PART II. TIMES OF THE SOCIO-CULTURAL

The war was a total social fact as much as it was
a political one, and may be more so.
—WADDAH CHARARA

The passage to Islam was a putting
into practice of Maoist principles.
I went into Islam, like some go to the factory.
But here in Lebanon, no one goes to the factory.
There are no factories, or so few of them.
—ROGER ASSAF

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4. PARADOXES OF EMANCIPATION

Revolution and Power in Light of Mao

Organization is the form of mediation between theory and practice.
—GEORG LUKÁCS

There are two ways of making investigations,
one is to look at flowers on horseback
and the other is to get off your horse and look at them.
—MAO TSE-TUNG

The turn to Marxist theory and practice came in the wake of a political failure—the scission of Syria from the United Arab Republic (1961)—and a military defeat (1967). Marxism constituted a powerful critique of both Arab nationalist ideology and the practice of the "progressive" regimes. It was the tool that enabled disenchanted Arab nationalist militants to turn their critical gaze inward to dissect both their society's class composition and the modus operandi of the regimes. Moreover, Marxism worked. The successes of the Chinese, Cuban, and Vietnamese Revolutions fueled the hopes of the militants who joined the Palestinian Resistance or oscillated in its orbit. Socialist Lebanon was critical in theory of communist stages of development, modernization theories, and the top-down development projects of the national liberation regimes. Having said that, their theoretical virtuosity, which led to their political visibility and merger with the Organization of Lebanese Socialists, reinscribed in practice a vanguardist pedagogical mode of politics.[1] They brought the gift of theory to the much more numerous and veteran militant Lebanese branch of the Arab Nationalist Movement. The Organization of Communist Action in Lebanon (1970–) would be plagued by splits and expulsions from the beginning. The party members could not agree on internal organizational questions and on external ones concerning the modalities of political practice they ought to engage in. Questions of autonomy and discipline as well as what constitutes political practice, where it should take place, with whom, to what end,

and in whose name shook the young organization from the start. The union brought together militants with different organizational legacies, theoretical genealogies, styles of political practice, and sensibilities toward party discipline and hierarchy who clashed along these lines. The early splits from the OCAL (1971–73) turned the critical gaze inward for a second time, this time to subject Marxist theory and politics to an auto-critique. In this chapter, and the next, I move from the reconstruction of a collective project of emancipation (SL and OCAL), in which Charara played a significant part, to the in-depth examination of his own militant trajectory and critical work.

A couple of years after the foundation of the OCAL, at the height of the social, political, and military polarization that preceded the outbreak of the fighting, Charara subjected the three main components—organization, theory, and political practice—of the revolutionary machine to critique. The people were still, for the time being, the revolutionary subject of History, but they too showed increasing complications. This critique was formulated in a translated and transfigured Maoist idiom when Mao Tse-Tung's thought was, in the wake of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, at the apex of its global influence. The Maoist critique of the party, theory, and practice rearticulated the meanings of power and emancipation as it addressed the political and epistemic dimensions of the question of representation. The vicissitudes of political practice opened up questions that bear a family resemblance to those that would later be taken theoretically in the academy by the labors of critique grouped under the umbrella of postcolonial studies. For now, questions of power, emancipation, and representation were articulated from militant grounds as an auto-critique and a political critique of the OCAL. Charara's Maoist episode put forth a "postcolonial" Marxism that attempted to conjugate the salience of communal solidarities—sectarian, regional, and kin—with class struggle and the possibility of revolutionary militant political practice.

The reflexive, auto-critical dimension and its prescient postcolonial tenor reveal once more a minor tradition of contemporary Arab thought that was forged by militant theorists whose distinctive interventions stand outside the canonized figures and thematics of contemporary Arab thought. The character of the Maoist auto-critique, while highlighting the resilience of communal solidarities, escapes the culturalism of figures like Sadik al-Azm. Moreover, this minor Marxist tradition, which sought to incorporate communal relations into class struggle, was not interested in restricting its intervention to criticizing Marxism for its Eurocentric discourses. It did that, but it was more invested in attempting to forge a theoretical idiom that enables the pursuit of militancy in the wake of realizing the saliency of communal contradictions internal to

