

INTRODUCTION

Yet the shadows that cling to Marxism
cannot be dispelled solely by desk lamps.

—RUSSELL JACOBY

We know, of course, that anthropologists, like other academics,
learn not merely to use a scholarly language, but to fear it,
to admire it, to be captivated by it.

—TALAL ASAD

Revolution and Disenchantment is preoccupied with an earlier episode of Arab political hope and despair. It takes a step back to the 1960s to excavate for our present the lost archive of the Lebanese New Left. It is at once a history of the rise of the New Left and its subsequent ebbing away, as well as an anthropological inquiry into the production, circulation, and uses of revolutionary and critical theory. In doing so, I am less motivated by an encyclopedic drive of inquiry that seeks to fill a gap in the literature by examining an archive that has not yet been explored—although that is also important in itself. Rather, I ask, how does the reconstruction of revolutionary lives and the excavation of an overlooked theoretical tradition shed light on the *metropolitan unconscious* of our critical—anthropology, critical theory, and Middle East studies—traditions?

Unlike the much older Arab communist parties—the Lebanese CP was founded in 1924—that revolved in the Soviet orbit, the New Left emerged out of the ideological and militant constellations of Arab nationalisms. The New Left militants were the generation of the Palestinian revolution that came to embody revolutionary hopes in a future of sovereignty and social justice after the swift military defeat of the Arab regimes against Israel in June 1967. I focus primarily on the trajectory and theoretical writings of Waddah Charara (1942–), a prominent Lebanese transdisciplinary thinker whose major works bridge the social sciences and history, in addition to multiple forays into the Arab-Islamic *turath* (traditions) and translations of theory and poetry. Charara

cofounded Socialist Lebanon (1964–70) with a handful of comrades.¹ I also close in on segments of the political and critical paths of Fawwaz Traboulsi (1941–) and Ahmad Beydoun (1942–). Traboulsi was cofounder of the organization and alongside Charara was one of its main dynamos before becoming a prolific historian, sociologist, and translator, and a major public face of the political and intellectual Left in Lebanon. Beydoun, who joined the group about a year and half later, would go on to become a distinguished historiographer and cultural critic, who also wrote poetry and the script of *Beirut, the Encounter* (1981), one of the cult movies of the Lebanese civil and regional wars (1975–90). In brief, the underground Marxist organization was a hub of militant intellectuals who much later, in the wake of successive waves of political disenchantment, became prominent intellectuals.

In 1970 Socialist Lebanon merged with the Organization of Lebanese Socialists, the radicalized Lebanese branch of the Arab Nationalist Movement, which severed its ties with President Gamal Abdel Nasser after the 1967 defeat, to found the Organization of Communist Action in Lebanon (OCAL). Charara, who was instrumental in the fusion between both organizations, subsequently led a substantial internal opposition movement along Maoist lines that was expelled from OCAL in 1973. At the beginning of the Lebanese civil and regional wars Charara's shock in the face of the sectarian—Christian/Muslim—forms that wartime practices of fighting, killing, pillaging, and destroying took led him very early on to put an end to nearly two decades of political militancy and exit from the Marxist tradition of thought. The sectarian divisions of the masses during the war revealed the difficulty of practicing a class-based politics of emancipation. Political practice could not be extricated from the webs of the social fabric. Communal solidarity eclipsed class interest. In the wake of disenchantment, Charara turned to a minute sociological investigation of the modalities of operation of communal—sectarian, regional, kin—power. Charara was probably the first of his cohort of militant intellectuals to take his distance from, and become critical of, leftist politics and ideologies, which, even if they did not themselves arise on sectarian grounds, did not manage to break free from the dominant communal polarizations dividing Lebanese society.

In excavating first Socialist Lebanon's forgotten archive from the 1960s and then focusing on Charara's theoretical texts in the wake of disenchantment, I unearth a minoritarian tradition of immanent critical Arab thought that diagnosed the logics and practices of power and examine the vicissitudes of a revolutionary project that sought to articulate an autonomous leftist practice. This diagnostic tradition, as I will develop throughout the book, steers away

from the dominant topoi of contemporary Arab thought. Its diagnostic immanent edge, which focused first on the practices of anticolonial regimes and Left political parties before examining communal logics of subjugation, did not get caught up on the ideological battleground of authenticity. It moved away from the comparison of “Arab” and “Islamic” values with “Western” ones, ushering a critique of the latter from the standpoint of the former, or translating one set into the other. When the promise of revolutionary emancipation was eclipsed, the critique of communal solidarities did not revert either to a Marxist historicism or a liberal critique of the social fabric and culture from the standpoint of a detached, context-less abstract reason. These political communal solidarities were not “traditional,” “pre-capitalist remainders,” Charara argued very early on in the mid-1970s, but modern products. They are partially the result of the logics of formal subsumption at work in Lebanese capitalism and the divisions of the Lebanese nation-state. Charara and Beydoun retained from their Marxist past a reflexive stance, which thinks the conditions of possibility of a critical work’s own conceptual building blocks, and the critic’s positionality, as it is thinking its object. It is this attachment to reflexive critique, in the wake of their realization that class is no longer the universal engine propelling political practice, that led them to formulate an immanent sociological and historical critique of community that is not grounded in universal reason. This critique worked by detecting the cracks in the communities’ own mythologizing discourses about themselves, highlighting in the process contingencies, heterogeneities, and divisions and the gaps separating discourses from practices. This patient diagnostic tracking of the layers of sedimented narratives and the vagaries of actual political practices can’t be more different than blanket culturalist statements that critique Arab societies from “the mythical space” of Western normative liberal theory.² But why reopen today the archive of a generation that was formed during the high tides of Arab nationalism, founded the New Left, and adhered to the Palestinian revolution before ending up as detached, disenchanted critics of communal logics dwelling in the ruins of futures past? What is the purchase in and for the present of revisiting this story of a generation that moved from nation to class to community?

