

### 3. JUNE 1967 AND ITS HISTORIOGRAPHICAL AFTERLIVES

When the June war broke out I was still in Paris. . . . I felt something like a quake mixed with shame, which pushed me to quickly escape to Beirut. . . . And for months, in an atmosphere of depression and despair, I thought, every now and then, of committing suicide. But it was forestalled first by a sense of responsibility towards a wife and three children and some remainder of a metaphysical trust in the revolutionary potential of the Arab people.

—YASIN AL-HAFIZ

At the time the Vietnam peace movement was gaining momentum but for me the Palestine issue seemed more crucial.

—MASAO ADACHI

There is no doubt that 1967, which marks the swift military defeat of Arab armies against Israel, has a ubiquitous historiographical presence. It is *the* turning point par excellence. You will find it referenced in Arabic newspaper articles, in Arab Human Development Reports from the United Nations Development Programme, and in the critical literature discussing artistic, intellectual, and political trends.<sup>1</sup> The use of the date of a military defeat as a marker for different genres, and not, for instance, the date of events that are internal to these fields of practice, is symptomatic of the saturation of Arab cultural scenes with politics, whether it is conceived as a national struggle against colonialism or a critique of discrimination based on sexuality, gender, and race. Artists and intellectuals often comment on the overbearing presence of political concerns. A few years ago, Hamed Sinno, the front man of the Lebanese pop band Mashrou' Leila, mentioned in an interview that it is very difficult to escape politics where he comes from.<sup>2</sup> Sinno echoed Jalal Khoury (1934–2017), the committed Lebanese theater director and playwright who more than four decades ago noted that “our world is asphyxiated by politics.”<sup>3</sup> More than fifty years of age separate the two. Sinno was born in 1988, in the last years of the Lebanese civil war, a few years before the collapse of the Soviet Union, while

Khoury was at the vanguard of Lebanese political theater in the late 1960s. That said, both agree on the difficulty of artists escaping politics in our part of the world. Pierre Bourdieu's theories on the increasing autonomy of cultural fields away from sociopolitical contexts, and external constraints, find their limit in the neocolonial and postcolonial Arab world.<sup>4</sup>

Works on Arab intellectual history in English adopt post-1967 thought as a marker for contemporary Arab thought.<sup>5</sup> In Ibrahim Abu Rabi's *Contemporary Arab Thought*, the post-1967 era is characterized by a variety of transformations that are hard to square with the historical event of the military defeat as their turning point.<sup>6</sup> In addition to mentioning the impact of 1967 on intellectual production, Abu Rabi' writes about "the Arab project of modernity [coming] to a standstill" (18); "most Arab states have experienced more not less authoritarianism since 1967" (22); "the social and economic transformations since 1967" (23); the "rise of the Gulf States to religious and economic prominence after 1967 mainly in the 1980's and 1990's"; the Islamic revival post-1967 (28); the "mode of production dominant in 1967 in the Gulf" (24); and capitalism after 1967. In this narrative post-1967 becomes the master key to unlock intellectual, political, social, and economic transformations in the Arab world. It's a master key that is without much heuristic value, one that plots structural transformations in societies and modes of production on the same plane as the event of a swift military defeat, without any distinction between different registers of analysis.

Suzanne Kassab's deployment of 1967 is much more focused. The intellectual and political crisis experienced in the wake of the military defeat, she argues, brought on two, increasingly bifurcated, responses:

One the one hand, the search for totalizing doctrines, especially religious after the demise of the Left and of secular nationalism, and, on the other hand, the radicalization of critique. The first trend was the result of a deep yearning for a holistic vision that could offer an indigenous, non-alienating worldview and mobilize the necessary forces toward a way out of the humiliation and the oppression. The second was the outcome of a painful confrontation with the limitations and dangers of holistic views as well as of the growing realization of the vital need for critique in the face of multiple forms of oppression.<sup>7</sup>

Kassab has done an admirable excavation of critical strands in contemporary Arab thought. Her work reveals the multiplicity of critical positions—for example, Marxist, liberal, feminist, Islamist—in contemporary Arab thought, standing as a much-needed corrective to the reduction of this tradition's complexity to a

stark ideological binary between secular nationalism and religious politics. Her comparative perspective, which ties in the motifs of Arab debates with global postcolonial conversations, undoes their exceptionalist treatment, which is so often their lot. It is also an invitation to carve new South-South intellectual paths that steer off the much trodden peripheries-metropole highway.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will revisit once more Socialist Lebanon's theoretical and political practice. In doing so, I have four aims. The first is to unearth a very early tradition of critique of the authoritarian regimes that predates the 1967 defeat. Second, to complicate the historiography that crowns 1967 as the turning point, which generated a bifurcation between holistic doctrines and critique. I do so by underlining the radical hopes that accompanied the political rise of the New Left in the *direct* aftermath of 1967, which combined an adherence to thick ideological traditions, such as Marxism, an engagement alongside the Palestinian revolution, and a commitment to critique.<sup>8</sup> The dominant framing of 1967 as the double marker of transition and bifurcation, I argue, is less the result of the direct post-1967 conjuncture and more of the 1980s, when most of these militant intellectuals lost their political organizational moorings and their hope in the revolutionary masses to become detached, isolated critics squeezed between the Scylla of authoritarian regimes and the Charybdis of communal solidarities and Islamic militant movements. As the political-social questions of the 1960s focusing on the transfiguration of Marxism—its Arabization—to guide political practice gave way to the political-cultural questions of *asala* (authenticity) and *turath* (Arab-Islamic tradition), quite a few of the 1960s leftists rediscovered the heritage of the earlier generation of *Nabda* (Renaissance) liberal thinkers, such as Taha Husayn and 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq.<sup>9</sup> The Arab liberal tradition, which they thought had been superseded by Marxism in the 1960s, proved to those former revolutionaries to be much more prescient in addressing the challenges they were facing from both state and society.

Third, unlike the most famous post-1967 self-criticisms, and here I have in mind the works of Sadik al-Azm and Adonis, which coupled the courageous ethical injunction of taking stock of one's own defeat with a culturalist critique that laid the blame on the "traditional" nature of Arabs, Socialist Lebanon focused on examining the social composition of these regimes, their ideologies, and more importantly the logics undergirding their technologies of rule and governing their political and military practices.<sup>10</sup> Critical diagnosis of actual practices of *power* is what they did.

Fourth, and to go back to our present, these very early Marxist critiques raise crucial questions regarding the question of minorities in the Arab world and

the mobilization of the Palestinian question by the regimes to legitimize internal power struggles and repress political dissidents. These two questions—minorities and the struggle with Israel as necessitating a permanent state of emergency—will later be taken up by the Arab liberal critique against the leftist and Arab nationalist anti-imperialists. Socialist Lebanon's work does not only reveal how early and prescient their diagnosis of the regimes was but also how it was embedded in a Marxist project that combined it with a critique of imperialism. After the defeat of the Left, these external (imperialism) and internal (regimes) critiques bifurcated. Liberals, mostly democracy advocates and culturalist critics of their societies, opposed anti-imperialist nationalists and Islamists who focused only on the geopolitical game of nations and the regimes' place in it. The Arab revolutions (2011–), by reintroducing grassroots mass political mobilization, ignited, for a moment at least, the hope of transcending the impossible choice between national sovereignty under a tyrant and a hope for democracy brought about by foreign occupation. Collective political practice brought back the possibility of articulating an antiauthoritarian and anti-imperialist politics from one position, before the regimes, communal internal divisions, and the never ending interventions thwarted the possibility of emancipation. Even if the first wave of revolutions have now ebbed, post-1967 as a dominant historiographic trope can no longer stand as the undisputed marker of contemporary Arab thought. It is now a category of the past. Post-2011 also urges us to cast a fresh look on how the analytic and historiographical categories of historians reproduce the categories of practice of key intellectuals of the earlier generation who were marked by the 1967 military defeat.<sup>11</sup>

In excavating this alternative genealogy of contemporary Arab thought and politics, which does not assume 1967 as the cardinal and only historiographical turning point, I, of course, do not seek to deny the centrality of the defeat. In fact, I will discuss how it constituted a watershed moment for academics both at home and in the diaspora, such as Sadik al-Azm, Edward Said, and Talal Asad, jolting the first two out of their ivory towers and into an engagement alongside the Palestinian revolution. In doing so, I reclaim a different genealogy for 1967, one that argues that the political moment of 1967 was central, and constitutive, for diasporic strategies of criticism—Asad's and Said's—that ushered in the critiques of the entanglement of Western knowledges with power. What I am after is a double move that seeks to displace the monopoly of 1967 as the marker of contemporary Arab thought at home and to reinscribe it as a cardinal moment for the intellectual and political projects of diasporic intellectuals.

