The Palestinian leftist movement: between political reality and cultural heritage

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The Palestinian leftist movement represented a revolutionary social phenomenon that laid the cornerstone of Palestinian resistance following the wide popular support it received from the late 1960s to the 1980s. Since that time, the popular support it had once enjoyed has diminished in favour of the political Islamic movements in the Palestinian community in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the civil society organizations that were supported by and subsequently succumbed to the terms of the donor states. This paper tackles the failure of the Palestinian left movement in generating a progressive resistance left culture, and it clarifies also the role and the impact of the Arab-Palestinian cultural heritage in the retardation of the Palestinian leftist movement. It seems evident today that the popularity the Palestinian leftist movement once enjoyed was related to a specific political era when leftist thinking and revolutionary ideology were generally popular. That being the case, the interim leftist thinking did not develop as the result of the leftist powers’ attempt to bring about societal change through the replacement of the existing social and cultural structures with progressive revolutionary beliefs that met the political and social needs of the left.

Keywords: Palestinian leftist movement; Palestinian cultural heritage; Palestinian political reality

The leftists used to take out the history from their heads; instead of taking out their heads from it.1

Much of the Palestinian literature has addressed the topic of the Palestinian left-wing movement in terms of the rise and success of the Palestinian leftist, the reasons for its regression, on both Arab and Palestinian levels (Hilal and Herman 2013; also Qatamesh, Al-Khawaja and others), with much less attention paid to the implication of the cultural factors in its regression, in contrast to the implication of the political factors that led to its weakness.

In most cases, the Palestinian leftist involved all the political and popular left-wing powers, including the Communist Party (currently the Palestinian People’s Party – PPP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), the Palestinian Democratic Union (FIDA), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-GC), and the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front (PPSF). This paper focuses on the left-wing parties that emerged after the Six-Day War (1967), although the Palestinian left

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was active before that time (Al-Ashhab 2008). This analysis mainly reviews the Palestinian leftist parties that appeared after that war, or the elapse of 1967 as it is sometimes called: ‘Al-Naksa’.

This article discusses three unrelated issues that it considers to be significant when studying the cultural character of the Palestinian leftist movement – a vast field of research so far largely unexplored. They include the rise of the leftist movement after 1967, the way the left dealt with women’s issues after the 1967 defeat, and leftist thinking after the Oslo Accords.

Previous literature reviews have raised the initial enquiry of whether the conditions for emergence of the leftist movement theoretically applied to the Palestinian situation at the outset.

During the researcher’s attempt to address this issue, it became clear that the Palestinian leftist was established after the Six-Day War, resulting from the regression of Arab nationalism in the wake of the Arab defeat, and overcoming the impasse. Therefore, the Palestinian armed struggle movements revived the leftist revolutionary thinking that met the needs of that critical stage in the history of the Palestinian cause. In this regard, Hisham Sharabi argued that the defeat of 1967 revived either frustration or revolution. In the Palestinian situation, it revived the revolution, determination, and struggle:

The severe shock strengthened our awareness, and deepened it day by day. This was the revolution of the defeat of 1967. The surrender to despair equaled surrender to enemy, and equaled a return to pre-consciousness stage. Thus, the force that inspired large segments of the educated bourgeoisie, to which I belonged, […] emerged towards the revolutionary awareness. (Sharabi 1975, 15)

Sharabi’s words reflected the ideological, social and revolutionary transition of some Palestinian resistance movements from the realm of nationalism to leftist Marxism in the late 1960s. These later divisions and developments in the leftist movements reflected the fragmentation of the left-wing movement between nationalism and Marxism. For example, the PFLP maintained to include the national thinking in its revolutionary and thought ideology as a basic principle, whereas the DFLP disfavoured it (Al-Khawaja 2005, 23).