History, First. This generation, born for the most part on the eve of independence in Lebanon (1943) and Syria (1945), lived through, acted in, and thought about major political turning points. It was marked very early on by the Palestinian Nakba, or Catastrophe (1948), before being swept by the high tides of the Ba’th and Nasser’s anticolonial nationalism in the 1950s. By the 1960s, they became Marxist critics of both anticolonial Arab nationalisms and pro-Western Arab governments. This generation of New Left militants

revolving outside the Soviet communist orbit and within a wider Third Worldist network of internationalist solidarity—the Chinese, Algerian, Cuban, and Vietnamese Revolutions—produced very early prescient Marxist critiques of imperialism, the national liberation regimes, and the Arab bourgeoisie. The Marxist ground that dialectically held these external (imperialism) and internal (regimes in power and the bourgeoisie) critiques together was premised on the presence of “the people,” the revolutionary subject capable of embodying this program in its revolutionary practice. The ground began to crumble with the beginning of the Lebanese civil and regional wars (1975–90). A few years later, the Iranian Revolution (1979) constituted a seismic event, whose aftermath began to radically alter the Lebanese political landscape by adding a militant Islamist component to the sectarian divisions already at work. Meanwhile, the 1980s witnessed the ebbing away of the Lebanese Left and the Palestinian resistance a few years after the Israeli invasion (1982); increased violence of the neighboring authoritarian regimes, such as the Syrian Ba’th’s Massacre in Hama (1982); devastating regional conflicts, such as the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88); and increased Islamist militancy (Hizbullah, 1985 to the present, and Hamas, 1987 to the present). After 1982, Israel, the postcolonial regimes, Islamist militancy, and sectarian confrontations all contributed to dashing the revolutionary hopes of those militants and thinkers who would come to be known as the 1960s Left generation.

This string of events resulted in the fragmentation of the members of this generation who were bound by their anti-imperialism, support of the Palestinian revolution, and a commitment to a horizon of social justice, in different political and ideological directions. Charara and Beydoun retreated from militancy into a life of writing, and some of the comrades converted into, or became fellow travelers of, Islamist anti-imperialism.³ Others retreated to the fold of their own sectarian communities—Christian, Sunni, Shi’i, Druze—that they had initially broken away from when they joined Marxist political parties in the 1960s. Looked at from the perspective of their “Palestinian years”—from their early childhood memories of the Nakba (1948) to the invasion of Beirut (1982)—this generation lived through successive seismic transformations. Their story, one of a generation captivated by the dialectic of revolutionary exhilaration and political despair in an ideologically saturated world and in compressed political times, deserves to be told.

Theory, Second. These militant intellectuals inaugurated a sophisticated minoritarian tradition of revolutionary and critical Arab theory, characterized by “a transversality of knowledges,” which defied the logics of professionalization, expertise, and disciplinarity.⁴ They weaved their works by engaging authors

such as Karl Marx, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Mao Tse-Tung, Leon Trotsky, Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Vo Nguyen Giap, Ibn Khaldun, Che Guevara, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Pierre Bourdieu, Cornelius Castoriadis, Michel Foucault, and Abdal-Rahman al-Jabarti, among others. Excavating this archive provides multiple “ex-centric” vantage points, located outside of hegemonic centers, their institutions, disciplines, and languages, which bypass the colonial divide assigning the Global South as locus of “concrete facts” and the North the manufacturer of “abstract theory.”⁵ In doing so, there is a gain in reflexivity generated by highlighting how the questions, stakes, modes of criticism, and practices of engagement of disenchanted Marxist intellectuals speak back to the ones practiced in critical anthropology, area studies, and postcolonial studies—what I earlier called the critical disciplines’ metropolitan unconscious.

In fact, it is this metropolitan unconscious that is in part responsible for the neglect of the archive of Arab Marxism and the examination of the production and circulation of critical theory from what is now referred to in shorthand as the Global South. Except for the brief Third Worldist interlude of the 1960s, when militant intellectuals like Mao, Giap, and Guevara were read and commented on, Western Marxists did not, for the most part, seek out, translate, and converse with the tradition’s non-Western theorists.⁶ Moreover, Arab Marxists were either criticized or neglected by critics whose reading practices condemned them for what they dubbed their Orientalist, historicist, and modernist discursive assumptions. Their “epistemological complicity” with Empire turned them from revolutionaries to discursive compradors.⁷ You know you’re really out of luck when both Eurocentric Marxists and their postcolonial critics agree to ignore you. Moreover, the imbrication of scholarship on the Middle East in Western political agendas sidelined militants who were neither bound by the frontiers of the nation-state nor the boundaries of religious tradition and were therefore on the margins of nationalism and Islamism.⁸ Last but not least, these militant intellectuals, who shared many of the same texts that later came to constitute the body of academic theory that social scientists drew on, appeared, at first sight, to be much closer to these disciplines’ theoretical skin than, say, Salafi Muslims. Their low coefficient of “Otherness” pushes to the limit the question of who occupies the slot of anthropological understanding and is a subject of charitable interpretation and who is the object of critical condemnation.

This is why, in recovering this history, my aim is to bypass the treatment of modern and contemporary Arab intellectuals as falling into one of two camps: either imitators of the West, call them self-Orientalizing and westernized natives

if you want, or autochthonous—religious thinkers engaging in an immanent critique of their societies.⁹ I hope I have managed to convey that what I am engaged in is far from a study of the unilinear reception by Arab thinkers of Western revolutionary and critical theorists, which at times announces itself with sensationalist titles à la *Reading Althusser in Ras Beirut*, anticipating the metropolitan dazzlement at the wonderful conjunction of reading a “universal” text in a “particular” location. Reception presumes a priori an origin and a destination, an authentic and a copy, while I am making a case for the primacy of multidirectional streams of translation.¹⁰

Having said that, Arab thought and literature have, in the past hundred years, also been produced from the Global North, a fact exacerbated by the massive displacements of people in the wake of the Arab revolutions. Successive waves of migration resulting from economic hardship, colonialism, relentless imperial interventions, authoritarian regimes, and civil wars resulted in the dispersion of Arab thinkers; just think of the Palestinians, who became a stateless diaspora after the first wave of eviction from their homeland that took place with the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. Arab thinkers and militants could be at home, in the diaspora, in exile, refugees, or shuttling back forth between their homes and a more secure location depending on political circumstances.

This dispersion is also linguistic: in addition to Arabic, they mostly also write in English or French or in more than one of these languages. While *Revolution and Disenchantment* focuses primarily on the travels, trajectories, and works of militant intellectuals who founded Socialist Lebanon, it does so by engaging their labors in the same analytic frameworks as Arab thinkers in the metropolises. It aims to incorporate into the spaces of contemporary Arab thought those distinguished exilic contributors, such as Edward Said, who rubbed shoulders with these thinkers in the same pro-Palestinian political and intellectual spaces, but are not included in the pantheon of contemporary Arab thinkers.¹¹ Without folding these intellectuals into the same tradition, scholarship will fail to address the shifting conditions of production of Arab thought, and it will reproduce the colonial divide. Arab thinkers at home will continue to be objects of study, while those in the diaspora will be addressed as colleagues to be engaged or as theorists whose work is used to frame the works and lives of others. This act of folding acquires an added significance in the wake of the Arab revolutions (2011–), which led to an increase in the global dispersion of Arabs from São Paulo to Istanbul. Former revolutionaries and militant intellectuals are today visiting researchers, professors, scholars at risk, and graduate students around the world.