### *Birth Pangs of the New Left*

The end of the union between Egypt and Syria in 1961 is now largely forgotten. This event, which exists outside of the contradiction with colonialism and imperialism, was crucial for this generation of militants. It constitutes the first major setback of the anticolonial nationalist regimes, less than a decade after the 1952 Egyptian Revolution. This intra-Arab event ushered in the first immanent critiques of the regimes that pointed out the gap that separates their pan-Arab ideologies from their practices that could not sustain a union for more than three years. It inaugurated an early critical reflexive turn that found in Marxism a critical theory and a weapon of political transformation, which by conjugating together the internal class contradictions of these societies with an anti-imperialist agenda was more conceptually sophisticated than Arab nationalist ideologies.

Some of the comrades who founded Socialist Lebanon in the mid-1960s came from this cohort of disenchanted Arab nationalists. Ahmad Beydoun (1942–), who had lost the links he had with the Arab Nationalist Movement and was immersed in a Ba‘thist atmosphere through his friends at Lebanese University, remembers the dissolution of the union as being a terrible and decisive event. Nearly fifty years after the establishment of the union in 1958, he draws my attention during one of our conversations to “something which the generation younger than us cannot imagine,” most probably alluding to my generation’s world, born during the Lebanese civil and regional wars (1975–90), a time of heightened Christian/Muslim sectarian tensions, Syrian military interventions, and Israeli invasions (1978 and 1982).<sup>12</sup> It seems light years away from the hopes of Arab unity that Abdel Nasser ignited in their hearts. “And that is,” he adds, “how terrible the dissolution of the union was for us. It was a blow that changed the meaning of the world for us. The political history of the last three or four generations does not really stop sufficiently at that date. They stop more at 1967. For us, 1961 was decisive.” It is this disenchantment “which gave rise to the desire and the need to know these societies that are called an *umma* [Arab nation].”

Turning their gazes inward from nation to class, these young intellectuals saw in Marxist theory and practice the answer to their desire to know and the appropriate tool to effect the revolutionary transformations of their societies. “The question of society,” Beydoun presses on, “was the true and effective mediator of [Marxist revolutionary] theory.” The year 1961 ushered in an early reflexive moment that turned away from nationalist rhetoric against external enemies toward criticizing the “progressive” regimes in power and diagnosing

the internal political contestations lodged at the heart of these societies. It laid the first bricks of what would come to be known after 1967 as the New Left.

Muhsin Ibrahim's presence, demeanor, and speech are as close as possible to those of a godfather of the Lebanese New Left. He began our conversation by asserting:

I am going to give it to you from the beginning. There is no New Left in Lebanon without a previous political foundation. Nothing fell on us called the New Left. The issue wasn't that the Lebanese students observed the French students's revolution [May 1968] and decided to do something similar. Its is that of the [Arab] nationalist movements . . . and some of the intellectuals of the Syrian Nationalist Socialist Party . . . the Ba'th Party and some of those who split from the Lebanese Communist Party. These are the birth pangs of the 1960s.<sup>13</sup>

By the time the comrades came together to found Socialist Lebanon they had radicalized their critique of the Arab nationalist movements and regimes. Early on, SL unmasked the Arab chauvinism of the Syrian Ba'th, which they knew from the inside, that was used against non-Arab minorities but cloaked itself in a progressive political rhetoric. The first issue of their bulletin—dated mid-September 1966—ends with an article entitled “Notes on the Last Agreement between the Kurdish Revolution and the Iraqi Government.”<sup>14</sup> After enumerating some of the points of the agreement—recognizing the Kurdish nationality in the “temporary constitution,” recognizing the language as an official one alongside Arabic in majority Kurdish areas, parity between Arabs and Kurds in educational delegations and scholarships, and so forth—SL assesses reactions to it, including the Ba'th's:

Behind a leftist rhetoric that claims to take the unity of Arab toilers as its starting point, and considers all actions against it a service rendered to imperialist interests, lies the clear chauvinist position of the declaration: the Kurdish movement is a separatist one that distracts the Arab and Kurdish masses from their main enemies: imperialism, the forces of reaction, and the oil monopolies. It is therefore at their service. Moreover, the Kurdish movement is headed by “tribal and feudal and reactionary sectors” that are backed by international colonialism, the British petroleum companies, and the reactionary rule in Iran. All these accusations are put forth without a single piece of evidence to back them up.<sup>15</sup>

Socialist Lebanon, which supported Kurdish self-rule within Iraqi territory, denounced very early on the Syrian Ba'th's use of *takhwin*—to accuse someone or

an entire group of treason or collaboration with imperialist or foreign powers, or both—one of the most commonly deployed tropes of political excommunication that was used mostly but not exclusively by Arab nationalist regimes and their acolytes. This political charge has had a long shelf life and even wider range of applications encompassing individuals, political parties, and entire communities. Arab communists were often the targets of Nasser’s accusations of treason.<sup>16</sup> Ethnic or religious groups, such as the Kurdish movement in this case, were often accused of being the internal agents, or doing the work, of imperialism, seeking to divide and weaken the nation’s body from within. For instance, Bashar al-Assad draws on this long tradition when he characterizes the Syrian revolutionaries as foreign-backed rebels, noting in the first months of the Syrian uprisings (2011–) that in the face of conspiracies that are multiplying like germs, the body’s immune system has to be strengthened to resist them. The predominance of the national question then, during the global age of decolonization, and its persistence throughout the contemporary Arab world via the Arab-Israeli struggle and the direct foreign economic and military interventions in the post-Cold War era, provided fertile terrain for the regimes in power to appropriate the critical language of anticolonial emancipation in order to enhance their power, crack down on dissidents, undercut all forms of institutional political and civic life, and, of course, legitimize their own rule. In the case of minorities, as Socialist Lebanon argued vis-à-vis the Kurdish movement, anticolonial nationalism was a veil for an Arab nationalist chauvinism that sought to tie its own internal other with foreign imperialist agendas.