the masses that complicate revolutionary practice. Retrospectively, Charara's Maoist interlude constitutes the first episode of a very early unraveling of leftist political practice as it stumbles upon both the top-down modalities of practice of leftist parties and the recalcitrance and reproduction of communal relations. Charara's militant experiences, particularly his observation of the failure of the worker and teacher-student movements at the time, as well as his dissertation research on modern Arab intellectual thought, revealed to him the complexity of Arab histories and the multiple solidarities at work in Arab societies in comparison to the poverty of theoretical languages that attempt to subsume them by a few concepts. Maoism was the theoretical idiom through which he articulated his early disenchantment with the belief in the political powers of theory and accounted for the multiple logics, temporalities, and solidarities at work in Lebanese society that foreclose the possibility of a revolutionary teleology while retaining the militant's hope in emancipatory political practice.

The Workers' Sector and the Blue Pamphlet Splits

Soon after the unification between the Organization of Lebanese Socialists and Socialist Lebanon, and after adopting a loose organizational structure for a short while, the nascent organization shifted to a Marxist-Leninist form: democratic centralism.[2] In 1971 a major scission—that of the workers' sector—shook the OCAL. The split took with it a substantial number of militant intellectuals who came from Socialist Lebanon who were ill at ease with the strictures of organizational forms associated with official pro-Soviet communist parties. "What was left was an organization whose true effective body was constituted by the Organization of Lebanese Socialists," recalls Abbas Beydoun, a member of the Politburo at the time. Moreover, those who left, Beydoun adds, were "of the same weight as Waddah [Charara], Ahmad [Beydoun], Fawwaz [Traboulsi], and Muhsin [Ibrahim]; you are not talking about us, who were the 'little ones' of the Politburo."[3] The adoption of democratic centralism soon erupted in disputes over decision-making and prerogatives. "The first dispute," wrote Traboulsi, who was a proponent of democratic centralism,

> took place between the rapporteur of the "Workers Sector," a member of the Politburo, and the committee responsible for the sector mostly composed of the intellectual cadres of Socialist Lebanon. It revolved around their mutual prerogatives: Is the committee's power superior to that of the rapporteur or vice-versa? The Politburo settled the matter by supporting the rapporteur as a representative of the higher committee

[the Politburo] over the lower one. And after going back and forth it was decided that either the Workers Sector committee abides by the Politburo's decision or be subject to an organizational sentence. The committee unanimously refused to follow the Politburo's decision, which then issued a resolution to freeze the membership of its constituents.[4]

What exacerbated matters was the fact that the Politburo member, an OLS member initially and more of an "on the ground militant," did not come from the same theoretically imbued context as SL's militant intellectuals. Enmeshed in the organizational dispute, and highlighted through it, were the heterogeneity of the two recently unified groups: the democratic heritage and very loose organizational structure of militant intellectuals and the "disciplined traditions" of the Organization of Lebanese Socialists, "which were inherited from the Arab Nationalist Movement."[5] The split brought out the question of the place theoretical abilities ought to play in assuming leadership positions. In a thick ideological political practice such as Marxism—where theoretical virtuosity endows its bearer with political authority—it was difficult for intellectual cadres to bow down to the decisions not only of a politburo member but also of one who wasn't perceived to be of the same theoretical caliber. This was especially the case since it seemed "as if there was a promise to hand over the unified organization to the cadres of Socialist Lebanon to educate it since they were accomplished and superior in this domain."[6] This first split was followed up with a great amount of labor around the four corners of Lebanon to recuperate the OCAL's energy in its wake.[7]