To put it briefly, the book makes an argument for considering Edward Said not only as a cosmopolitan and postcolonial theorist but also as an Arab intellectual among others intimately impacted by, and engaged with, the unfolding of political events in the region—and for understanding the disenchanted Marxists at home, not as “local, autochthonous” intellectuals but as theorists at the crossroads of transnational streams of discourses. Of course, the mere fact that Edward Said is absent from compendia of contemporary Arab thought, or that his work is marshaled as the theoretical paradigm that frames the work of others, is symptomatic of the metropolitan unconscious of area studies disciplines. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have to make a case to include Edward Said in the same analytical frame as Fawwaz Traboulsi, Waddah Charara, Sadik al-Azm, Ahmad Beydoun, and Mahdi ‘Amil. In other words, I seek in this work to hold the tension between the interconnectedness of our world and the structural imbalance of power that makes some intellectual theorists to be engaged and others autochthonous intellectuals to be studied, or native informants to be used. I seek to avoid both highlighting an interconnectedness, which does not take power into account, and an erasure of interconnectedness, which is itself a symptom of power.

Political Present, Third. Last but not least, unearthing this archive in, and for, our political present is a timely affair. I certainly do not intend to collapse the distance separating the past of the New Left militants from our present. The political conjuncture they inhabited and acted in, and the answers they articulated exclusively in a Marxian idiom before abandoning it, is not exactly ours today. I am also not attracted to retrospectively judging whether they were right or wrong in their analysis and political wagers. To recover the theoretical labors and visions of emancipation of a previous generation of militants and thinkers is not only an antidote to public amnesia but an exercise that clarifies the distinct contours of our present and an invitation to an intergenerational conversation around the possibilities and binds of emancipation.

In addition to revisiting the theoretical-political questions they were preoccupied with, and which have become salient today in the wake of the Arab popular uprisings (2011) and the recent global anticapitalist mobilizations that I mentioned in the prologue, I am also driven to revisit their dual legacy: revolutionary exhilaration and political despair. Hope and disenchantment; revolutions and murderous regimes, foreign interventions and civil wars; and citizens and communal subjects are all constitutive of our very recent past and our present. It is in this sense that we are inheritors of the dual legacy of hope and despair of the 1960s Left. To do so, I carve a path between a corrosive Left melancholy that disparages an uncertain and increasingly precarious present while

drinking to stories of the 1960s, the golden age of internationalist solidarity, on the one hand, and a liberal and Islamist triumphalism that banishes this past's relevance to our present by dismissing this Marxist generation's critical labors and practice because of the collapse and disintegration of socialist regimes or their cultural alienation from their society, on the other.¹²

Fieldwork in Theory

In examining the transnational travels and translations of critical theory in different spaces such as political party cells and academic settings, as well as its uses and appropriations in political projects, the book engages in what I call “fieldwork in theory.” It looks into the different social lives of theory. I ask not only how theory helps us understand the world but also what kind of work it does in it: how it seduces intellectuals, contributes to the cultivation of their ethos and sensibilities, and authorizes political practices for militants. Anthropology has produced a rich reflexive tradition that, by turning the discipline's critical gaze inward, has interrogated the epistemological assumptions undergirding its concepts and its practices of representation.¹³ The book shifts the focus away from the critique of the discursive assumptions of theoretical discourses to the ethnography of their production, circulation, and political effects in nonacademic settings.¹⁴ As the frames of inquiry become the objects of ethnographic investigation, the anthropological frontiers between the worlds of slick, context-less, abstract, and frequent flying theories and the concrete stickiness of ethnographic empirical worlds become increasingly muddled.¹⁵

Fluency in theory was, and remains, a prized good in anthropology despite recent observations that the discipline has taken an empiricist turn.¹⁶ For one, dabbling in abstractness makes for a more fluid circulation and a wider readership, as any editor would tell you. In anthropology, it also provides a common lingua franca that rises above the particularities of the discipline's geographic subdivisions, joining its practitioners together in a more encompassing disciplinary space of arguments. For instance, in the mid-1970s, Middle East anthropology was considered a marginal subfield that had by and large failed to both attract an audience beyond area specialists and contribute to disciplinary theoretical debates.¹⁷ By the late 1980s Middle East anthropology managed to escape its parochialism. It was home to two influential theorists—Clifford Geertz and Pierre Bourdieu—as well as some key figures of “reflexive anthropology” (Vincent Crapanzano, Paul Rabinow, and Kevin Dwyer).¹⁸

At least since Geertz recast doing fieldwork as an act of interpretation, strict separation between observation and “data collection,” on the one hand, and

interpretation and theoretical reflection, on the other, became harder to maintain.¹⁹ This separation was roughly mapped on a temporal and spatial structure. First, the anthropologist travels somewhere to do fieldwork. This is the moment of participant observation, the ethnographer's gaze, and experiences, supposedly to be recorded in field notes and diaries—a moment of discovery and self-discovery. And then there is the second moment, a consequence of the anthropologist's privilege of departure, for metropolitan anthropologists, who for the most part do not permanently reside in the societies they study.²⁰ This is the time when the anthropologist comes back from the field and sifts through her notes, audio recordings, pictures, and archives to compose a text presenting the collected material.²¹ This is when the “raw material” gets processed and made to *speak back* to theoretical concerns, when it gets fashioned into a recognizable text complying with the styles and academic conventions of the field. After years of mentorship, writing manuals and boot camps, procrastination and drafts of drafts, the initial ethnographic gaze is, at last, translated into a disciplinary trace.