Ever since Karl Marx wrote that ‘Nationalism is a weapon in the hands of the bourgeoisie’ (Beer 1955, 21) an ongoing discussion has been raging between Marxists and other currents, particularly concerning the contradictions – or lack of them – between nationalism and Marxism or communism. The existence of this contradiction is evidenced by the fact that leftist movements in both the world at large and the Arab world, in particular, view Marxism as being in direct opposition to nationalism. This is manifested in the Arab world by one fact, among others, that many Arab and Palestinian communists, swayed by Soviet illusion, recognized Israel, believing that this implanted settlement would become a socialist country. Another is the fact that Syrian communists stood against unity between Syria and Egypt in 1958.

This is both an old and a new discussion among members of the Palestinian leftist movement; it continues to rage today, just as it did during the early years of the movement’s foundation. Two answers are proposed to explain the reasons for this. In response to a question from the author asked during an interview (held on 19 April 2015) regarding the Palestinian left’s retreat from its nationalist roots, Ahmad Qata-mesh said, in an interview conducted by the author, that the Palestinian leftist movement was not in contradiction with nationalist thought at all, ‘since all leftist
Palestinian currents, including the Popular and Democratic Fronts, adopted as part of their thinking, a revivalist Arab project aimed at unifying the Arab countries and ending the dependency on imperialism and globalisation’ (Qatamesh, in an interview on April 19, 2015). In direct opposition to this view, Samara (interview 2015) said that the Palestinian left had retreated from its nationalist roots, to varying degrees, adding that

while the Democratic Front leapt towards a highly exaggerated ‘internationalism,’ the fact that the Popular Front was the outcome of the Arab Nationalist Movement’s demise distanced it from the nationalist current. These developments that took place after the 1967 War compelled the two movements to become more regional and international in nature, and thus abandon the nationalist dimension to varying degrees. It is worth noting here that their confinement to regionalism on the one hand, and their closeness to internationalism and disregard for the nationalist dimension, on the other, played an important role in causing the Palestinian left’s failure to either transform into a leading current or become the coordination centre for an Arab communist movement. (interview conducted on 19 April 2015)

Some writers believe that the contradiction between Marxism and nationalism was, at various stages of history, a fabricated or imagined contradiction, especially in colonized societies. The communists’ struggle against colonialism is a natural phenomenon, and this applies to the Arab world as well as to Palestine. Moreover, Arab unity is also a demand – as a material and developmental need – for the popular classes which are supposed, at least according to Marxism, to have a vested interest in socialism, or have an interest in socialism which, in turn, has a vested interest in Arab unity (Samara 2003, 13–54). As pure theoretical analysis presupposes, it is, at the same time, both nationalist and socialist. In other words, analysis requires theoretical and revolutionary awareness-raising tools. This notion is, however, rejected by traditional Arab communists (the Soviet current), the current that insists on the contradiction between nationalism and Marxism, while recognizing Israel at the same time.

Returning to the revival of the leftist thinking in the period that followed 1967, we conclude that the leftist ideology was not in its foundation a response of a class reality. In his critical review of the experience of the PFLP abroad, Jarrad (2005, 34) noted:

Clearly, the PFLP renounced the class and ideology dimension during its foundational Second Conference in February 1967. […] In its initial phase, the PFLP did not plan to propose a complete political leftist vision for liberation of Palestine, derived from, and grounded on, the theory of the scientific socialism.

The social class status of the founders of the Palestinian left, such as Dr George Habash and Wadi Haddad, shows that they belonged to the educated bourgeoisie (Abu Al-Sharif 2014, 15). Therefore, the establishment of the leftist movement after the war of 1967 did not conform to the conditions of the theoretical leftist establishment, neither in terms of the social class of its pioneer founders nor in response to social class reality. Indeed, the class origins of Palestinian leftist leaders are not different from leftist leaders in other countries, especially in Third World countries. They come from the petty bourgeoisie or, in more modern terms, from middle-class backgrounds. Members of this class usually receive a good academic and professional education as doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc. due to the availability of the financial
resources necessary to fund these levels of education, especially in the more advanced Western universities.

In the Leninist sense — well-known to the party — it was from among the well-educated that revolutionaries were to be found; those who took political positions and who, therefore, had organized partisan tendencies. There are many reasons for this, including the fact that they have the relevant culture and knowledge, which is what distinguished party members from ordinary citizens; a phenomenon that also applies to the early Palestinian leftist. It can be said that today this distinction is no longer that significant or the sole condition, now that information is easily available to anyone who wants to know.