The split of the majority of Socialist Lebanon's constituency a short time after the fusion left its marks on Charara: "They went out in the spring-summer of 1971 and I traveled right after. My travels were partially motivated by this."[8] A fellow member of the Politburo recalls the surprise provoked by Charara's decision to leave directly after the split to pursue a PhD in France, despite the fact that he was at the forefront of upholding the Politburo directives against the worker's sector: "I don't know what was the reason behind it. No one told him no. Although this thing was very 'frappant' [striking], not only surprising. . . . Waddah was not one of those people you say to, what are you going to do. So he went."[9] "He came back a very different person," the comrade adds, "adopting things similar [to the positions of the] Gauche Prolétarienne against democratic centralism, and with a position exactly opposed to the one that led to the organizational crisis."[10] Charara finished his dissertation, entitled "Le Discours Arabe sur L'Histoire" (The Arab discourse on history), in 1972, came back, and headed an opposition movement inside the organization that

would split in 1973, two years before the beginning of the Lebanese civil war. After a number of meetings with the dissenting comrades, Charara formulated the opposition's political, organizational, and theoretical positions in a lengthy document (ninety-six pages), which came to be known as *al-Kirras al-Azraq* [*The Blue Pamphlet*,] that declared the group's independence from the OCAL. *Al-Hurriyya*, the weekly political magazine and mouthpiece of the OCAL at the time, published a four-page article on July 16, 1973, entitled "A Communiqué from the Politburo of the OCAL Announcing the Expulsion of the Boyish Leftist Band of Apostates [*al-Murtadda*] of Marxism-Leninism."[11] The dissenting group, which called for direct action among the masses and not through institutions, such as syndicates or Marxist-Leninist parties, and for "fusion [*iltiham*] with the Palestinian Resistance,"[12] did not survive long after the split and its members went in different directions. Some comrades adhered to the Lebanese Communist Party, some joined Fatah, while others went home.[13] The scattering of a substantive number of OCAL dissenters between different factions of the Palestinian resistance and the Lebanese Communist Party can be understood in light of Traboulsi's retrospective assessment: "While the first split [of the Workers Sector] brought up issues pertaining to organizational structure, and the second [*The Blue Pamphlet*] focused on the modes of militancy, they were also, and especially, bringing out the question of the raison of d'être of the organization in comparison to two references: pan-Arab [*qawmi*] and leftist, i.e., in reference to the Palestinian resistance and to the Lebanese Communist Party."[14]

Some of the dissenters, he added, "deemed that the Lebanese situation does not warrant an additional new communist organization to the left of the Communist Party, so they directly adhered to the Palestinian resistance."[15] Others "realized the weight and popularity of the Communist Party and its importance in the life of the working class,"[16] therefore canceling the justification for the OCAL's existence. The two stronger forces eroded the national and socioeconomic feet on which the OCAL stood.

The prewar years were not exclusively marked by the polarization around the Palestinian resistance. They were also years of mobilizations around socioeconomic questions in the privileged sectors of leftist militancy: peasants, workers, and students.[17] November 1972 witnessed the strike of Ghandour's biscuits and chocolate factory workers. The twelve-hundred-strong workforce at Ghandour's, the largest nonunionized force in Lebanese industry, Traboulsi relates, demanded "a wage increase, equal pay for men and women workers, the recognition of the shop floor committee, and their right to trade union organization" (167). Police opened fire at the workers' demonstration, killing

"Yusuf al-'Attar, a militant of the OCA's Workers' Committees, and Fatima al-Khawaja, a member of the LCP, and wounding 14 others" (168).[18] Approximately a month after the demonstration, Ghandour fired all his workers. He later opened shop again, reemploying all of them except for a hundred whom he considered to be at the head of the protest. "The outcome of the Ghandour battle," Traboulsi, the historian, writes, "left only frustration and resentment. The trade union attaché at the US embassy noted that the demonstration and the general strike had been a 'moderate success' for the Left, which had managed to go on the offensive and win the 'propaganda war.' However, he concluded that neither the Left nor the trade unions had secured any gains for the workers" (168). The Ghandour strike was followed by the strikes of tobacco farmers in the south and a number of strikes in the educational sector, notably by public school teachers, which included violence between the state apparatus and the protesters, in what would prove to be the last months of a struggle conceived along the lines of an *opposition* to the state before the outbreak of the fifteen-year-long civil and regional wars. The year 1972 saw the strike of sixteen thousand public school teachers, "demanding a wage increase, the right of trade union organization and retirement after twenty-five years of service" (170). The strike lasted two months, and ended when the government stopped paying their salaries. It picked up again from January to July 1973. While 324 teachers lost their jobs, the network of solidarity with the teachers covered all of Lebanon, as "their sit-ins and hunger strikes became a rallying point for all social movements" (170). In January 1973, "a procession of thousands of tobacco planters occupied the offices of the Régie in Nabatiyeh, demanding a 20 percent increase in the purchase price of their products. The following day, the army shot at the demonstrators and killed two peasants" (166).[19]