Having said that, anthropological practice is still by and large structured around a distinction between the anthropologist's theory and the people's lives and intellectual traditions, which she studies during her fieldwork. This leads anthropologists to struggle with a few things, mainly the epistemological status of their accounts of people's lives, practices, and discourses, which are mediated by their own theoretical tools. Anthropologists are no longer authoritatively affirming, like Ernest Gellner did in his study of Muslim Moroccan Berbers, that “what appears to be *vox dei* is in reality *vox populi*.”²² The epistemic authority of the anthropologists' theoretical discourses remains, nonetheless, a vexed question. As Michael Jackson recently asked, “But why not place Sophocles' drama of Oedipus, Freud's model of the psyche, and Kalabari [Nigeria] and Tallensi [Ghana] myths on a par?” undoing therefore the distinction between art, theory, and myth.²³ Because thought, Jackson says, requires some distance from the empirical field while underscoring that distancing is not a “sign of superior intellectual skill,” nor are the accounts produced as a result endowed “with a superior epistemological truth-value.”²⁴ Philosophy, he adds, is a strategy to take our distance from the sensory and social worlds of experience, in contrast to ethnography, which is one for close and “intersubjective encounters.”²⁵ In brief, we encounter again the distinction between the sticky materiality and intersubjectivity of the lived empirical world, and the slick, abstract, conceptual universe that hovers above it.

This distinction is also upheld by authors who do not argue for what is gained by the use of philosophy and theory but what is potentially lost. “People,” João

Biehl and Peter Locke write, “are plural and ambiguous, irreducible to history and populations, norms and social forces.”²⁶ In this case, theory, which is put to use to provide an account of a particular ethnographic encounter, risks, through its powers of subsumption, ironing out the complexities of the world. It also stifles “conceptual innovation” from the ethnographic ground up. Calls were also issued to return to ethnographic theory, as a response to a diagnosis of the discipline as descending into a parochialism as a result of its conceptual subservience to Continental philosophy coupled with a neglect of its own history, debates, and concepts, such as *mana*, *taboo*, and *totemism*.²⁷ In contrast to the discipline’s past, when philosophers, social theorists, and psychoanalysts could not avoid wrestling with its ethnographic concepts, today anthropologists churn out studies that apply “the concept-of-the-month” in a game that no one outside the discipline cares about.²⁸

These current debates about theory in anthropology are symptomatic of the discipline’s anxiety regarding the political and epistemic authority of its discourses vis-à-vis the forms of life it inquires about (are its concepts superior to other traditions of intellectual inquiry?) and their intellectual authority vis-à-vis the big ideas produced by philosophy (are they subservient to Continental philosophy?). Anthropologists, and sociologists, have held philosophy in such awe that it has led them to oscillate between getting as close as possible to it and trying to dethrone it.²⁹ The French genealogy of the social sciences, which provides US academia with much of what it considers to be its theory, reveals—from Émile Durkheim to Pierre Bourdieu—different attempts to displace the authority of philosophy by arguing that the social sciences provide better, and more reflexive, answers to philosophical questions than the mother discipline herself.³⁰ These debates also bring out the question of anthropology’s status today as a discipline that tries to be accountable to multiple constituencies, both internal and external to it, that are driven by different questions and attachments. It has to be wary of accusations of colonial violence, which can take the form of reifying difference, or of culturally appropriating a concept from its everyday uses in its form of life and “elevating it” to the status of theory, while simultaneously striving to be theoretically innovative and autonomous from the hegemony of ideas produced by philosophers. Can it manage to carve out a space for itself that does not fall back on the epistemological violence it was accused of in the past, when it generated its ethnographic concepts from below, without being epistemologically subservient to Continental theory?

The distinctions between the concreteness and messiness of the field and the abstractness and slickness of theory, as well as the one between the bottom-up

ethnographic theorizing and the top-down application of Continental theory, do not hold when one's "raw material" and "fieldwork experiences" include translations of, glosses on, and engagements with works and authors that form the canons of political and social theory. When one observes strands of one's own "theory" in the field—but not exclusively so, let me add—the presumed "innocence" of the supposed first moment of immersion, observation, and experience evaporates, since the frames through which one sees, classifies, and records are themselves, in this particular case, the objects of inquiry. The back and forth between the stickiness, concreteness, and senses-drenched materiality of the field and the slick world of abstract theory comes to a halt. In this case, the conceptual distance separating the tradition doing the inquiring and the one inquired about diminishes. For this is an internal traffic in theory. Yet the initial conservative pleasure of recognition, which overcomes the anthropologist as a result of her acquaintance with these theorists in the classroom (say, Marx, Gramsci, Bourdieu, Althusser), quickly recedes from view. It vanishes as the researcher encounters the multiple social and political lives of concepts, which are translated, transfigured, and embedded in emancipatory projects by members belonging to a different *generation* whose spaces of experiences and horizons of expectation were fashioned by different times and places. This is why doing fieldwork in theory, and tackling the question of theory from the South, cannot restrict itself to picking a few concepts, or authors away from their spaces of argument, to call into question some aspect of, or highlight an absence in, metropolitan critical theory.³¹

Fieldwork in theory moves away from the reification of discursive assumptions toward the labors of excavation of traditions of intellectual inquiry and the reconstitution of the theoretical, ideological, and political stakes at play in order to understand the numerous translations and modulations of critical theory.³² Moreover, far too often revisiting the works of earlier critical thinkers focuses on assessing the purchase of their theories, either by making a case for the usefulness of their concepts for understanding the contemporary moment or by going in the opposite direction by seeking to denaturalize our present by underlining the difference separating their labors of conceptualization from ours. In both cases, their theories are what are mainly at stake in the excavation operation. In this work, I am also driven by a desire to recover something more than their concepts. I will pay attention to their critical ethos, their intellectual sensibilities, their sense of positionality, their ways of navigating the terrains of social accountability and intellectual autonomy and of theoretical production and political practice. In paying attention to these extra-epistemological issues, I avoid collapsing the inquiry into the social lives of theory, into a reified

conceptual analysis of Marxist, Islamic, or secular discourses. In doing so, we get a better sense of the political struggles and the stakes animating the spaces in which these theoretical works were produced, circulated, and appropriated. I am driven to do so by a desire not only to provide a more complex picture of the intellectual life and political struggles in the Arab world but also to curtail an instrumental appropriation of “Arab theory” and to forestall the reproduction in critical scholarly discourses—and disciplinary institutions—of ideological distinctions, such as between the secular and the religious.³³ In *Revolution and Disenchantment*, I intentionally *hold the tension* between narrative (historical and ethnographic) and theory without seeking to release it in one of the two directions.³⁴