What applies to the class origin of the Palestinian leftist and its founders also applies to leftist leaders throughout the Arab world, especially in the Arab Mashrek. If we take the Arab Nationalist Movement as an example, it is evident that its founders were from the above-mentioned class, including Hani al-Hindi and Sami al-Hindi from Syria; Hashem Ali Muhsen and Basel al-Kubeisi from Iraq; Ahmad al-Khatib and Hasem al-Qatami from Kuwait; Wadi’ Haddad and George Habash from Palestine; Hamad al-Farhan and Nayef Hawatmeh from Jordan; Qahtan al-Shueibi and Seif al-Dali from Yemen, etc. Hence, the social and class origins of the Palestinian left, after 1967, no doubt played an influential role in these movements’ formation. This came about through using the knowledge and cultural tools available to the early leaders to get out from the impasse from the 1967 defeat through an evocation of what can be described as the awareness and intelligence of leftist thinking.

Soon after the advent of the Palestinian leftist movements, the revolutionary movement suffered from various divisions and internal conflicts. These conflicts resulted, in fact, from the desire of some of its leaders to dominate other leaders’ thinking, and from intellectual discords on the adoption of Marxism. Therefore, the phenomenon of dissidence in the Palestinian leftist parties strongly emerged during the early stages of their establishment. Al-Khawaja (2005, 23) wrote, ‘The PFLP First Conference in August, 1968, in Jordan, was not successful due to internal dissidences and the imprisonment of George Habash in Damascus.’ He added, ‘In its 1969 Second Conference, Nayef Hawatmeh declined the invitation’ (Al-Khawaja 2005, 23). Nayef Jarrad (2005, 35) also said that ‘both Ahmad Jibril and Ahmad Zarour withdrew from the PFLP, then founded Jibril’s PFLP-GC, and the Organization of Arab Palestine led by Ahmad Zarour’.

Other cultural factors had contributed to this dissidence according the above-mentioned phenomenon, which stemmed from the cultural heritage of the Palestinian profile character. Thus, it is very crucial that a distinction be made between ‘facing the enemy’ and ‘facing the self’, since this ‘revolution’ embraced a strong desire to change and revolutionize the political reality. At that time, the emergence of the phenomenon of dissidence expresses a confusion of the adoption of new thinking. Also, it is possible that it indicates the confusion of how to deal with the ‘cultural self’ that suffers from the dominance of patriarchal thinking; the dominance of semi-feudal and clans relationships, with the cultural accumulation of previous colonial periods. This is not the case yet; also there is an accumulation of religious heritage that did not necessarily reflect the religion itself, as it indicates the non-accumulation of leaderships’ experience in social and political leadership (Qatamesh 2005, 20). All these factors led to the cultural impasse of the left-wing.

The earliest leftist had begun with an education process of politics, revolutionary and social aspects through Marxism thought, without taking into account a study of
the Palestinian cultural reality and the dismantling of the underlying social infrastructure.6

In general, at its core, the social and cultural thought of the Palestinian leftist agrees with the social demands of the international leftist movement, chief among which are the demands of the working class, the socialist transformation linked to the development of the means of production, and all social struggles against class, sexual or racist exploitation. However, because the means of production are not developed in the Arab world, the Arab leftist movement could be described as a progressive historical bloc, with special consideration for Palestine, given the precedence of liberation requirements over the social angle.