In addition to criticizing the politics of treason, Socialist Lebanon took issue with the obverse form that the predominance of the national question took, which is the mobilization for the liberation of Palestine and the fight against anti-imperialism to legitimize their own action, achieve or expand power, and interrupt revolutionary politics. “Concerning the slogan of ‘liberating Palestine,’” they write,

this is not a new one [slogan] for these movements [nationalists]. It was, and still is, the demagogic call that is brandished by all these movements to interpellate the masses to get to power or to keep it. The result has always been the suppression of the masses’ consciousness and their movement as well as forbidding them from forming their revolutionary parties that truly represent their interests (this is what happened in Egypt, in Iraq, and what some fear might happen in Jordan).<sup>17</sup>

Socialist Lebanon engaged in acts of immanent critique that diagnosed the gap separating the regimes’ progressive professions of faith regarding the two legs

they stood on—the national question and the socioeconomic one—from their practices of rule. When it came to the latter, SL contrasted the promise of socialism with the privileges accrued to those in power. “The rule of the Ba’th in Syria is the rule of the rural segment of the petite bourgeoisie that appropriates surplus production through the army and the state apparatus.”<sup>18</sup> These appropriations take the form of different kinds of income and privileges such as high salaries; army cooperatives that “provide them with everything they need—from the pin to the car—at cost value”; rent control and interest-free loans to buy apartments; automatic promotion of officers by one grade upon demobilization and receiving thereafter a monthly salary corresponding to their new rank while keeping all their previous privileges. To all of this should be added the additional incomes and privileges that come from being part of power, such as favors rendered to one’s family and bribes received for facilitating transactions with the state.<sup>19</sup> The “military administrative bureaucracies” ruling Syria and Egypt foreclosed the possibility of political practice for the masses in their respective countries. Not only did they presume to speak for the entire nation, they also depoliticized the Palestinian cause by rendering it a military issue: an injustice that was caused by a military defeat and will be resolved by a military victory. This perspective provided the adequate ideological justification for “consolidating the army’s role, which was considered the only force capable of resolving the Palestinian problem.”<sup>20</sup> It was also used as the main excuse for the army’s failure to resolve the predicaments of the national democratic revolution and for its taking the biggest share out of the national budget.

Socialist Lebanon also condemned the foreclosure of the masses from political practice by the top-down technological and economic development strategies. The development question, SL affirmed, cannot be resolved through these means and with foreign aid since it is a social problem. “Solving the question of backwardness—the Chinese model is clear on this front—cannot take place unless the wretched masses accept to make big sacrifices,” they write, “which are accompanied by a consciousness of knowing that these will result in building factories and irrigating lands that will produce later on work, food, clothing, education, and health. It is obvious that these sacrifices and this consciousness cannot take place without the masses’ popular organizations whose power is in contradiction with that of the military.”<sup>21</sup> The regimes, whose *raison d’être* is the national question and to a lesser extent the development of their societies, banish the masses from the center of political practice by rendering the first a purely military affair to be undertaken by the army and the second a technocratic one to be solved by experts. Moreover, the regimes are characterized by an “enmity to popular organizations”<sup>22</sup> and strive to cancel their role in these



two domains “while representing themselves as expressing the interests of the wretched masses by bringing into being organizations that are loyal to them.”<sup>23</sup> The regimes’ practice vis-à-vis “the new colonialism,” on the other hand, is one characterized by wavering and an incapacity to exit from the capitalist market. “They are not able to break free from its hold and they are not able to ally themselves with it . . . [new colonialism] has more loyal allies represented by feudalism and the bourgeoisie and even the petite bourgeoisie that still retains right-wing organizations (the Muslim Brotherhood . . .).”<sup>24</sup>

Socialist Lebanon’s verdict on these regimes is prescient and damning. They are a failure on the national, regional, and international fronts. The reason why they didn’t fall after the swift and devastating defeat in June 1967 is because “the confrontation with colonialism still provides the advanced [*al-mutaqaddima*] (and even the backward) regimes an effective popular defense that refuses to let go of what nationalist forces have achieved in terms of independence. . . . This is exactly what these regimes understood and they began to call for restricting the battle to this aspect only.”<sup>25</sup> A few years later, Anwar al-Sadat relinquished Nasser’s statist economic policies and followed that with a visit to Jerusalem that buried the national question. The Assadist dynasty began its policies of economic liberalization in the 1990s, “followed by ambitious privatization initiatives in the mid-2000s.”<sup>26</sup> It still seeks to draw its legitimacy from the national question.

*1967: Personal Watersheds, Fellow Traveling, and Diasporic  
Institution Building*

We owe the birth of two of the best known Arab public intellectuals of the 1960s generation to the 1967 defeat: Sadik Jalal al-Azm (1934–2016) and Edward Said (1935–2003). Unlike SL’s militant intellectuals, who had nearly a decade of militant experience behind their backs in 1967, al-Azm and Said were detached academics for whom the defeat constituted a personal watershed moment. Said wrote:

And 1967 brought more dislocations, whereas for me it seemed to embody the dislocation that subsumed all other losses, the disappeared worlds of my youth and upbringing, the unpolitical years of my education, the assumption of disengaged teaching and scholarship at Columbia, and so on. I was no longer the same person after 1967; the shock of that war drove me back to where it had all started, the struggle over Palestine. I subsequently entered the newly transformed Middle Eastern

landscape as a part of the Palestinian movement that emerged in Amman and then in Beirut in the late sixties through the seventies.<sup>27</sup>

Said, whose first and only attempt at political writing had been on the Suez crisis of 1956 submitted to the Princeton newspaper during his undergraduate years, wrote “The Arab Portrayed.”<sup>28</sup> This piece was printed in a special issue of *Arab World*, “the Arab League monthly published in New York,” guest edited by Said’s close friend Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, the Palestinian academic and future member of the Palestine National Council (1977–91).<sup>29</sup> This special issue, Said noted, was “intended to look at the war from an Arab perspective. I used the occasion to look at the image of the Arabs in the media, popular literature, and cultural representations going back to the Middle Ages. This was the origin of my book *Orientalism*, which I dedicated to Janet and Ibrahim.”<sup>30</sup>

The productivity of defeat did not only take the form of making public intellectuals out of detached diasporic academics. The defeat also produced new institutions, periodicals, and publications. In 1967–68, Arab American scholars wary of the founding in 1966 of the Middle East Studies Association “soon after the closure of the American Association for Middle Eastern Studies, and the overlap in the leadership of the two bodies” and fearing that “MESA was simply a continuation of the earlier pro-Washington and pro-Israel organization,” established the Association of Arab-American University Graduates, “which organized a series of annual conferences and publications under the leadership of Ibrahim Abu-Lughod. For several years these were scheduled to conflict with the MESA meetings.”<sup>31</sup> “The 1967 war had shocked” these diasporic intellectuals “into realizing that the scholars speaking about the Middle East in the United States, even the minority who seemed sympathetic to the Arab World, were not *from* the region, and did not speak *for* the region.”<sup>32</sup> In the wake of the war they “began to challenge the style of academic detachment with which establishment scholars maintained both their status as experts and a silence about controversial issues, especially the Palestine question” as well as the construction of the Middle East as an area of study.<sup>33</sup> These diasporic intellectuals not only contested the styles of academic writing, and their flagrant elisions, but, more importantly, also turned their critical gaze toward a more fundamental level, to the politics inherent in the metropole’s construction of its objects of knowledge, noting that the Middle East “was a colonial conception, which, by including Turkey and Iran with the Arab countries, minimized the much stronger common culture of the Arabic-speaking world.”<sup>34</sup> Following up on “The Arab Portrayed,” Said articulated a critique of Orientalist scholarship in 1974 at the Association of Arab-American University Graduates conference.