Time of History: Traveling Militants and Theories

This generation of intellectuals came into a world that had already been radically altered by capitalist modernity and forces of European hegemony.³⁵ They were the products of a modern schooling system in Lebanon, which at the time taught French, and English to a lesser extent, alongside Arabic.³⁶ Both Wad-dah Charara and Ahmad Beydoun moved between private and public Francophone schools in their youth. Fawwaz Traboulsi, on the other hand, attended a private Anglophone boarding high school. The choice of where to go for higher education was, as would be expected, determined by the second language one possessed. Beydoun and Charara received grants to study in France, while Traboulsi traveled to England and studied at the American University of Beirut.³⁷ Sadik Jalal al-Azm (1934–2016), the Syrian philosopher and fiery public intellectual, did his graduate work at Yale University after studying at the American University of Beirut. The Lebanese University, the only institution of public higher learning in Lebanon, was founded in 1951, a bit less than a decade after Lebanon’s independence. After exiting from revolutionary political practice, Charara, Beydoun, and a handful of other comrades from Socialist Lebanon would teach at the public university, while Traboulsi would join the private Anglophone universities.³⁸

This generation’s travels to the metropolises to study their own societies, coming back to lead revolutionary lives before finding sanctuary in the university in the wake of political disenchantment, is a familiar postcolonial story. Yet Socialist Lebanon’s militant intellectuals traveled in the opposite direction of some of the best known public intellectuals of their generation.³⁹ Sadik Jalal al-Azm and Edward Said were detached ivory tower academics who did their graduate work on Immanuel Kant and Joseph Conrad, respectively. Struck

by the 1967 blitzkrieg, they converted. They moved out of the university and into the world, inaugurating a life of public engagement that came to define their legacy. Socialist Lebanon's militants, on the other hand, had always found themselves swimming in political streams before an event—the Lebanese civil war, in the case of Charara and Beydoun—left them high and dry. They moved from the world and into the academy. The crisscrossing lives of these revolutionaries turned academics and academics turned public intellectuals intersected at the Palestinian juncture. The high tides of the Palestinian revolution during the late 1960s and early 1970s brought them together. They either joined the revolution or became its allies before going their separate political and theoretical ways at different points in the next decade.

It is difficult to conceive of the lives of this generation of leftist militant intellectuals without dwelling on their intimate relation to the practice of translation. During the days of militancy, one translated for purposes of political education, as a strategy to give Marxist political arguments a different gloss on a doctrinal point and to anchor a political line in a theoretical ground. Later on, one translated a text to make it available for students in a seminar, and, of course, translation is always one way to earn some income.⁴⁰ These translations, especially those associated with the Marxist tradition, were not translated from their original languages (Marx: German; Lenin and Trotsky: Russian; Gramsci: Italian; Guevara: Spanish), but mostly from their French or English translations. At times an Arabic text was produced by simultaneously translating from English and French translations. In the particular case of a translation from a translation, which I will explore further in chapter 2, the metropole's languages, publishing houses, and publications, such as Éditions Maspero, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, *Les Temps Modernes*, *Historical Materialism*, and *New Left Review*, were pivotal institutional bridges that made, via metropolitan languages, the ideas and experiences of different militants and theorists from the South and the North accessible to each other.⁴¹ I say one, because this globally interconnected world, which was fashioned by the practice and travels of militants as well as the intense circulation and translation of texts, did not always transit through metropolitan universities, periodicals, and publishers. It was also fostered by the art festivals, publications, and intellectual, political, and military institutions of the nonaligned and socialist worlds.

Besides their labors of linguistic translation, these militant intellectuals effected an additional act of translation. The knowledges these militants produced, relying on the transnational discourses of Marxism, Leninism, and Third Worldist radical thought, were not merely representations of their societies but rather interventions in them that were part and parcel of their revolutionary political

practice. They underscored the centrality of adapting Marxist concepts for the formulation of a communist politics attentive to the particularities of their political present, which went under the heading of the “Arabization of Marxism.” These were acts of transfiguration that “refunction a text . . . for different demanding-sites,” moving away from translation’s problematic of meaning and its attendant questions.⁴² These acts of linguistic translations from translations and conceptual transfigurations were fueled more by the impediment of revolutionary practice than by a fidelity to an original text. They were not mediations between a self and an other, an attempt to bridge supposed incommensurabilities between cultures, or an initiation of a dialogue between different intellectual traditions. Theirs was not an attempt that sought, as many critical and anthropological works do, to render what seems unfamiliar at first glance familiar or, going in the opposite direction, to denaturalize what we take for granted. They did not aim toward a rediscovery of one’s own commitments in a different theoretical language or to reveal the contingency of one’s own norms when refracted through a different prism. Rather, the practice of theorizing, which includes translation and transfiguration, was part and parcel of the arsenal of revolutionary politics, which was rendered possible by a deeply held belief in a shared horizon of an emancipation to come.

These practices, discourses, and institutions assumed and produced a global interconnectedness, a political universality of sorts premised on internationalist solidarity, the urgency of political practice, and multidirectional translation—North-South; South-South—that dodged the usual trap of *recognition* and consecration of authors from the colonies by the strong institutions of the metropole. “The structures of power the colonized writer confronts,” Talal Asad wrote a while ago, “are institutional, not textual.” “When someone pleads with the colonizer to make a judgment in a particular writer’s favor, to have him or her translated and read ‘seriously,’ what is sought,” Asad added, is “the modern world culture’s transcendent power to redefine that writer’s value as ‘universal.’”⁴³ In the case Asad is describing, the metropole’s institutions are the gatekeepers that grant an author access to “the universal,” enabling the global circulation and multiple translations of the work—even though it is often a universal that always falls short of attaining true universality. Literary criticism in the Anglo-American academy, Rosalind Morris notes, “tends to attribute to the third world literary text an irreducible particularity.” “The resistance here,” she writes, “is not of or by the third world writer and/or her writings, let alone by the subaltern; it is the resistance of dominance to its possible displacement from the exclusive claim to universality.”⁴⁴

These militant intellectuals were fashioned by and contributed to fashioning a globally interconnected world that cannot be captured adequately by an ahistorical deployment of East/West or North/South binaries. Nor was its commonality synonymous with a homogeneity and an epistemological naïveté. Their theories cannot be reduced to a wholesale operation of the importation of Left varieties of modernization theory, even if some of them dabbled in them, and to self-Orientalizing discourses. To do so is to mistake multipolar acts of translation and transfiguration for a one-way colonial imports business. The figure of the internationalist militant intellectual/translator, not that of the westernized discursive comprador, is at the heart of the first part of this book—chapters 1 to 3.