The Marxist education of the leftist movements focused on providing a political, cultural and imported substitution. Qatamesh, during an interview, when asked about the theoretical education and its exclusion from the interpretation of the cultural reality and heritage, said, ‘Marxism in Europe benefited from the Enlightenment Movement and other social revolutions that attempted to interpret reality, and dissociate it from feudal and religious compositions and the dominant rule of clergies, and else.’ His words indicate that the revolutionary leftist movements had few followers who adopted the left-wing thought when interpreting the social reality of the Palestinian Arab culture. To substantiate this idea, see this notable quotation from Marx: ‘previous philosophies were satisfied with interpreting the reality only, where, in fact, they should have tried to change it’ (Qatamesh 1994, 9). Marx insinuated that the Western reality was interpreted indeed, and that Western Marxism’s mission had to change this reality. Conversely, the Palestinian leftist movements requested the alteration of Palestinian political social reality without considering the historical era that embraced the cultural structure which was formed during political and economic conditions that were different from those of Western culture. Therefore, the Palestinian leftist movements applied the Marxist statement as is without the interpretation of the local cultural reality.

Furthermore, there has not been an interpretation or an addressing of the religious heritage in the Palestinian case by the leftist movements.7 This religious heritage follows jurisprudence scholars from more than one thousand years ago, and it is commonly recognized today that in our region the Palestinians are under the rule of the Al-Fiqh but not Islam as a religion. The Wahhabi and Al-Azhar Fiqh had become sacred, whose sacred values are incontestable; they are as holy as the Quran itself. The Fiqh stipulates that women’s subordination to their men is sacred; Muslims obeying their leaders is sacred; it is sacred that everyone must show obedience to their fathers and grandparents (‘The anger of the Father is as the anger of God’8); and planning the life of a human before it begins is sacred too – all through control by the family and marriage affairs. The succumbing to the misconception of fatalism prevailed, which was affiliated from previous colonial culture and political Islamic eras, and which used and exploited Islam by disseminating values of fatalism and patience that are in contrast to what Islam phrased as a religion. The leftist movements utterly ignored this effective religious heritage as a whole, which became the principal birthplace of the patriarchal system that had reacted to and was affected by its values. The religious heritage had granted the patriarchal system the trait of saintliness. In addition, the leftist movement with its beliefs ignored the revolutionary aspect of the Islamic religion, which focuses on Quranic texts on justice and bans blind obedience and injustice, and the misuse of the concept of patience to subdue people. Moreover, they proposed their beliefs as a socio-cultural alternative, which
was mistaken as new missionary preaching. Thereby this tells about the estrangement they practised with their religion and religious heritage, and hence this estrangement created a gap for these leftist movements to understand the reality before they even tried to change it.

Objectively speaking, it should be noted that at that time the political situation was very harsh (Al-Khawaja 2005, 22), and this was likely the main cause for refraining to undertake any criticism or interpretation of the cultural heritage. In fact, the patriot struggle motif was dominant in that period, which was the eminent objective. For this reason, this paper is an attempt to examine the cultural reasons underlying the weakness and the retardation of current leftist thought.

Furthermore, the promotion of Marxism ideology, even if some leftists did adopt it when thinking and practising, did not reach beyond the level of indoctrination of the mass supporters due to the ideological estrangement of the social Marxism ideology with religious and cultural heritage. This formed a hybrid transformation in the cultural reality in Palestine. In this regard:

All our movements had an intellectual poverty. Sometimes it (was said that we have had enough ideas but actually we are poor with ideas. […] The non-development of political forces intellectually and democratically impedes their evolution, and would thus lead to the emergence of others.

(Samara 2005, 63)

Saeed Mudya wrote:

It is notable that the left political work suffered from factions and divisions. We always referred to Marxism by mentioning Mao Zedong, Cuba, and Vietnam, and Soviet Union, but we never said that we have Marxism of Arabs.

(cited in Qatamesh 2005, 59)

Whilst an intervention by Ibrahim Abu Mazen noted:

It is believed that there are two main reasons which have led to a weakening of the Palestinian left, especially PFLP, namely, poor leadership and poverty of culture. In the ’70s and ’80s, the Palestinian leftist had deeper and broader culture and leadership than the era of the defeat, and, of course, this owing to its leadership.

(cited in Qatamesh 2005, 60)

Despite all efforts, the author still has not managed to find out what was really meant by the above-mentioned term ‘poverty of culture’. Nevertheless, it probably refers here to the inability to face the self.