Waddah Charara wrote *The Blue Pamphlet* in the spring of 1973, in the wake of all of these events, weaving a reexamination of what was called for on the theoretical, political, and organizational levels, the causes for failure as well as the direction for future political action (Fig. 4.1). Charara observed these mobilizations closely. At times, he took a more active part in them, such as attending the public meetings held by the striking Ghandour workers, until he was forbidden by the OCAL to do so.[20] "Why weren't the largest demands-based mass movements," he wrote, that represent "the interests of the main popular classes able to snatch one partial benefit from the authorities? Why could the authorities resort to violent oppression without falling apart, or at least leading to a change in the government?"[21] Two years before his exit from Marxism, Charara engaged in an auto-critique from within the boundaries of

المجموعة المنشقة عن « منظمة العمل الشيوعي »

توضح وجهة نظرها

● منظمة العمـل الشيوعي تنتهي الـى خط
تحريفـي ، قطـري ، اصلاحي ٠

● الخـط الديمقراطي والمسألة الوطنية ٠

● في سبيل خط وطنـيﹰجماهيري ٠

FIGURE 4.1. Front cover of *The Blue Pamphlet*.

the tradition, repositioning himself in an ultraleftist, fervently pro-Palestinian Maoist position.[22]

The Twilight of the Organizational Idol

In the wake of the 1967 Arab defeat against Israel, and the ensuing reexamination of the causes leading to the defeat of the Arab armies by political parties and intellectuals, the Arab Nationalist Movement previously gravitating in Nasser's orbit proposed resorting to popular armed struggle to fight imperialism in Arab lands. Socialist Lebanon participated in the argument regarding the direction of the Arab liberation movement. After emphasizing that for Marxists the question ought not to rest on the principle of violent confrontation but rather on the suitability of this form of struggle for the present, Socialist Lebanon reached the following conclusion:

> We asked a question about the meaning of proposing the slogan of armed struggle in the current period. Now is the time to answer that what is meant by it is the deferral of the primary task of Arab struggle: the building of Marxist-Leninist parties, which history has not devised any alternative to, for leading the liberation of oppressed masses to victory![23]

Socialist Lebanon, which was still loosely organized, distinguished itself from the calls for "armed popular struggle" positing the Marxist-Leninist party as the sole agent of emancipation of the masses. Three years after the small group of intellectuals merged with the Organization of Lebanese Socialists, the opposition inside OCAL came to perceive organizational practices as a means of oppression. The organization's leadership, Charara wrote, "sees in every act of political accountability a risk with uncertain consequences. And this has been consolidated after the 1971 split: since the leadership has seen it a result of some comrades' desire to discuss with no limits!" (*The Blue Pamphlet*, hereafter cited as *TBP*, 4). In this veiled auto-critique Charara accused the leadership of evading the discussion of important political events such as Anwar al-Sadat's decision to expel all Soviet experts from Egypt, the issues of contention in the Syrian Communist Party, and the Ghandour workers' strike.[24] Additionally, the splinter group accused the Politburo of "suspending the internal regulations, interfering in the details of organizational issues, establishing special relations with specific members, in addition to using arguments of safety, security, and secrecy for no valid reasons." "In one word," Charara summarizes, "the organizational relationships have become a means of authoritarianism, abuse, and isolation" (*TBP*, 6).