Sadik al-Azm, the Yale-trained philosopher, born to an upper-class Damascene family, was, like Said, a detached academic teaching at the American University of Beirut.<sup>35</sup> “If someone had predicted before the defeat of June 1967 that one day I would be producing the type of writing which I later did produce,” al-Azm mentioned thirty years later, “I would have thought him mad.”<sup>36</sup> al-Azm highlighted the gap between the “revolutionary” economic and political agendas of the Arab liberation movement and its “conservative” superstructural side, which did not tackle Islamic thought, characterizing it as reproducing “values of ignorance, myth-making, backwardness, dependency, and fatalism” and impeding “the propagation of scientific values, secularism, enlightenment, democracy, and humanism.”<sup>37</sup> He went on to publish two of the most controversial and widely circulated works, even though officially banned by many countries in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat—*Al-Naqd al-Dhathi ba’d al-Hazima* [Self-Criticism after the Defeat] (1968) and *Naqd al-Fikr al-Dini* [Critique of Religious Reason] (1969).<sup>38</sup> These two books, now considered classics of post-1967 modern Arab political thought, are much indebted to the works of the Syrian Marxist thinker Yasin al-Hafiz, who early on focused on the analysis of culture and values in an effort to move criticism beyond the monopoly of the geopolitical grid. The year 1968 also witnessed al-Azm’s expulsion from the American University of Beirut on the grounds of his writings and for signing a petition calling for the withdrawal of the American army from Vietnam.<sup>39</sup>

In the wake of 1967 Socialist Lebanon continued their critiques of the regimes in power while Said and al-Azm moved away from their disciplinary areas of expertise toward forging new modalities of public criticism. Intellectuals in the metropole, such as Said, intervened by calling into question the assumptions on which the West’s knowledges of the non-Western world are built. This was a critical labor that, as Talal Asad put it, subjected these *Orientalist* works to the same scrutiny they used to subject “Oriental” peoples and languages to.<sup>40</sup> They turned the West’s critical gaze on itself. The questions of colonialism that these diasporic thinkers tackled were tied to their experiences of everyday racism and the refusal of wide swathes of Western societies to understand the justness of Arab political causes, particularly when it came to the denial of solidarity to the Palestinians’ struggle for national self-determination.

Things were inflected differently in the Arab world. The questions spurred by the defeat, there and then, were of course of a more direct political and military nature. Why were we defeated? How do we move forward from this point? What are the most suitable ideologies and organizational forms that should be adapted in reorganizing the struggle in the wake of the defeat? These were all

hotly debated issues. The ideological and political problem-space was crowded with religious, Arab nationalist, and communist answers to these questions.<sup>41</sup> It was in this emotionally saturated, politically charged atmosphere that, Sadik Jalal al-Azm, influenced by al-Hafiz's work, steered away from widespread interpretations and prognoses that explained the defeat by external factors, blaming it on US imperialist conspiracies and the shortcomings of the Soviet Union, when not interpreting it as a divine punishment for having lost the proper Islamic way.

What is important to stress is how in both these problem-spaces—the metropolitan and the Arab—what was at stake was to isolate an internal cultural layer for critique. Diasporic thinkers called into question Western culture for its racialized portrayal of Arabs, while critical intellectuals at home isolated “traditional” Arab culture as the root of the defeat. It was a critique of culture that took the form of the problem of *race* and cultural imperialism in the supposedly enlightened metropolises of this world and the problem of *religion* and social conservatism in the supposedly socialist progressive Arab countries. What was also shared by both critical agendas was their *oppositional* character to hegemonic positions whether in Orientalist representations of the Arab world or in the widely circulated arguments in political literature after the defeat that blamed it on external factors. In both cases, these intellectuals saw their critical public interventions and staged them against prevalent cultural and political doxas of the time.

This is where their similarities end. al-Azm's critique was a jeremiad of sorts, a prophet lambasting his people for their traditional ways that brought this ignominious defeat upon them. Said's critique speaks back to the West that dehumanized Arabs through the cultural products of Western consciousness. For al-Azm—a vanguardist modernist critic—the Arab, a culprit of his own defeat, must change his own ways, while for Said, the diasporic oppositional intellectual speaking back to the white majority, the Arab is a victim of cultural imperialism that must resist and tear down the webs of Western racism.<sup>42</sup>

The critique of Arab cultures for their “lacks”—democracy, individual rights, women's rights—and the critique of “Western consciousness” for its webs of cultural imperialism that dehumanize the “Oriental” became increasingly widespread from the 1980s onward. While these two critiques were *theoretically* at odds with each other, the critics that produced them were politically in solidarity. Both Said and al-Azm became fellow travelers of the Palestinian revolution in the wake of 1967. The militant hopes initially generated by the Palestinian resistance in the late 1960s and the political solidarity with it would receive their first blow just a few years later when it clashed with the Jordanian army (September 1970). In the wake of the Iranian Revolution (1979) and

the defeat of the Palestinian revolution in Lebanon (1982), which ushered in a wave of militant religious politics, the secular political space of anti-imperialist solidarity, premised on the presence of the *feda'yi* as the revolutionary subject, crumbled. The concept of anti-imperialism was stretched by Islamist militant movements to include cultural decolonization, while cultural critics in the metropolises increasingly called into question the colonial epistemological assumptions of modernist intellectuals. The defeat of the revolutionary subject, whose presence and institutions enabled political solidarity amid theoretical divergence, will result in an increased narrowing of the space separating theoretical critiques from political positions. Diasporic intellectuals and critical thinkers at home will increasingly part ways, but we are not there yet.

*A Failed Arab Modernity or a Military Defeat  
of Postcolonial Regimes?*

To get a sense of the distinct contours of SL's minoritarian critical labors, against the best sellers of contemporary Arabic thought, I will take a small detour via al-Azm's *Self-Criticism after the Defeat*. al-Azm dedicated a little bit more than a third of the volume to analyze samples of "the tendency of evading responsibility [for one's actions] and blaming it on others, which clearly manifested itself after the June 5th defeat."<sup>43</sup> The logics of justification, he underscored, are not only deficient analytical grids but also symptoms of deeper underlying traits permeating Arab culture. The revolutionary youth, he wrote, "are politically revolutionary, however, deep down, they are conservative socially, religiously, culturally, ethically and economically, except in rare cases."<sup>44</sup> The gap between the theory and practice of the Arab revolutionary reveals an incomplete, if not aborted, revolutionary transformation. al-Azm's strategy is wedded to a staunchly modernizing historical progressive agenda. Revolution means overcoming the "dark image of the past" and initiating a rebellion against past generations.<sup>45</sup>

When tackling the Arab progressive regimes, he emphasized their "ideological confusion" and their "centrism," as well as their ambiguity concerning the question of secularism and the scientific nature of their socialism. "There is no doubt," wrote al-Azm, "that the excuse for the existence of progressive and socialist regimes in the Arab world is the revolution against this weight of backwardness carried by the Arab human being . . . and not refraining from revolutionary socialist measures against it out of consideration for the people's religious feelings' . . . and the preservation of traditions."<sup>46</sup> In contrast to SL's diagnosis, which centers on power by analyzing the technologies of rule that

substitute the people's political practice with top-down military and technocratic solutions, al-Azm's lament is precisely that the advanced regimes are failing to adequately fulfill the promise of getting rid of their citizens' backwardness. They are failing not because they are negating the political practice of the people (SL) but because they are conceding too much to their religious feelings and traditions.

al-Azm's culturalist diagnosis deploys all the binaries of modernization theory that are absent from Socialist Lebanon's political analysis: tradition/modernity, religion/science, superstition/reason, backwardness/progress. The two accounts differ not only in isolating different grounds for explanation—power and culture—and how this entails a divergent understanding of what constitutes progressive political practice and who is supposed to carry it out. It is also a difference between the deployment of rough and ready reifications, such as “the traditional characteristics of the Arab personality,” and an empirically informed analysis of the many privileges of army officers, the mechanics of their co-optation of the political process, and their instrumentalist use of anticolonial sloganeering to consolidate their own internal powers.