Turning to the second point – distinguishing between ‘facing the enemy’ and ‘facing the cultural self’ – it will now be discussed how the Palestinian leftist dealt with women’s issues – a key factor in the production and transfer of culture.

The liberal views of the Palestinian left towards women and their issues date back to the heritage of Arab nationalism and the Communist Party in Palestine in the 1930s (Al-Khalili 1977, 22, cited in Kattab and Awwad 2004). As for the feminist activities of the leftist movements that was crystallized after 1967:

The organization and mobilization were not based on the leftist’s intellectual, but were based on the Palestinian struggle and politics, as well as on a general progressive outlook toward the woman, which was derived from the democratic ideas that were
adopted by the early Arab nationalists. This intellectual outlook gained a step forward in late 1968 and early 1970s.

(Al-Barghouthi 2005, 65)

Al-Barghouthi also added:

It is obvious that most women who joined the Palestinian left-wing came from the educated, moderate bourgeois class. Others were previous members of the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM), who studied abroad at the Arabs universities.

(65)

Generally, the leftist movements stood against all forms of oppression and exploitation (Al-Labadi 2004, 67). Therefore, during the initial phase of factional mobilization, women’s and youth leftist education focused on politics, national liberation, resisting against the Israeli occupation, fundraising, demonstrations and strikes, charitable work in societies, mobilization of the Arab world towards revolution, controlling undercover activities, and solidarity education (Al-Barghouthi 2005, 65).

Unsurprisingly, during that period the mobilization and organization of women to become involved in the struggle was a groundbreaking endeavour, which, coupled with their own awareness of liberation, offered the leftist a cultural victory by breaking the traditional role of women. However, in the late 1960s (specifically in 1968), many men and women in leftist movements were arrested and subjected to severe torture. Therefore, the abuse of women in Israeli prisons largely impeded their participation because the fear of the threat of torture and interrogation had intimidated a number of families (65).

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Palestinian left gained higher prominence through the establishment of women’s political frames,14 and a focus on issues of struggle (Taraki 1990, cited in Kattab and Awwad 2004). Similarly, it focused on comprehensive communist education which presented women’s issues in a holistic manner. In this regard, it rejected all forms of abuse, as well as cultural, economic and sexual prejudice, linking all with national liberation and economic independence. Hence, the great victory of the Palestinian leftist during that period had promoted women’s labour and called for their rights and equal pay. This trend was enhanced by the leftist women’s foundations which provided substantive support for working women through the provision of nurseries, kindergartens, arts and crafts, and health education. Most importantly, there was an additional similar focus on struggle and trade unionism (Kattab and Awwad 2004, 26). The rates of women who worked for left-wing forces during the first Intifada were: educated 30%, students 34%, nurses 20%, housewives 12%, and villagers and farmers 4% (Al-Barghouthi 2005, 69).15 It must be recognized that these achievements constituted a significant shift in Palestinian society with regard to women’s issues. Indeed, they empowered women to participate in politics at the grassroots’ level, and eliminated all cultural obstacles against their rights to work and education. Despite the fact that these achievements were outstanding, these achievements did not encounter patriarchal dominance and offered a solution to the economic and political predicament of the patriarchal authority at the grassroots’ level during that time.

Nonetheless, with regard to the dual approaches of ‘facing the cultural self’ and ‘facing the enemy’, these achievements for women largely focused on the ‘facing the enemy’ approach and not ‘facing the cultural self’, which eventually intersected with ‘facing of the self’. In other words, it is an outstandingly selective liberal culture. However, clans and semi-feudal relationships almost dominated important issues
among men and women, including family relations, patriarchal authority and their educational implications, which were not influenced by an awareness of Marxism. Thus, women who volunteered to fight in Jordan and in camps in Lebanon were still unable to get married without the consent of their guardian, or challenge male supremacy bestowed by social customs, a clan’s law traditions and the following legislation.

The author wonders while having an attempt at reading the cultural reality of the leftist movements about the women’s liberation cause, and the relationship of a man with a woman as wife, daughter and mother, etc., what did these movements really achieve by pushing women onto the labour market and gaining societal respect towards this achievement? This begs the question of whether woman’s labour is necessarily useful for societal liberation and justice.