Charara and his comrades reproached the OCAL's leadership not only for their internal authoritarianism but also for adopting a certain form of political action that went hand in hand with the organizational dimensions of the crisis. The organization, whose primary objective was to lay the foundations of the working class's leadership for emancipation, had reduced its struggle, according to the splinter group, to a politics "from above." The OCAL's contribution in the "Rally of National Parties and Forces" had begun to monopolize all of the organization's political activity.[25] The leadership began to increasingly think that "the only 'struggle' is the one that takes place in meetings of leaders and 'generals' while the main work which takes place in the midst of the masses diminishes" (TBP, 15). "The disdain for mass struggle" produced internal repercussions as well, since the leadership started to think that it is the organization and "what it sees is correct," forgoing discussion, political confrontation, and "the rules of organizational relations that permit the comrades to present their views and differ from those of the leadership" (TBP, 15). In the summer of 2008, Charara remembered the state of the OCAL when he returned from France:

> When I came back I didn't have any idea of what had happened to our work, to the organization. I came back and found out that Muhsin Ibrahim had made a "bande à part" [separated himself] in a complete way, with a personal link to Arafat and Kamal Jumblatt. And what is called the organization is practically living off this relationship, to which it had no link, and over which it had no control. No one knew what was said, what was happening, and all the attempts to move the OCAL from its student base to popular, workers, rural bases were either stopped, or no longer had any political echo.[26]

Charara's substitionist critique underscored that the organization had been reduced to its leadership, while mass struggle and militancy had been reduced to private meetings with the "generals" of progressive political parties.[27]

The telos of the organization's practices had long forsaken emancipation. This form of politics from above was driven by the increase in the organization's institutional share of power. "When the organization reaches syndicate positions," Charara wrote, "its pretense of democracy ends, and it begins fearing the students' interference in issues that concern them" (TBP, 34). Moreover, these political strategies of reaching power, which begin by alienating and fearing those the party seeks to represent, are refracted internally by an increasing stratification of relationships. "Members of cells are not supposed to distribute communiqués," Charara writes, "a task that is delegated to the 'lightweights,' as

someone describes the members of assemblies and circles" (*TBP*, 33). This political practice, which was predicated

> on reaching power—externally—and on an increasing importance of ranks and relations of power internally, renders the talk about the point of view of the working class, the popular masses, and the national battle empty. And it enables, behind the mask of Marxist jargon, a petite bourgeoisie whose horizon of ambition is constituted by the state apparatus to move forward; a bourgeoisie that glorifies in talk workers and peasants while it does its best [in practice] to retain the differences between itself and them. (*TBP*, 35)

Charara's harsh critique underscored how particular—petit bourgeois—interests had occupied the party, turning Marxism into an ideology that is deployed to serve its own interests. In doing so, it reproduced in practice the relations of power it claims to eradicate in theory. It is not hard to see a continuity between Charara's critique of the OCAL and Socialist Lebanon's earlier critique of the "military-administrative-bureaucratic" regimes during the mid-1960s as apparatuses of power that foreclose the masses' political practice while speaking in their name.

The question of autonomy, of taking part in putting together a movement of auto-emancipation, that is neither dependent on nor subjugated to parties outside of it, whether they are state bureaucracies, nationalist parties, or sectarian formations, has been at the heart of Charara's thought since the 1960s. Decades later, he drew a retrospective distinction between Socialist Lebanon's critical theoretical labor and its political practice: "We didn't have a problem with the critical aspect of things. . . . Tracking inconsistencies, contradictions, ignorance, and deviations from Marxism and Leninism. This was work we had fun doing." Having said that, the political task of building "an autonomous sociopolitical force," Charara continued, "proved to be an astronomical task, particularly that the work was being done by thirty to forty people maximum including about ten of them in cells, and the rest were students, and some were teachers."[28] The expansion of the small and loose group of militant intellectuals into a wider organization in the turbulent years leading to war witnessed the fall of the "organizational" idol, once theoretically assumed to constitute the transparent vector of people's emancipation. It became the vector of a "petite bourgeoisie" in its bid for power with the other constituents of Lebanese society rendering Marxist ideological positions its Trojan horse.