Socialist Lebanon's analysis not only dodges the binaries of modernization theory, it also escapes another prevalent binary trap, which usually comes hand in hand with the former: internal versus external factors in the analysis of the 1967 defeat. al-Azm's inward turn toward culture (internal factors) is an ethical injunction to take responsibility for one's actions. His call, though, remains caught within the same nationalist matrix of the regimes—us/them—whose valences he inverts. Instead of blaming “imperialism” for the Arabs' defeat, he lays the blame on the “Arabs” themselves. The nationalist form of the question “why were we defeated?” takes its unified subject for granted—the Arab “we”—whatever the answer one gives. Socialist Lebanon's diagnosis of the regimes and the class composition of Arab societies displaces the nationalist subject that delimits the possible answers in a binary matrix of us/them, internal causes/external ones to the political plane.

Socialist Lebanon was not preoccupied with questions of modernization, but with the coupling of the national and social questions on which an *autonomous* left could be built—one that not only faced national issues but also the more covert economic domination of foreign capital and the local bourgeoisie. From their perspective, 1967 was not a failure of Arab modernity. It was a military defeat of the regimes that would come to constitute their own *historical chance*.

## *Theory and Autonomy*

In the absence of masses, SL's theoretical virtuosity, which positioned itself to the left of Arab nationalist regimes and the Lebanese Left, managed to draw attention to them within these wider political circles. It will result in their merger with the radicalized Lebanese branch of the Arab Nationalist Movement led by Muhsin Ibrahim in the wake of the 1967 defeat. Before I address the union, I will now sketch the contours of SL's critique of the Lebanese Communist Party, which brings out early on the question of the autonomy of leftist political practice. This question will become increasingly significant as we move on into the 1970s and will go through different theoretical and political iterations, until Charara's final disenchantment in the first months of the civil war; but let's linger for a while in the hinge years of the late 1960s.

In June 1959, one of the historic leaders of the Lebanese Communist Party, Farajallah al-Helou, was arrested and tortured to death in Syria by the anticommunism department of the United Arab Republic; "the Lebanese communists considered Nasser to be merely a dictator and essentially a representative of the greedy Egyptian bourgeoisie."<sup>47</sup> The Syrian-Lebanese Communist Party had opposed the union between Egypt and Syria in 1958 and refused to disband after its establishment.<sup>48</sup> A couple of months before the killing of al-Helou, in March 1959, Nasser—in a similar vein to Aflaq's Ba'athist positions—declared Arab communists to be "[foreign] agents who neither believe in the liberty of their land or their nation, but only do the bidding of outsiders."<sup>49</sup> The anticolonial and anti-imperialist agenda of pan-Arab movements marginalized the communists by advocating socialist politics plus a nationalist agenda, in contrast to the communist parties, which could not escape the Soviet orbit. Even before the emergence of Third World and national liberation movements, Arab communist parties received what could possibly be their hardest hit when they followed Moscow in accepting the UN partition of Palestine in 1947. Their earlier anti-Zionist stances had to be forgotten after their acquiescence to Moscow's decision, which "not only pulled the figurative rug from under the Arab communists, but also reinforced their isolation in the Arab world and essentially forced them into the role of apologist for their prime support, the Soviet Union."<sup>50</sup>

The Palestine question, the relations with Arab nationalist liberation movements and the new national military regimes of the 1950s and 1960s, and the allegiance to the Soviet line were major issues plaguing the Lebanese Communist Party by the mid-1960s. Moreover, both the Syrian and Lebanese parties had been under the Stalinist command and the personality cult

of the Syrian secretary general, Khalid Bikdash, who had ruled the party since the early 1930s.<sup>51</sup> By 1964,

discontent was formalized with an explicit request that a party congress be convened to question the party's leadership. While the malcontents were purged from the party, dissension within party ranks continued, culminating in the party's fragmentation and the formation of a number of splinter groups.<sup>52</sup>

Not long after the founding of Socialist Lebanon in 1964, Waddah Charara and Christian Ghazi joined "the Leninist Movement," an opposition current inside the LCP.<sup>53</sup> This movement, Traboulsi recalls, "combined in a strange mix its renovating Italian communist influences critical of Stalinism and a loyalty to Khalid Bikdash's leadership and his continuing tutelage over the LCP. . . . These comrades [Charara and Ghazi] stayed there for a few months and came back disappointed."<sup>54</sup> After their attempt to work from the *inside* of the LCP, the comrades reunited again and began producing their bulletin.<sup>55</sup>

Socialist Lebanon, as we saw earlier, subjected the nationalist military regimes to a leftist critique, showing how their nationalizations failed to bring about a socialist revolution, producing rather a new state bourgeoisie of military officers and bureaucrats. The LCP, whose overall crisis became more acute in the wake of 1967, exacerbating the conflict between a senior pro-Bikdash old guard and a rising new generation of cadres, was subjected to a different strategy. The militant intellectuals' strategy focused on the old pro-Soviet party's *theoretical poverty* and its lack of autonomy.<sup>56</sup> In the first SL editorial, titled "Socialist Lebanon and the Left," they wrote:

The theoretical aspect has to be given an important position that is being avoided by the current Left. Why is it avoiding it? Because it sheds light on its laziness and rashness, and on how it throws itself into the facile. And because it reveals its subscription to predominant ideological precepts which are those of the petite bourgeoisie, such as: reforms are a positive step and one ought to ally oneself with the nationalist wing in power.<sup>57</sup>

This editorial was a reply to early criticisms of the group that accused it of breaking the ranks of the Left and stigmatizing their intellectualism. The theoretically lazy Left dabbled in reformist petit bourgeois precepts, according to SL, which would keep it in a state of dependency. The only solution to rescue the Left from tailing behind nationalists, and to build an *autonomous* Left, was to give theoretical formulation its due, for it is supposed to guide political action. A little more



than a year later, SL criticized the performance of the Front of National and Progressive Political Parties, Forces and Personalities two years after its inception.<sup>58</sup> The two feet on which leftist action stood, for SL, were the national question (anticolonialism and anti-imperialism) and the social question. While the front had succeeded in the first, it failed in the second. The front's national politics

represented a wide current comprised of different sectors that refuse the direct domination of American Imperialism, or the humiliating, overt dependency to a force [the US] protecting Israel. . . . Within these limits the Front's actions were clear, positive and effective. This aspect, however, despite its importance, and while assuring that one ought to hold a solid position vis-à-vis its issues, is nothing but a nationalist position that rests on the refusal of direct domination or its manifestations. Moreover, the social groups that can adhere to such a position are relatively large; and their adherence does not at all lead to a specific social, or political, position regarding the confrontation of imperialist domination hiding in the economic sphere. Some of the groups that refuse to insure American capitals see no fault in drowning the Lebanese market in European commodities and having it suck up a wide share of Lebanese investments. . . .

As soon as social problems emerge that are the result of the organization of Lebanese society and its deep problems, and therefore require a precise analysis and relatively isolated positions, the Front reveals another face, which is characterized by hesitancy, disintegration, and running away, unmasking the true character of this group. And it is clear that the greatest number of problems, and those that touch the most the establishment of a solid leftist action, are related to the second aspect, the social aspect.<sup>59</sup>