It is true, nonetheless, that women’s labour had positive impacts on their status; their economic independence offered them cultural gains through participation in family decision-making. On the other hand, these women suffered from another form of economic exploitation. They were, in effect, exploited both at home and at work, and they were also deprived of their economic income through either direct financial deprivation or their powerlessness to govern their earnings. This benefits absolutely the male dominance. As a result, there is a need for more research to be done on the reflections of leftist thinking on leftist families and social gender roles during the 1970s and 1980s.

With respect to intellectual revival, again it has already been noted how the revolutionary leftist thinking was revived after the defeat of 1967. In the 1970s and 1980s, there was a strong desire to revive the economic and political roles of women. The leftist movements had to face the economic and political impasse that resulted from the oppression of the occupation authorities and the mass arrests of left-wing youths. However, this was not a revival of the liberal role of women on the basis of class reality. Rather, the Palestinian leftist’s experience in looking at cultural reality was selective. To validate this claim, the author maintains that women’s political participation was widespread at the grassroots’ level, while their leadership presence was described as weak in comparison with the grassroots.

With respect to the third point – the difference between ‘facing the cultural self’ and ‘facing the enemy’ following the Oslo Accords. The Palestinian armed struggle, especially the leftist movements, after the 1960s incurred hard setbacks, beginning with Black September, the fall of Nasser’s nationalism, the war of attrition between Egypt and Israel, the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty, the invasion of Lebanon, and the exile of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to Tunisia: all had resulted in the retardation of the Armed Struggle Movement in general, and the Palestinian Leftist movement as well. On this issue, Qatamesh notes, ‘There is no doubt that the rise of the PFLP has coincided with the rise of the national issue, and that its decline has coincided with the disintegration of the Palestinian issue’ (Qatamesh 2005, 16).

Moreover, the literature concurs that the weakness of the Palestinian leftist movements was also caused by some external subjective factors, as mentioned previously. These include the fall of the Soviet Union, the shift from a bipolar to a unipolar world, and an unchallengeable American leadership. One of the main internal factors included the financial crises incurred by the left-wing organizations.

Other external factors include the second Gulf War, the fall of Iraq, the expulsion of Palestinians from Kuwait, and the Oslo Accords. Indeed, the accords caused another wave of dissidences inside the Palestinian leftist movements, in particular, and inside the Palestinian resistance, in general. Aggregately, these are the subjective causes for interpreting the collapse of the Palestinian left wing.
What about cultural factors? What has happened to the cultural leftist ideology? And what is about the impact of leftist intellectual education during the 1960s–80s? If the left wing had collapsed, then how surprisingly did the speed of the intellectual (ideology) collapse at the same pace, since intellectual change occurs over a much longer time period.

Twenty-six years of Palestinian leftist revolutionary efforts have been wasted. The reasons previously mentioned may not totally explain the reasons for this. Therefore, to return to researching about the cultural leftist personality traits – the cornerstone of mobilization and education through reading books and bulletins, group discussion and prison education. All have incorporated the general traits of the revolutionary leftist personality. Such education included the refusal of exploitation, oppression and injustice, alleviating and assisting the marginalized and exploited groups (workers, peasants, women, oppressed people), and a belief in freedom and social equality. For example, leftist education in the PFLP used Lenin’s slogan about the leftist personality: ‘I am against class, national, sexual and religious oppression’ (Qatamesh 1994, 9).

Other important traits were highlighted during the era of education and mobilization. These are encapsulated in the following quotation: ‘The real leftist does not give up, the real leftist does not compromise on his principles, and real leftist shows his strength in times of weakness and fall’ (Qatamesh 1994, 11).

All the above considerations now beg the question about the extent of compromise leftists make on their principles today. Some have defected from their principle of struggle, and from the true leftist culture. Some have become leaders or followers of the right wing (Belkeziz 1998; Akkash 2004), some leaders have been criticizing the Oslo Accords since it was signed, despite the fact that they still live under its shadow and benefit from its institutions, while others abdicated completely to the real enemy – imperialism – and were embraced by its institutions; whereas the establishment of each international leftist ideology is for the fight against imperialism.