In highlighting these points, I aim to underscore three different pathways to attain universality. The first is the a posteriori outcome of *political articulation*. It is sustained by an ethos of internationalist solidarity that, through traveling theories and militants, and multiple acts of translation/transfiguration, fashions a common world. True, this pathway was premised on positing class as the universal grammar of inequality, but its universality is socially mediated and needed to be activated through the practices of transfiguration and militancy.⁴⁵ The second pathway privileges context-less, supposedly a priori universal concepts, say, rights, reason, and freedom, which subsume, and are in no need of, the double movement of transfiguration and militancy.⁴⁶ The third—metropolitan institutional consecration—is an outcome of power.

*Times of the Sociocultural: Civil Wars, Communal Solidarities,
and Metropolitan Epistemology Critique*

Difference at the time of Marxist militancy was not yet articulated on the ground of communal—sectarian, regional, familial—solidarities. It was a function of the particularity of the political present that through a diagnosis of the political forces, and attention to possibilities for practice, also steered the militants of Socialist Lebanon away from grounding difference in historicist evolutionary terms, which in communist politics took the form of stagism.⁴⁷ Militant Arab Marxism and anthropology articulated mirror images of difference. The first articulated difference in historical terms (historicist stagism, or the anticipation of a revolutionary future), while the second articulated difference in sociocultural terms.

The compressed years of the 1970s revealed clearly the differences between the slow temporalities of academic disciplines and the fast pace of political events. Around the time when metropolitan disciplines were taking stock

of events such as decolonization, the Vietnam War, and the increased racialization of Arabs in the wake of 1967, by interrogating the entanglements of their knowledges with colonial power, particularly by diasporic scholars (e.g., Talal Asad and Edward Said), there was a swift unraveling of a political world, through the sectarian violence of a civil war, that dislodged Marxist concepts—“revolutionary masses,” “organic intellectuals,” “revolutionary theory”—from the world they were supposed to capture and transform. To put it briefly, by the time these disciplines were slowly beginning the process of their own decolonization from ahistorical assumptions in the mid-1970s, Marxist militant intellectuals were beginning to cast away their revolutionary conceptual arsenal to examine the wartime communal logics. As diasporic intellectuals began their critical forays into the politics of theory, the shocked revolutionaries called into question their own previously cherished theory of politics. At a time when metropolitan disciplines dealing with the non-Western world were emerging from their prehistory, breaking away from the authoritative repetitions of Orientalist structures, the disenchanting Marxists, betrayed by history’s promise of emancipation, were entering into a posthistorical world that was characterized by the repetitions of communal wars.

Those years not only witnessed disenchanting Marxists at home and metropolitan critical scholarship going in opposite critical directions (History →←Society/Culture).⁴⁸ What these divergent critical directions shared was, as I will develop in chapters 4, 5, and 6, a sidelining of ideological distinctions—Left and Right, progressives and reactionaries—as fundamental criteria of theoretical and political discernment. The autonomy of the ideological was called into question from two radically different corners: the discursive and the sociological. Thinkers in the metropolises, such as Edward Said, who were influenced by Michel Foucault’s work, sidelined *theoretically* the ideological distinctions between right-wing authors and Marxists by showing how both groups, despite their ideological differences, partake in the same Orientalist discursive assumptions (chapter 6). While Charara, who was closely observing the unfolding of the fighting during the Lebanese civil and regional wars, noted that despite the ideological divisions separating the fighters on opposite sides of the trenches (Left and Right), the more fundamental divide, which dictated common modalities of practice for both sides, was communal—primarily sectarian, but regional and kin solidarities also played a role (chapter 5).

The Euro-American epistemological critique of Western knowledges of the non-West, which took off in the late 1970s and 1980s, inaugurated what would come to be known as postcolonial studies; it was also contemporaneous with a crisis of Marxism in Europe. Those same years witnessed the ebbing

of the vigorous debates that sought in different ways to think the question of the political—Mao, Gramsci, Althusser—away from economic reductionism. Critical works, sometimes undertaken by former Marxist militants such as Jean-François Lyotard, subjected master narratives, universals, and notions of totality to a corrosive theoretical skepticism.⁴⁹ While poststructuralist and postcolonial thinkers were theoretically calling into question the discursive assumptions shared by liberals and leftists for their violence and their exclusions, the disenchanted Lebanese Marxists were experiencing the political breakdown of the Lebanese state and of a common world of ideological distinctions. There was a world fragmented into blocs governed by subfactions of fighting militias in Beirut or by the regimes that increasingly colonized every sphere of social life—political, educational, judicial—and subjugated them to the will of the sovereign. They did not necessarily have a theoretical longing for universals or the application of Western liberal models. Rather, they longed for a dignified life in *common* that escapes oscillating between a world fragmented by sectarian warlords and identitarian communal discourses, on the one hand, and one that is colonized by tyrants who subjugate their citizens for decades on end in the name of the coming battle against imperialism, on the other. The final chapter of the book traces the fork in critical and political agendas in the wake of the communal fragmentation of the militants' common world and the Iranian Revolution between those intellectuals who not so long ago worked side by side in support of the Palestinian revolution.

On Method

Edward Said critically addressed the intelligentsia in the postcolonies, noting that one of the indications of cultural domination resided in its auxiliary status to Western trends.⁵⁰ “Impressive evidence for this,” he wrote, “is found in the social sciences and, surprisingly enough, among radical intellectuals whose Marxism is taken wholesale from Marx’s own homogenizing view of the Third World.”⁵¹ Whether gravitating in the Soviet or US orbits, the rigged concepts, which were at the heart of Arab intellectuals’ thought and guiding their political practice, risked turning them from emancipators into unknowing dupes partaking in their own domination. Over time this mode of epistemological criticism has gained more and more traction in the scholarship on the Middle East and keeps on adding new objects to its critical mill. The critique of discursive assumptions, whose focal point was the interrogation of modernist, liberal, feminist, and Marxist assumptions about nation, gender, religion, and culture, has more recently extended its terrain to focus on new objects of

investigation: secular and LGBTQ discursive assumptions. The insurrectional acts these modes of reading enabled at first withered away as they became increasingly doxic procedures of a researcher's domain.⁵²