In both its critiques of the regimes and of the communists, Socialist Lebanon emphasized the project of auto-emancipation of the people, and of the autonomy of the Left, against the regimes' foreclosure of political practice and the Left parties' dependency on "nationalist forces" such as the Progressive Socialist Party, led by Kamal Jumblatt, the Druze leader and descendant of a political family of landowners. The anxiety the social question produced in the dependent and reformist Lebanese Left, which highlighted the national question and an antisectarian secular politics, will be revealed once more in its excision from the transitional program for reforms the Lebanese National Movement presented at the beginning of the Lebanese civil wars (1975). But for now, SL was fond of repeating that theoretical elaboration was an essential feature for

building an autonomous leftist political practice. “The Theoretical Education Corner,” an irregular rubric in their bulletin, was the ideal place to weave theoretical discussions into the analysis of a present political situation. “The corner” constituted a double intervention: didactic and political. It elucidated theoretical texts through shedding light on a specific political situation and in the process inserted a critical wedge between what it claimed the Marxist corpus truly said and how the LCP understood it—discrediting it.<sup>60</sup> Their theoretical critiques of the Nasserite regime, and the Left, which were inaugurated before the defeat, had a much greater political impact in an altered problem-space characterized by questions revolving around a theoretical renewal in the direction of more “solid” and “scientific” theories than Arab nationalist foggy rhetoric, a rethinking of the modalities of political struggle and the agents that will carry out the task of emancipation—popular war of liberation/Palestinian commando operations or conventional warfare conducted by the armies of Arab regimes. Socialist Lebanon’s leftist critiques resonated with the disaffected Arab nationalists after the “fall of the regimes” who were in the process of severing their ties with Nasser, substituting Marxism-Leninism for their Arab nationalist socialism.<sup>61</sup>

### *State and Revolution*

The second half of President Charles Helou’s mandate (1964–70) witnessed a wave of Lebanese polarization around Arab regional issues. Lebanon, which did not fight in the 1967 war, dived straight into the conflict with the establishment of the Palestinian guerrilla resistance in its southern towns and the inauguration of military operations from its borders.<sup>62</sup> The Palestinian resistance post-1967 became a local player in Lebanese politics, putting on the table again the question of the content of Lebanon’s national identity. In 1958, the question was posed as an alternative between the anticolonial national liberation pan-Arabism of Nasser and the pro-Western (Eisenhower Doctrine) Lebanese nationalism of the state and the majority of Lebanon’s Christian population. After 1967, it revolved around Lebanon’s involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict and specifically whether the country ought to allow the Palestinian resistance to launch operations from its borders.

The masses rallying around the resistance, as witnessed in the tens of thousands marching in the funeral cortège of Khalil al-Jamal, its first Lebanese martyr who fell in Jordan (1968), constituted a moment of hope for the Left. The rallying was read as a sign of the Lebanese masses’ radicalization around national

ideological lines. Their embrace of the Palestinian resistance was an omen of transcending the politics of urban notables, ruling families, and rural landowners that dominated the Lebanese Parliament. There were other signs as well, such as the Lebanese southerners' welcome of the guerrillas' implantation in their villages, which challenged the authority of the landowning political families and the Lebanese army on its southern borders.<sup>63</sup> The 'Arqub area in the south was baptized the "Arafat trail," in comparison with Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh Trail.<sup>64</sup> It also became known as Fatah land.

State and revolution, and their ideological and sectarian constituencies, faced each other and clashed on a number of occasions from 1968 onward. Israel adopted a strategy of destabilization and disproportionate "retaliation" in the wake of Palestinian guerrilla action, exacerbating the country's internal polarization, in what would later be considered as the years leading to the 1975 war.<sup>65</sup> On December 28, 1968, an Israeli military unit destroyed on the ground thirteen Lebanese civilian aircrafts belonging to Middle East Airlines after Palestinian commandos hijacked an Israeli plane to Athens. In the summer preceding the airport raid, "Lebanese villages in the south came under heavy shelling. This led to the widespread destruction not only of homes but of crops and orchards which had served as the principal means of livelihood" for southerners who moved to safer areas in the suburbs of Beirut.<sup>66</sup> The repercussions of the attack on the air fleet exacerbated the polarizations, inaugurating a political crisis and the resignation of the government (January 16, 1969). Rashid Karami, the newly appointed prime minister, called on the Lebanese Parliament to recognize the right of the Palestinians to fight for the liberation of their homeland—a not uncontroversial statement amid the internal polarization.<sup>67</sup> The situation deteriorated on April 23, 1969, when "the army opened fire at a massive demonstration in solidarity with the Palestinian resistance in Saida and Beirut, leaving a number of dead and wounded. The violent reactions to the army's behavior—especially in his home town, Tripoli,—prompted Karami to resign."<sup>68</sup> Syria also became a player in the 1969 crisis. By the end of September, the army attempted to control the situation after a series of confrontations with the Palestinian resistance, as a result of which Syria closed its borders and imposed severe economic sanctions on Lebanon.<sup>69</sup>

On November 8, 1969, the Cairo Agreement was signed between the PLO and the Lebanese army under the auspices of President Nasser, temporarily relieving the tension, with Syria opening its borders, and the formation of a new cabinet on November 26. The agreement, ratified shortly afterward in the Lebanese Parliament, legitimized the resistance's actions on Lebanese territory.<sup>70</sup>

The Cairo Agreement would come to signify the national division on the Palestinian question even though most Lebanese parties accepted it. A solution of last resort, it generated political resentment, which led to clashes between Christian Phalangist militants and the resistance.<sup>71</sup> After 1971, Lebanon became the *only* vital space for the resistance, in the aftermath of its clashes with the Jordanian army (1970–71), resulting in its defeat and the relocation of the PLO's command to Beirut. Around the same time, the Syrian regime also shut its borders to Palestinian guerrilla activity.

Around forty years later, Waddah Charara recalled these times:

[The years] 1968–69 constituted the peak of mythification and religiosity in Socialist Lebanon. We began working [in 1964] with Fawwaz [Traboulsi] and others on the issue of renewal of [Lebanese president] Chehab's mandate. For four or five years we were fishing for syndicates, workers, and student demonstrations as well as tackling problems of the National Front and the LCP. These were our problems.

In 1969, we entered a different epoch. It is important that this different epoch be looked at from its internal side, i.e., how we were seeing it and experiencing it. At this time one was twenty-six or twenty-seven years old, not an old man, but with already ten to twelve years of "militantism," part of them in the French Communist Party, in contact with European Marxism. . . . And then there was this tremendous internal shock, where it was revealed to us, after what was called "the defeat of the regimes," i.e., Nasserism, that *this was our historical chance*.<sup>72</sup>

### *Two Resistances: The Palestinian and the Lebanese*

"The ruling Lebanese interests cannot acknowledge the links that tie its farmhouse, Lebanon, to the region's causes," wrote the anonymous author—Waddah Charara—of "The Two Resistances: The Palestinian and the Lebanese," a central piece from 1969 that captures the height of Socialist Lebanon's activist fervor (Fig. 3.1).<sup>73</sup> The long and scathing article against the Lebanese authorities located the Palestinian resistance as the external revolutionary agent that will detonate the contradictions of the system. "The Lebanese position," wrote Charara, "i.e., the authorities' position, is clear, Lebanon is of the Arab region: its economy and the prosperity of its financiers and merchants rise on the role they play in that region. Lebanon, however, is on the margin of the Arab region when it comes to political problems threatening to destabilize those who rule it" (1). "*The Lebanese entity*," continued SL's major theorist contemptuously, "is



FIGURE 3.1. *Socialist Lebanon*, Issue 16, September 1969.

the fortified haven for the domination of a banking-commercial bourgeoisie that would not have existed if not for the role it plays in the imperialist pillage operation of the Arab region. This is Lebanese independence. And this is the unique position that God under his sun did not create anything like” (2).<sup>74</sup>

The main diagnosis constituted a strong indictment of the Lebanese state’s politics of neutrality in the Arab-Israeli conflict and of the country’s *laissez-faire* capitalist system. It was into this situation—characterized by Lebanese economic integration into, and political isolation from, the Arab world—that the Palestinian resistance made its entrance. It unmasked the real face of the Lebanese regime, for “how can a regime that plays the role of the watchdog of imperialist dependence agitate an entire people for a national battle? And how can the Lebanese system, which survives on the remains of imperial interests, go through this battle that will put its banks, agents, and summer resorts in danger?” (5).