Today, in the wake of the defeat and sclerosis of Arab leftist parties, it is not difficult to be swayed by *The Blue Pamphlet*'s prescient critique of instrumental

and top-down politics and leadership unaccountability, which turned progressive parties into the means of production of new elites. Muhsin Ibrahim remains till today the secretary-general of the practically nonexistent OCAL, nearly fifty years after it came into being. Having said that, if one brackets the seductive reading of the 1970s from the present perspective of a Left in ruins, we get a more nuanced picture of the conditions of possibility of political action in a particular conjuncture. These very tense pre–civil war years, whether on the Palestinian front or on the socioeconomic one, and the mobilizations that ensued polarized the Lebanese polity. Fawwaz Traboulsi, one of the very few SL militants who did not leave the OCAL in the early years after the union, and stayed on as the number two in command after Muhsin Ibrahim till the mid-1980s, recalled the beginnings of their emergence on the "official" national political field. "The battle of Ghandour [fall 1972] opened up a new period in the life of the organization," wrote Traboulsi, "during which we had to cooperate with the other leftist parties in a mobilization that took larger dimensions than the [usual] factory ones and which surpassed our capacities to carry it by ourselves."[29] "As a result," he continued, "our relationship to Kamal Jumblatt and the LCP improved after a period of boycott, estrangement and mutual accusations that reached the extent of student fights between us and the latter, which were not devoid of violence" (*PYMR*, 134). It was in this context that the OCAL emerged on the national political scene when it was invited to the meeting held by the Rally of National and Progressive Parties—the precursor of the Lebanese National Movement—to protest the severe draft law limiting the freedoms of political parties.

Traboulsi gestured in his memoir to his ambivalence during this hinge moment (1973): "We entered the Left's front [the Rally of National and Progressive Parties] from the door of our militancy at the level of the base. But, is there a possibility of reconciling base-militancy and participation in action 'from above' and public political life?" "This was the question," Traboulsi recalled, "that would trouble us, or rather trouble me personally, and characterize my positions and behavior with much wobbling and hesitancy" (*PYMR*, 135). Muhsin Ibrahim, the veteran of official Nasserite politics, on the other hand, called for the "political fructification" of theoretical analysis.[30] Ibrahim is less concerned with questions regarding the modalities of political practice and its autonomy that troubled Charara and Traboulsi, Socialist Lebanon's founding dynamos, and divided them on the cusp of the war. Rather, Ibrahim's position is articulated as double avoidance: of the endless discussions of intellectuals (theory without a practice), on the one hand, and political opportunism (practice without theory), on the other hand. With the beginning of the Lebanese

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civil war, Muhsin Ibrahim became, alongside Kamal Jumblatt and George Hawi (the assistant to the secretary general of the LCP), one of the main leaders of the Lebanese National Movement, the coalition of leftist and pan-Arab parties that were allied with the Palestinian Resistance.

Power and Emancipation along Maoist Lines

As Marxist political parties became—alongside the bourgeoisie and imperialism—the targets of critique from within the tradition, the meaning of emancipation and power were also rethought. The nodal shift in the rethinking of emancipation and power according to Maoist lines was related to the crisis in political and epistemic representation. If the Marxist-Leninist political party was no longer the representative of the working classes, its reaching power no longer constituted a revolution; it was merely a substitution of one ruling class by another, retaining the "differences" between itself and the masses. Maoism, wrote Charara, meant that

> conflict between the masses and their enemies, takes place in inter-penetrating, camouflaged, or overt forms in *all* of society's cells and its institutions. The masses taking the reins of power is not therefore an unforeseen rupture that puts the leadership of the masses' movement in charge of state power, giving it suddenly the task of eradicating from above the relations of oppression and exploitation. Rather, the mass line is present in the conflict in all positions of social power from the narrowest to the widest. (*TBP*, 91)

Power was no longer a thing that was solely concentrated in institutions of rule and at the nodes of capitalist production. Charara's Maoist critique, by extending the domain of conflict between the masses and their enemies into all corners of society and making it internal to all institutions, rearticulated the horizon of emancipation away from the mere fact of seizing power. The political question was clearly no longer monopolized by who was in power. The extension of power and struggle to all cells of society and the stress on the insufficiency of increasing one's share of power in institutions to constitute emancipation was translated in *The Blue Pamphlet* by an emphasis on new forms of struggle that put the masses' practice as the mainspring of political action. Maoism meant "the foregrounding of the masses' own struggle on any pretense of leadership that builds itself outside of its own movement" (*TBP*, 89). The organization that put its own interest before that of the masses and outside of their movement was to be overcome by the masses' formulation of

their own political project in light of their own practice. For this practice, wrote Charara, in a direct echo of Mao, "always contains a true kernel, behind all phenomena, that ought to be deduced and returned to the masses," (TBP, 90).[31] Foregrounding the masses' own practice also entailed a rethinking of the role of intellectual vanguards. "An illusion that has always flirted with professional 'intellectuals,'" Charara wrote, "is to try and spare the masses any experience, or to take their place in digesting their own experience" (TBP, 74). The intellectuals were to become the editors/formulators that take in the word of the masses, reformulate it, and give it back to them—and not to be the originators of thought.[32]