Despite the fact that it has become normalized, and hegemonic in anthropology and Middle East studies, this reading practice never ran out of steam. In geopolitical conjunctures, characterized by US imperial interventions and invasions that were buttressed by ideologies of liberation, this defensive and oppositional practice of criticism constituted a much-needed corrective to the enlisting of discourses—such as feminism and liberalism—in military imperial ventures.⁵³ This critique of the entanglement of discourses, say, Orientalist or universalist, with imperial power did not lose its impetus, precisely because of the sense of political urgency generated by the geopolitical conjuncture that propelled it and bestowed upon this theoretical critique its anti-imperialist *lettres de noblesse*.⁵⁴ Moreover, for those of us who teach in the US, and who witness in our everyday lives institutional and personal racist acts of violence against Arabs and Muslims, these critical reading practices, which seek to disrupt the reproduction of racist tropes, at the very least in the classroom, acquire an added importance. “The web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, dehumanizing ideology, holding in the Arab or the Muslim is very strong indeed,” Said wrote regarding life in the West, and particularly in the US, “and it is this web which every Palestinian has come to feel as his uniquely punishing destiny.”⁵⁵

These critical reading practices are still much needed as pedagogical tools and *strategic* modalities of public intervention in the Euro-American domestic battles of representation. Having said that, they have become increasingly problematic as a hegemonic theoretical apparatus in the academic fields of knowledge production and in public interventions *about* the Arab world. In the wake of the initial insurrectionary works by Talal Asad and Edward Said, this mode of criticism morphed from a practice that teases out the different layers of mediation between knowledge and power into one of ideological adjudication. The nonintended effect of the Saidian rewiring of the Foucauldian genealogies that marked the power/knowledge couplet (colonial power/imperial knowledge) and imbricated it within a political anticolonial antagonism with a dominant subject (the West) and a dominated one (the Orient) is that it produced a form of discursive-ideology critique that unmasks the rigged discursive assumptions undergirding thinkers' thought to reveal a class of “westernized natives” who are discursively, and at times economically, allied with Empire. The “Oriental” subjects who are fashioned by “Orientalist” knowledges (ontology) put them to use (epistemology), like the colonialists and imperialists,

to undermine from the inside their own societies (politics). Perhaps the most memorable sentence that encapsulates the workings of this modality of criticism that collapsed ontology and politics into epistemology is contained in Leila Ahmed's powerful revisionist critique of the nineteenth-century Egyptian thinker Qasim Amin, who was often hailed as a feminist pioneer in the Arab world. After noting that Amin's work is the rearticulation "of the colonial thesis of the inferiority of the native and Muslim and the superiority of the European" in a "native upper-middle class voice, the voice of a class economically allied with colonizers," Ahmed quips that "far from being the father of Arab feminism, then, Amin might more aptly be described as the son of Cromer [the British consul general in Egypt from 1877 to 1907] and colonialism."⁵⁶

Three decades after the insurrectionary critical contraption came into being to criticize the authority, and claims to neutrality and objectivity, of Western knowledges of the non-West, it was repurposed as an ersatz anti-imperialist implement wielded to condemn Arab thinkers and militants from the nineteenth century to our present for internalizing "colonial taxonomies" and being discursive compradors of sorts.⁵⁷ What disappeared with this repurposing is the crucial initial concern with the question of the authority of discourses, which Talal Asad was particularly preoccupied with. The question of authority cannot be separated from the loci of enunciation of these discourses' authors, their institutional sites of production, and their spheres of circulation, in addition to their discursive backbone.⁵⁸ Evacuating the question of authority risks collapsing the two meanings of representation—re-presentation as portrait (art, philosophy) and representation as proxy (speaking for, politics)—into each other.⁵⁹ The irony of the matter lies in the fact that the epistemology critique of Arab thinkers took off at the point of their political and military defeat, and at times imprisonment and assassination, by Israel, the authoritarian regimes, and the rising sectarian and religious political forces. Their words came to be criticized as their worlds began falling apart.

This modality of criticism remains "parasitic" on a particular idea of the West.⁶⁰ In an older Maoist jargon the West constitutes the main contradiction for these critics, which is why these critiques cannot account for the complexities and internal divisions of Arab and Muslim societies. Its main move, vis-à-vis those Arab thinkers whose discursive assumptions are dubbed to be in alliance with Empire, is a strategy of inversion that never surrenders its attachment to the West. By only taking up an oppositional stance toward the attempts of the West and "westernized natives" to refashion these forms of life, without dialectically relating these attempts to the internal historical dynamics and contradictions of these societies, this modality of criticism falls very

close to reinscribing the argument that the engine of historical transformation is external to these societies, but instead of welcoming it like twentieth-century modernization theory did, it now has to be resisted.

In fact, the archive of contemporary Arab thought is primarily examined, like the older generation of scholars did, through the anxiety of influence of the West. In the introduction to his magisterial *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, Albert Hourani wrote about the pitfalls of focusing on individual thinkers in contrast to schools of thought.⁶¹ In doing so, there is a risk, Hourani wrote, “of giving the impression that they were more important and original than they really were; most of them (although not quite all) were derivative thinkers of the second or third rank of importance.”⁶² Highlighting this tradition’s reproduction of Orientalist and colonial taxonomies, and doubting the originality of secular Muslim thought, underscores, like Hourani, the derivative nature of this tradition. Again, the difference lies in inverting the normative charges associated with this common diagnosis. While Hourani focuses on these thinkers because they are vectors of modernization, the oppositional metropolitan critics underscore the epistemological and ontological violence at the heart of these intellectuals’ visions that seeks to bring about Western hegemony. What gets foreclosed in the process is an engagement with modern and contemporary Arab and Muslim thought that does not reinscribe the West as its sovereign subject. Moreover, critiques of Arab and Muslim intellectuals as self-Orientalizing, unoriginal, and plagued by colonial taxonomies reproduce the historicism and theories of lack that are criticized in these thinkers’ works by unwittingly reinscribing once more the Arab world as lagging behind, this time around in the production of original thought.