At the heart of this theorization is a view of the Lebanese sectarian political system as devised by French imperialism. This system is what preempts the elaboration of a class-interest driven political practice. Charara writes:

The sectarian formation, which was made the geographic and political basis of Lebanon, is able to stifle every form of political maturity that carries the masses to fuse with the Arab region’s battle against imperialism. This is not only because it puts every political discord to the test of civil war, but because it stifles every disagreement by annulling its true political aspect—a conflict of interests within the framework of power—by making it subservient to the sectarian conflict that conceals and fragments the issues pertaining to power. This makes political opposition, whether it wants to or not, acquire a sectarian dimension. In this situation, there is no “national” party that “covers” the Lebanese territory and no Lebanese ideology and no Lebanese history. (2)

The homogenizing force of capitalist expansion, which is supposed to drown the ecstasies of religious fervor and of chivalrous enthusiasm in the icy water of egotistical calculation, stopped at the gate of Lebanon’s sectarian political fort.<sup>75</sup> “Sectarian and regional distinctions,” SL writes, “bring to the attribute of the ‘citizen’ . . . other attributes that dominate it: the Sunni from Beirut, the Maronite from the Mountain, the Shi’i from the South or Baalbeck”(2–3). The coming into being of the abstract Lebanese citizen that would follow an interest-based politics was prevented by the political system that produced a “hybrid citizen; organized political practice stops at his door without being able to pass its threshold” (3). In brief, the commensurability and political

equality between abstract citizens that is supposed to come into being with the generalization of exchange in a capitalist mode of production is thwarted by a political system assembled by imperial interests.

The effect of the presence of the Palestinian resistance in Lebanon was not merely quantitative, that is, not just another item on the agenda of the Lebanese Left. Rather, it is the anti-imperialist detonator that is working toward overcoming the imperial legacy of disjunction between capitalist economic integration and sectarian political isolation. “The public that fought the battle in 1958,” wrote Socialist Lebanon in the second article of the same issue,

fought it with loyalty to the feudal lords, [and] a sectarian, familial, local loyalty that was enhanced by their representing a Nasserite, Arabist tendency. While the [current] rallying around the Palestinian Resistance rises on the remains of that loyalty.

The event in itself carries a potential that allows, and this has been proven, the breaking of traditional sectarian loyalties, transforming them into national loyalties, that will fragment the base of the sectarian right whatever the sect it belongs to. Does the fact that the main transformation is happening among Muslims lessen its value? Not at all. The sectarian knot is not solved in one go, and if the entry point to its dissolution is revealing the conflict [i.e., its political nature] on the Muslim level the next level would certainly reveal its true nature when the Muslim Right finds its natural ally in the Christian Right.<sup>76</sup>

In the large demonstrations in support of the Palestinians on April 23, 1969, during which the Lebanese army opened fire, killing and wounding a number of protestors, it became clear that Muslim public opinion had turned, embracing the resistance and insulting traditional political leaders (Abdallah el-Yafi and Adnan al-Hakim) and the grand mufti of Lebanon, Hassan Khaled. The Palestinian agent, which acted as a solvent of sectarian loyalties, contributing to rearticulating politics along national lines, was enhanced by a second factor:

The conflict does not take place on the closed internal level. The factor that is detonating it is not “Lebanese.” . . . It is far more reaching, and it shall extract the conflict from its “Lebaneseness”—i.e., from its specificity, and hence its sectarian nature—to posit it on the level of the whole region. And therefore the poles of the ruling alliances can no longer contain it within the sectarian frame because it reveals their common positions despite their different sects. And this position is not only in contradiction with the continuity of Palestinian Resistance in Lebanon but also with

the rest of the Arab people (qua people) on which the Lebanese bourgeoisie relies to assure its continuity by living off them and cashing commissions on their account.<sup>77</sup> (16)

The revolution would neutralize the bourgeoisie's sectarian tricks and defenses, revealing that the heart of its politics is "interest based and political and can no longer veil itself with sectarianism (7)." Revolutionizing the Lebanese polity and the solidarity with the Palestinian resistance were not envisaged as a bloodless undertaking. Yet the impact of the revolution, SL predicted, would transform the clashes "from a sectarian conflict into a civil war" (17). "If democratic national rule cannot be reached without a civil war," they wrote, "the 'real coordination' with *fida'yi* action cannot [also] take place without exposing the southern region to an Israeli invasion" (17). Socialist Lebanon's, and Charara's, 1969 prognosis was right in predicting the coming conflict and wrong in predicting its nature. Six years later, a civil war erupted, splitting the country along sectarian lines. Israel invaded in 1978 and pushed the PLO and leftist militants away from the borders.

The fall of 1969 was a long way from the theoretical and ideological skirmishes of the mid-1960s between Socialist Lebanon and the Lebanese Communist Party on the proper understanding of the Marxist canon and its diverse political translations. In the years leading to the civil war, the revolution altered the Lebanese political landscape and the Left's role in it. A year later, in 1970, Socialist Lebanon would fuse with the much larger Organization of Lebanese Socialists, establishing a unified organization that became known as the Marxist-Leninist Organization of Communist Action in Lebanon (OCAL).<sup>78</sup> The years leading to the civil war witnessed a number of splits from the young OCAL, which played a pivotal role in the Lebanese National Movement when the fighting broke out in the spring of 1975.

Sitting in his office in *al-Safir* daily in July 2008, Abbas Beydoun reminisces about the beginnings of the collaboration in 1969 between the Organization of Lebanese Socialists (OLS), which he belonged to, and Socialist Lebanon, before their union. Around this time, "I founded a Lebanese [rubric] in *al-Hurriyya*, which did not exist earlier. I wrote it through an understanding and alliance with Socialist Lebanon, and predominantly with Waddah, with whom we had a developed relationship."<sup>79</sup> And around the same time, he adds,

I wrote a theoretical text that is similar, parallel, to a Socialist Lebanon text called "The Two Resistances," mine was called a look at the Palestinian resistance and the Lebanese reality, something of that sort. The theorization was the same. They were both based on a frightening idea: it was



the theorization of the civil war. [It ran along the lines] that this was a prosperous country, which can't generate a revolution for a number of reasons . . . because it has benefited from Arab defeats and it has a certain level of economic leisure, etc. . . . No true revolution was possible here unless it comes from the outside.<sup>80</sup>

In a similar vein, Muhsin Ibrahim, who was at the head of the OLS, dubbed the Palestinian resistance the lever that will lift the Arab national liberation movement.<sup>81</sup> On the fortieth day commemorating the assassination of George Hawi, the former secretary general of the LCP, which took place in Beirut on June 21, 2005, Muhsin Ibrahim issued an auto-critique of the Lebanese National Movement's involvement in the 1975 war, which centered on two major points, or faults as he called them. The first consisted in Ibrahim's acknowledgment that in supporting the Palestinian struggle, the Left went too far in burdening Lebanon with the military weight of the Palestinian cause. And the second was that the Left "deemed it easy to board the civil war's ship, under the illusion of cutting short the road to democratic change."<sup>82</sup> A major figure of Socialist Lebanon commented on Ibrahim's auto-critique. Ibrahim, he said, uses the same idea found in "Two Resistances," but flips its valence. In the late 1960s the resistance was the detonator, the lever, the catalyst that in alliance with the Left would explode the system. In 2005, Ibrahim, the major political leader of the Lebanese New Left, observed that the Left went over the top by overburdening the country with its support of Palestinian militancy.

### *1967's Historiography Redux*

To get a sense of how SL's revolutionary high hopes, carried by the tidal waves of the Palestinian revolution, were framed in the scholarship of the time before 1967, which came to be read as symptomatic of the bifurcation of critique from ideology, let's revisit Anouar Abdel Malak's introduction to his edited volume *Contemporary Arab Political Thought*, originally published in French in 1970.

