making the tricontinental alliance and agenda for action. Ben Barka's political practice showed the historical course of worldwide anti-colonialism from movements of national independence which opted for concepts of national liberation and utilised them in an internationalist and socialist framework. Lacking in numerous texts of the radical left, the chapter sheds light on how the relationship between revolution and counterrevolution shaped one another.

In 'Marxism or Left-Wing Nationalism? The New Left in Egypt in the 1970s' Gennaro Gervasio sees the trajectory of the New Left in Egypt as peculiar within the history of Arab radical Marxist politics. The chapter highlights the philosophy and political praxis of the Egyptian Radical Left in the 1970s as well as the experience of the 'far left' which the *al-tanzīm al-shuyū'ī al-miṣrī* represented. Created in 1969, the organisation would become the Egyptian Communist Workers' Party in 1975. In spite of the two groups' openness to radical intellectuals from various countries, the TshM and the ECWP's discourse was confined to a nationalist and pan-Arabist one.

In her chapter 'Non-Zionists, Anti-Zionists, Revolutionaries: Palestinian Appraisals of the Israeli Left, 1967-73,' Maha Nassar argues that the debates on Palestinians' engagement with the Israeli Left ignores a deeper history of planned and conversational engagements that Palestinians have embarked on with Palestinian, Mizrahi and Ashkenazi leftists inside the Green Line. With largely different results, publications, such as *al-Yawmiyyāt al-Filastīniyya* (Palestinian Diary) and *Shu'ūn Filastīniyya* (Palestinian Affairs), played a significant role in establishing the dynamics that shape the Palestinian views of the relationship between Zionism and colonialism within an inclusive leftist environment.

The connexion between contesting a political and economic order and challenging social and cultural standards is a key characteristic in worldwide revolutionary dynamics in the 1960s and 1970s. In her chapter 'Dismount the Horse to Pick Some Roses': Militant Enquiry in Lebanese New Left Experiments, 1968-73', Laure Guirguis focuses on Waddah Charara's militant and intellectual course with an outline of the reframing of the Maoist concept of 'militant enquiry' as it is used in a different context, and transformed between Europe, the Arab world and Afro-Asian spaces of resistance. Along with analysing militant theoretical writings and memoirs, interviewing former militants added value to the originality of the work.

Arab militants' voices have long been marginalised; the story of Khalid Ahmad Zaki and his guerrilla war in southern Iraq is no exception. In 'The 'Che Guevara of the Middle East': Remembering Khalid Ahmad Zaki's Revolutionary Struggle in Iraq's Southern Marshes,' Philipp Winkler studies carefully the story of the Iraqi activist Khalid Ahmad Zaki, who met radical left-wing groups while he moved to London to study and to frequent Bertrand Russell's entourage. As Zaki became a symbol of resistance against the predominant movements among Arab communists for co-operating with prevailing regimes in their home countries, his memory

survived as a revolutionary icon and went far beyond the borders of Iraq. Died trying to instigate revolution among peasant multitudes in the Third World, Zaki was perceived as another heroic anti-imperialist rebel. His friends and comrades considered Zaki as a Middle Eastern Che Guevara.

In ‘Crisis and Critique: The Transformation of the Arab Radical Tradition between the 1960s and the 1980s,’ Jens Hanssen focuses on intellectual debates between Arab leftists and nationalists in Cairo, and the emergence of Arab Marxist scholarship on Materialism and Arabic-Islamic philosophy during the period between 1961 and 1971. The notions of ‘crisis’ and ‘critique’ and what they convey about the intellectual struggles within the Arab Left during the age of decolonisation and the global Cold War occupies a central place in Hanssen’s approach of the topic.

Studying the past from authoritarian and sectarian perspectives unfolds the militancy of the Arab Left in the seventh and the eighth decades of the twentieth century as an anomaly in the history of the Middle East. Samer Frangie’s chapter, ‘The Afterlives of Husayn Muruwwa: The Killing of an Intellectual, 1987,’ undertakes contextualising this current viewpoint and historicising this present feeling of great sadness towards the past. The Afterlives of Husayn Muruwwa offer an opportunity that can help readers recognise what is at stake in the various ways we live the ‘futures past’ that haunt our present. Muruwwa established one of the moments in which Marxism and communism collided with modern Shi’ite Islamism.

The Arab Left played an important role in shaping the historical era studied in this volume. Munif al-Razzaz, Samir Amin, George Tarabichi, Anouar Abdel-Malek, Sadiq Jalalal-Azm, Mahdi Amel and Abdallah Laroui, to mention but a few, dominated the intellectual scene across the region. The historical period covered in *The Arab Lefts: Histories and Legacies, 1950s- 1970s* gives deep insights into leftist militants and intellectuals’ determination to achieve social justice in the context of a secular society, and to fight the powers of sectarianism, the religious right and the narrow identities. Its chapters deal with various uncharted areas on leftist militancy from the Maghreb to the Arab Gulf. Such great effort in tracing the appearance and evolution of leftist thought from the 1950s to the 1970s, as it is scholarly manifest and well structured in this volume, makes the book an important contribution to the study of the Arab Left.

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