Therefore, if one is interested, like I am in this project, in understanding the travails of this generation of thinkers, the questions they posed, the answers they proposed, and the different positions they were arguing against or aligning themselves with, a practice of criticism premised on unmasking “faulty,” or not, epistemological assumptions will not be of any help. What it will do is erase the historicity of these fields of argument and obscure the *character* of these specific interventions. It also forecloses the investigation of how theories, which are embedded in language games and political projects, help fashion the ethos of militant intellectuals and later of disenchanting solitary critics. For instance, in just focusing on universal—say, secular or liberal—discursive assumptions, and aligning them a priori with the US empire and human rights imperialism and epistemological violence, these critical strategies risk reifying these universals by erasing the logics of political practice, the powers of institutions, and the transfiguring acts of translation that repurpose these discourses

and embed them in different projects. It does so through eliding central historical and ethnographic questions. How are they put to use? By whom? In what conjuncture and to what end? How do their international travels change them and their adherents? What projects do they enable and foreclose as they are put to practice? While the unmasking of Eurocentric knowledges parading as universals proved to be salutary against the effortlessly thrown historicist charges of the “backwardness” of non-Western cultures, it also risks naturalizing the conceptual universal/particular distinction on a geographical West/East one.⁶³ This will again participate in either hailing difference as a form of resistance to the homogenizing power of the West or claiming it to be a traditional, or “pre-capitalist,” remainder that needs to be overcome to safely reach the much awaited and always deferred shores of modernity.⁶⁴

In investigating these questions, I will mainly draw sustenance from the methodology developed by the Ludwig Wittgenstein and John L. Austin-inspired work of Quentin Skinner and David Scott’s notion of a problem-space. The central tenet of Skinner’s method is captured in “Wittgenstein’s remark ‘that words are also deeds.’”⁶⁵ Skinner posited that in order to understand the *historical meaning* of the text, one has to view it as an intervention in argument and ask about the *character* of the intervention⁶⁶ through asking questions such as “What is this text doing? What is the author doing in this text?”⁶⁷ “How is it positioned in relation to existing arguments? What kind of an intervention does it constitute? What does it accept, reject, repudiate, satirize, ignore in existing discussions?”⁶⁸ The import of R. G. Collingwood’s “logic of question and answer,” put to use in Skinner’s work, was its insight that it is helpful to approach any intentional object of the human mind (a building, a piece of music, a philosophical work) as a solution to certain problems, and hence the historian’s task is “to find out the questions to which the text was the answer.”⁶⁹

David Scott elaborates the concept of a problem-space, mainly out of his reading of Collingwood and Skinner, “though in the background of it,” he tells the late Stuart Hall, one can “discern the trace of Wittgenstein, J. L. Austin and Foucault.”⁷⁰ In *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (2004), Scott notes that

a “problem-space,” in my usage, is meant first of all to demarcate a discursive context, a context of language, but it is more than a cognitively intelligible arrangement of concepts, ideas, images, meanings, and so on—though it is certainly this. It is a context of argument, and therefore one of intervention. A problem-space, in other words, is an ensemble

of questions and answers around which a horizon of identifiable stakes (conceptual as well as ideological-political stakes) hangs.⁷¹

Moreover, what this concept allows Scott to do is to gauge the temporality of different spaces of arguments, how in a new conjuncture “old questions may lose their salience, their bite, and so lead the range of old answers that once attached to them to appear lifeless, quaint, not so much wrong as irrelevant.”⁷² In emphasizing the temporality of problem-spaces, Scott is after a rethinking of the relation of past to present, to avoid understanding the past in the terms of the present, to sidestep the “presentism that reads the past as a naive or mistaken version of the present”⁷³ by reconstructing the character of an intervention in its own space of arguments. Scott, however, is also interested in an additional question following the historical act of reconstruction, that of interrogating the saliency of the reconstructed move for the critic’s present. Is the question still worth answering?, he asks. In that sense, Scott adds a normative edge, an engaged posture, to the labors of historical reconstruction, noting the insufficiency of the detached reconstructing of the past practiced by Skinner, “who bows and exits just at the point at which the question arises of determining and judging the stakes in the present of the rehistoricizing intervention.”⁷⁴ The labors and responsibility of the historian are not to stop at the present’s doorstep, by denaturalizing and revealing the constructedness of what we now take for granted.⁷⁵ It is not enough to show how things were different in the past, and therefore infer that our present could possibly have different contours; rather, Scott urges the critic to knock on this door and seek “to make the present yield more attractive possibilities for alternative futures.”⁷⁶

In this project I will build on Scott’s insights, drawing attention to the problem-spaces, not only of different generations of critics but of differently located contemporary critics. While Scott’s interest lies mostly in the temporality of problem-spaces, I will put this notion to work to also help us understand the dynamics of synchronous fields of argument in the Levant and in the North American academy.⁷⁷ Moreover, in times when oppositional culture in the metropolises is growing farther and farther away from the thinkers and movements of emancipation on the ground in the Arab world—unlike the earlier generation’s solidarity and alliance with the Palestinian national liberation movements—these critics are answerable to a variant of Scott’s critique of Skinner’s detachment. So you’ve shown from afar how the discursive assumptions that Marxist and feminist militants and thinkers are using are all deeply entangled with power. This reveals that you have mastered the application of critical tool, but is that enough? Can’t theory go beyond oppositional critique

toward “positing a new imaginary figure/model of intelligibility,” as Cornelius Castoriadis suggested—one that can be tethered to a reimagining of political futures.⁷⁸

Coda

This book is best approached like a musical fugue. Its major voice is the Lebanese New Left. Diasporic critical theorists, like Edward Said and Talal Asad, and the impact that their critical work had on metropolitan disciplines, are its minor voice. It has two more minor voices, which appear every now and then. The first is the work of scholars associated with the South Asian Subaltern Studies collective, who shared in their beginnings a common Maoist and Gramscian lineage with the theorists of Socialist Lebanon but put it to use differently. The second is the 1960s French Left. Socialist Lebanon’s militant intellectuals were in touch with some of its factions and kept track of its theoretical productions and militant strategies. As the fugue unfolds, its main subject—emancipation, particularly from colonialism and imperialism—goes through a succession of inversions and counterpoints that are still unfolding in time.

The form of the book reflexively reenacts this generation’s dialectic of revolutionary hope and political disenchantment. In part I—Time of History—I reconstruct the coming into being and high tides of the New Left by examining Socialist Lebanon’s archive. In doing so, I underscore how the members of this generation were bound together by a collective project of emancipation, which inscribed itself within an internationalist constellation of revolutionary movements. In examining the multiple binds confronting the revolutionary project in part II—Times of the Sociocultural—I move from the reconstruction of a collective project of emancipation to an in-depth examination of Waddah Charara’s own militant trajectory and critical work. The scale and focus of the chapters mirrors the transubstantiation of a collective of underground militant intellectuals writing anonymous clandestine texts in the service of the revolution into disenchanting, isolated critics in a wartorn polis.