Everything accentuated despair. . . . And then, from the heart of the night, there came a gleam of hope. The people of the tents, the anonymous men and women, children and old people of Palestine embarked upon the only valid course open to a nation stripped of its homeland and faced with that ethnic, cultural and political racism which lies at the core of all imperialism. The people of Palestine endowed themselves with resistance

organizations charged with the co-ordination, definition, and pursuit of a campaign of armed national liberation.<sup>83</sup>

The coming into being of the New Left and the Palestinian resistance, and the revolutionary hope they generated in the wake of 1967, gets excised from the smooth narratives that associate 1967 with the end of Arab modernity, or the hinge moment between nationalism and Islamism, when ideology bifurcated from critique. Even if one discounts the covert critical work of revolutionary organizations like Socialist Lebanon, a number of the critical public intellectuals at the time were either militants, like Yasin al-Hafiz, or fellow travelers of Marxist and Palestinian political parties. In the wake of the defeat, al-Azm joined the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and had a brief political experience. The vital need for critique was not detached from a political engagement for Palestinian emancipation and a subscription to thick ideological traditions such as Marxism, but in a lot of cases was wedded to them. In fact, Samir Kassir compared the defeat of 1967, which acted as a catalyst to leftist thought and practice, to the cultural desolation in the aftermath of the 1982 Israeli invasion. He rereads the same history through the hegemonic religious/secular binary of his present. Post-1967 is split into two: 1967–1982 corresponds to the efflorescence of socialist and secular thought generally, while the rise of religious politics takes over after 1982, which Kassir dubs the endpoint of the Arab Nahda.<sup>84</sup>

The historiography around the 1967 defeat is a magnet for the deployment of the mythological language of Nahda (Renaissance) and Nakba (Catastrophe)—Arab impotence, stagnation, and defeat, which bestows meaning and provides a certain frame of reference to understand the event but not necessarily to diagnose it. Different authors dubbed the military defeat a second Nakba and the endpoint of the second Nahda.<sup>85</sup> “The June 1967 war was the most serious event in modern Arab history,” wrote Faysal Darraj, the Palestinian literary critic, in 1989:<sup>86</sup> “Israel’s establishment was an expression of the defeat of the Palestinian people and the impotence of the Arab regimes in a certain historical period when they were dependent on colonial forces. But the June defeat was an expression of the defeat of the Arab revolution as a whole.”<sup>87</sup> Other thinkers posited 1967 as the second event, in the wake of colonization, that led to a collective Arab neurosis. “It is important to understand well the two historical stages of what I call the neurosis of the Arab world,” Georges Tarabishi writes:

First, there was colonization, the shock with the West constituted by the arrival and victory of Napoleonic troops that shook the Arab street for

the first time. Later, the encounter with Israel, and the totally unexpected defeat of 1967, led to a second collective neurosis. The Arab world, the Arab street, were completely undone and the culture became entirely Salafi.<sup>88</sup>

In a more recent text, Darraj underscores that 1967 “resumed in different circumstances the defeat of Muhammad Ali Pasha in the nineteenth century.”<sup>89</sup> The year 1967 is taken as a singular event, a turning point on all levels, but also a contemporary expression of a deeper structure of defeat that has been plaguing the Arab world since the Napoleonic invasions. Structure and event are both present in the historiography of 1967, which is simultaneously the most serious event in modern Arab history and a resumption of Muhammad Ali’s defeat. What this mythological language forecloses is alternative historical and social scientific inquiries that diagnose and attempt to articulate the past’s relationship to the present.

A similar evacuation of history takes place in the work of postcolonial scholars who criticize Arab modernist thought from the Nahda to the present for being trapped in a colonial epistemology of progress. The secular modernist intellectual and the postcolonial academic are both trapped within the progress/backwardness (defeat) binary. If the former laments the backwardness of the Arab social structure and its production of a successive string of defeats, the later laments the attachment of the former to ideologies of progress and civilization and their critique of backwardness:

Sadik al-Azm criticized, in his book *Self-Criticism after the Defeat*, the Arab social structure, which is invariable in its defeats: for it was defeated in the Ottoman period, and it was defeated in the period preceding independence, and it was defeated even more in the period of “independence states.”<sup>90</sup>

...

The proper question is the following: What makes Arab intellectuals, from Najib Azuri to Taha Hussein, and from Constantine Zurayk to Yasin al-Hafiz and from Mahdi Amil to Fawzi Mansour and Saadallah Wannous, confront a society that firmly combines defeat and backwardness?<sup>91</sup>

The critic of epistemology, on the other hand, puts some of the same names together to show how these intellectuals share colonial epistemological assumptions with US discourses about the backwardness of their own societies:

In reality, post-1967 Arab intellectuals quite visibly have struggled with the “failure,” of their own societies and states, often implicitly agreeing

with the developmental discourse found in the assessments of *Bootstrap* [a 1953 United Nations Jordan valley development project pamphlet]. The editorial in English-language dailies such as the *Daily Star*, *Kuwait Times*, *Arab News*, or, *al-Ahram Weekly*, written by mainstream indigenous intellectuals, analysts, journalists, and activists, confirm such an observation. In fact, the discomfiting verisimilitude between Arab and American criticism reveals the double colonizing move performed by the very epistemology that will be under examination in this book. Like in *Bootstrap*, intellectuals from Constantine Zurayk, Sadiq Jalal al-Azm, and Nadim Bitar to Hisham Sharabi and Hazim Saghiyah might agree that the disempowerment of the Arabs cannot be separated from their cultural and political illiteracy.<sup>92</sup>

To recapitulate, I excavated in this chapter a minoritarian tradition of critical diagnostic Arab thought that focused on actually existing relations of power. Socialist Lebanon's heterodox Marxism, revolving outside the Soviet orbit, examined the ideologies, logics, and practices of rule of the progressive regimes. The history of this minoritarian tradition calls into question the historiographical molds that take June 1967 as their sole anchor. The diagnostic thought that Socialist Lebanon produced provides us with an alternative conceptual universe from the prevalent ideological jargon of "remedies" and "deficits," and the mythological one of collective neurosis, a multiplicity of catastrophes (Nakba) and endpoints of successive Renaissances (Nahda). Having said that, Socialist Lebanon did not only produce a critical diagnosis of the regimes in power. In the aftermath of the 1967 defeat, the critical and theoretical work they were producing gained in ideological power. It interpellated the Arab nationalists who were increasingly steering toward Marxism as Palestinian armed struggle took over the mantle of anti-imperialist confrontation from the discredited "progressive regimes." With the formation of the Organization for Communist Action in Lebanon (1970), SL's militant intellectuals were catapulted into a different modality of political practice at a time when the resistance was increasingly becoming a key player in the tense years leading to the outbreak of the civil and regional wars.

Historiographical accounts, which anchor the bifurcation of Arab thought into holistic doctrines and reflexive critiques in 1967, skip the revolutionary high tides that directly followed the defeat. These high tides conjugated—not always easily, as we will soon see—the thick Marxist ideologies that hailed the Palestinian *fida'yi* as the new revolutionary subject with a commitment to critique. The bifurcation, I suggested, is better read as a product of the conjuncture produced

in the wake of the Lebanese wars (1975–90), the Islamic revival and the Iranian Revolution (1979), and the defeat of the Palestinian revolution (1982). That is when the mediation between revolutionary theory and political practice was finally severed. The much-coveted revolutionary subject was either mired in the webs of communal solidarities, converted into a militant Islamist universe, or defeated. No one was left to carry out the project of emancipation. Critique was all that was left on the table. History, it seemed, had exited its own stage.