On this issue, Qatamesh during the interview said, ‘only a few leftists defected, and that the real leftists either returned home or were jailed’. Therefore, there is a need for further studies to re-examine the disintegration of the Palestinian leftist after the Oslo Accords to find out if those defectors are only a few or the majority. This paper emphasizes what Qatamesh in the interview referred to in a remarkable phrase from Ibn Khaldun: ‘to generalize the part on the whole is a big mistake’.

It is said that the real energy of the leftist surges during periods of weakness and collapse. If that is the case, why then are the leftists returned home today? Are they waiting for the situation to worsen? Though this is known about the leftist, it reiterates that the leftist has a resilience.

The severe strikes incurred by the Palestinian and global leftist movements do not justify today’s level of defection and inaction, or justify this apostasy. It is likely that early leftist education did not go beyond mere inculcation and indoctrination of the popular base, and that its real crisis lay in the difference between thought and practice. The duplication personality of the Palestinian leftists was one of the underlying causes of the leftists’ retardation at the grassroots’ level. Indeed, they believed in equality, enlightenment and revolution; yet they adhered to practise their local clan and cultural heritage as a whole, which varied from person to person depending on his original certain classes and social aspects. The supposedly genuine leftist has not gone beyond to its own cultural heritage. This explains the leftist’s apostasy towards the conservative ideology during the regression and the collapse period.
It should be clarified that what was stated here does not mean that cultural, social and religious heritage is negative as a whole, in order not to fall a prey to those who get angry and would accuse anyone criticizing the cultural heritage as an orient. The critic of cultural heritage does not stem from being an admirer of Western culture by any account. The author confirms that she still thinks her cultural heritage is adaptable more for her than any other cultural heritage, despite the problems inherent with this heritage. However, these problems must be exposed and addressed because they have formed a massive rejection and severe impediment for societal acceptance towards the enlightened, progressive and leftist movements.

Cultural self-criticism does not at all negate criticism of imperialism, capitalism and dependency. To succeed in revolutionary work that challenges the Israeli occupation and imperialism, a popular base needs to be developed that believes in revolution, with a culture that deters humiliation, inaction and collaboration with such powers. This is what leftists should do today. In reality, however, leftist action nowadays is limited to unassuming participation in demonstrations and insignificant cultural action. The task of leftists at present is to undertake the fundamental task that had been previously ignored by the Palestinian left-wing movements during the early stages. The leftist needs to address and examine the reality and the cultural religious history that was influenced by the medieval period, as well as followed by colonialism, in order to refute the educational and cultural values that serve the cultures of colonialism, and devote humiliation and submission. Only then can a community-based revolution be restored without a fully intelligent revival of Western thought that the previously educated, striven, Palestinian youth had brought in the past.

Finally, this paper ends a quotation, ‘The leftists took history out of their heads, instead of getting their heads out of history’ (Yassin Al-Hafith, cited in Akkash 2004, 2).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes
1. This quotation is by Yassin Al-Hafith (cited in Akkash 2004, 2).
2. During an interview on 19 April 2014, Dr Adel Samara went on to say in this context, ‘What we can say is that this matter should not be confined to one position or to Marx’s deductions. To confine the matter to Marx’s position is the outcome of a dogmatic and lazy thought process, one that is even incapable of genuine research.’ He went on to say, ‘One could understand or place Marx’s position vis-à-vis nationalism in the context of the historical moment in which he wrote, and the nature of the society or socioeconomic makeup that he spoke about. His position has to do with the ruling bourgeois classes in Western Europe that stoked nationalist sentiments and used them, on the one hand, to mobilize the popular classes in their colonial wars and, on the other, to anesthetize public opposition to class exploitation under the pretext that the class struggle weakens the state’s actual nationalism. Only the diligent researcher will discover that, even in the Communist Manifesto itself, Marx highlighted the premise that nationalism is a stage that one has to go through and that the proletariat will first implement their nationalist project.’ For more information, see Samara (1988).
3. It was reported that both George Habash and Wadi Haddad graduated from the American University in Beirut after studying medicine.
Examples include the conflicts and divisions within the leftist movement in the late 1960s, and the conflict between Fatah and the PFLP in the 1970s (Al-Khawaja 2005, 17).