Estranged Intellectuals

Maoism's emphasis on the logics of political practice and the relations of production cleared the path for questioning the powers of political and epistemic representation. Charara's critique of the OCAL's internal organizational structure and its relationship with the masses brought out Maoism's critique of the politics of delegation, and of expertise, premised on the distinction between those who have knowledge and those who lack it.[33] I now turn to his auto-critique of how leftist militancy articulated the relationship of theory to practice and his reflexive account of why it did so, which is driven by two fundamental ideas. The first is Charara's critique of the imputed power of theory, that is, its performative political powers. If Lenin said "without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement," Charara, who spent about a decade immersed in militancy and in practices of reading, translating, and writing, particularly during the intellectually fervent years of Socialist Lebanon, came to the realization that revolutionary theory does not necessarily guarantee the coming into being of a revolutionary movement. What may seem to some today like an obvious realization is not exactly so. The theoretical and political conjuncture of the times placed a lot of weight on the political value of theory. Louis Althusser for one, whom Charara had read carefully and put to use, wanted "to guarantee an autonomy for theory that would make it capable of investing Marxism with the theoretical edge to generate political renewal."[34] The radical post-1967 conjuncture in the Arab world was characterized by a turn away from Arab nationalism to Marxism that was fueled partly by the latter's theoretical sophistication. Even today, critical scholars who warn of the ontological and epistemological violence of discourses still subscribe to a strong belief in the powers of theory that supposedly, and without much friction, will produce predictable effects in the world.

The second is Charara's observation regarding the ruggedness of the social terrain and the complexity of practices and political events in comparison to the poverty of theoretical languages that attempt to subsume them. He came to this deduction via several routes. It was the result of his close observation of mass movements, the consequence of leftist militant practice, and his Maoist turn, which highlighted the focus on practices and the empirical idea of investigation.[35] It was also the result of his close reading of Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, the Egyptian historian who chronicled Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, for his dissertation work (1972). What al-Jabarti revealed to him was the gap between the richness, complications, and contradictory aspects of historical events and the poverty of the ideological discourses that came to dominate Arab discourses on history and politics.[36] The gap between theory and practices was now wide open in both directions: by severing the direct highway that tied theoretical virtuosity to revolutionary practice, and by highlighting the complexity of practices that cannot be adequately captured by mastering a few big concepts. Charara's political experiences, his theoretical persuasion, and his historical excavations led him away from theoretical abstractions and into much more empirically inclined sociological and ethnographic modes of analysis that he will develop fully in the wake of the Lebanese civil and regional wars. Having said that, he noticed very early on the gap separating the revolutionary ideological political line—its anti-imperial *content*—and its practices, modes of operation, and communal *forms* of mobilization. Just a few months before the founding of the OCAL, in a sequel to "The Two Resistances," he had a moment of doubt regarding the revolutionary potential of the Palestinian resistance, which he had theorized a few months earlier. Charara underscored "the rupture" between the resistance's supposed role as a detonator of Lebanese contradictions and its material fostering of "traditional political actors," whose base rises on personal, familial, and regional loyalties.[37]