That resulted from an overlap between different cultural backgrounds incorporating nationalist thinking with bourgeois content, religious culture and socialist culture other than scientific socialism – Marxism – all of which took the form, in reality, of class positions or relations, be they bourgeois or middle class.

One of Marx’s famous slogans: ‘Before the Proletariat battles on the barricades, it should announce its rule through a series of intellectual victories’ (Al-Husseini 2008).

This refers to Palestine. In this regard, I am emphasizing the need to address the religious heritage to include issues of jurisprudence, legislation, etc. and not religion as a faith. This had not been addressed when leftist thought rejected religious thought as a whole, and did not distinguish between the religious discourse, legislation and Fiqh, as well as the lack of arbitration of sociological class analysis.

A Palestinian proverb.

The world witnessed the Palestinian armed revolution in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The researcher Azmi Al-Khawaja says in this regard, ‘The guerrilla action went through unprecedented rise after its inception after the Six-Day War. The PFLP and the Fatah represented this phenomenon in the early years.’

This is despite the literature being rich in accounts of tremendous intellectual activity among the intellectuals of the Palestinian and Arab leftist movements on the reading, understanding and analyses of the different schools of Marxist theory. This is evidenced by the intellectual debate, which led to rifts between the parties based on these schools. There eventually came a time when there was a time for education, analysis and study, along with struggle. To demonstrate this point, I cite two examples. First, since its inception, the ideological position of the DFLP was based on ‘several schools and trends in Marxism (Marxist–Leninist, Marxist–Maoist, Marxist Guevara, with national trends like Trotsky, and the parties of the third line (North Korea, Vietnam). The ideological position of the DFLP was resolved in 1971, after Black September, through the re-acknowledgment of the Marxist–Leninist line [. . .]’ (Al-Zabari 2005, 21). Second, the pace of debate and intellectual analysis of the DFLP matched that of the PFLP. Qatamesh cited, ‘People were opened to the thought of Antonio Gramsci very early although the majority was more attracted to the heritage of both revolutions (the Vietnamese and the Cuban) in addition to the two socialist revolutions in Russia and China than the experiences of construction in the countries of the bureaucratic socialist transformation.’

This assertion remains subject to debate, and I cannot be definitive about its veracity until it is scrutinized by scientific examination and research.

Samara added, ‘In Latin America or in India, there are intellectual production and democracy and this is related to building a production base.’

The feminist struggle for action was not limited to the activity of the left as described in the following quotation: ‘Since the 1920s, women got involved in organizing demonstrations and [. . .] they organized the boycott of Israeli and foreign goods, especially during the general strike – strike of 1936.’ It also added, ‘These activities were limited to a few educated women from middle and wealthy families. During Al-Buraq Revolution in 1929, 9 women were killed from a total of 120 martyrs’ (Al-Khalili 1977, 22; Kattab and Abu Awwad 2004, 25–26).

Kattab and Abu Awwad (2004) added, ‘Then expanded and included the various factions and main parties in the Palestine Liberation Organization.’

The rate of women members who participated in left-wing parties reached around 26% in the 1987 intifada.

Abdelilah Belkeziz added, ‘After the collapse of the socialist bloc or after long periods of detention, a large number of members of the communist parties turned into the Salafist and religion’ (Belkeziz 1998, 2).

In a seminar held on 18 March 2014 attended by the author in Ramallah and organized by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation on the launch of a book entitled The Left in the Levant, during the discussion a man stood up and introduced himself as a deeply rooted leftist, and said that he even sometimes recognizes himself, that he sometimes found himself a clanman in a social event, and other times he found himself to be a conservative in another, and
then continued to list other positions. This is evidence of the crisis experienced by a leftist between the thought to which he relates and his reality.

References