He put these two ideas to work in his auto-critique of the political practice of militant intellectuals, starting from the founding of Socialist Lebanon. The cornerstone of the account given for the "disease that has infiltrated all parts of the organization" was the origins of its constitutive members, who were for the most part "marginal intellectuals" (*TBP*, 17). In this first reexamination of Socialist Lebanon—and the Organization of Lebanese Socialists—Charara remarked that the former's practice "did not coincide with work to extend militant roots in the ranks of the popular movement" (*TBP*, 17). Socialist Lebanon's work mostly grew "in the cracks of [other] political parties' positions, that is their contradictions. . . . What 'Socialist Lebanon' did not realize, and it is also the case for the 'Organization of Lebanese Socialists,' is that

the correctness of political critique does not constitute a foundation to build a militant organization and to form militants" (*TBP*, 17). In other words, drawing attention to the LCP's theoretical poverty via the intertextual theoretical practice that Socialist Lebanon engaged in, as we saw all along, was no longer a guarantee for building an autonomous popular movement. To get an idea of the strength of the idea tying theoretical prowess (or the political line) to political efficacy, it is worth revisiting the interview Fawwaz Traboulsi gave to the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) in October 1977, in which he affirmed that "the correctness of our [OCAL] political line accounts for our influence on the masses and within the front [the LNM], disproportional to our numerical situation."[38] In Traboulsi's vanguardist reasoning, good theory accounts for political influence on both the masses and other leftist parties despite the organization's small size.

Charara extended his auto-critique of militant intellectuals beyond the reduction of political practice to political critique, noting that their relative privileges compared to peasants resulted in an increased *distance* between them—inhabiting the "language and culture of professional party member politicians"—and the effective everyday issues and struggles of the masses (*TBP*, 18). "The organization's ranks and before it those of Socialist Lebanon and the Organization of Lebanese Socialists," wrote the fresh PhD graduate from France in an accusatory tone, "are swarming with those pursuing a university education in order to improve their social and economic conditions of living. And this [situation] results in distancing them from the masses' ranks where they aspire to militate" (*TBP*, 17). This distance between the intellectuals and the masses resulted in the former's engagement in a "cultural" critique of the dominant political practice that "veiled itself with Leninism." "And there is no doubt," added Charara, "that our cultural critique is a result of the weak relation that linked us to the real struggles taking place in our society" (*TBP*, 18).

Charara argued that they were held captive by an "imaginary image" of workers that in fact carries "the features that are really those of intellectuals, but transposed into the factory" (*TBP*, 23). Workers were seen only as workers, that is, as a homogenous group produced by factory relations, not only because of the bookish character of these intellectuals' knowledge of workers but more importantly because of their sociological profile. These militant intellectuals broke their relations with their villages, their families, and the parliamentarians of their areas. Moreover, they accessed their jobs by passing an exam or holding a degree "independent of traditional relations," and joined a "homogenous milieu composed of employees who like them have left the countryside and their relationships with their families" (*TBP*, 23). The estranged militant intellectual

who speaks in the name of the masses is a product of an internal migration to the city whose means of livelihood were mediated by abstract, institutional means that broke away from the regional, kinship, and sectarian forms of solidarity that mediate the Lebanese citizens' relationship with the state and the market. Yet "when these traditional relationships still play a role in the intellectuals' conditions," Charara wrote, "they [the intellectuals] make efforts to hide it so that it does not devalue them and their merits" (*TBP*, 23). Briefly put, the image of the "abstract worker" is a consequence of the intellectual's abstraction from multiple attachments and mediations, whose haunting presence is capable of generating streams of anxiety.

Charara also put his critique of the estrangement of militants from the masses into practice. He followed Mao Tse-Tung's recommendation that "since [intellectuals] are to serve the masses of workers and peasants, intellectuals must, first and foremost, know them and be familiar with their life, work and ideas."[39] He relocated in the spring of 1973 to Burj Hammud—a multiethnic, multinational, working-class suburb northeast of Beirut—and lived there until the outbreak of the fighting in 1975 made it impossible for him to stay there. Charara's établissement in Burj Hammud took the form of making connections and working with groups of rural migrant workers from 'Irsal, a northeastern Lebanese town on the border with Syria, as well as with a number of factory workers in the surrounding area during this time. Charara's Maoist period, and his établissement, was premised on his own physical displacement into a working-class neighborhood where he engaged in everyday investigations and political practices with the people living and working there. It was an effort to learn from them and to overcome the gap between intellectual and manual labor. In contrast to Socialist Lebanon's textualist phase, when the emphasis was on the translation and transfiguration of texts to produce an adequate theory of one's political present, the militant intellectual during this last period of militancy, not the texts, traveled with the hope of both reconfiguring himself and the masses. "After all," Kristin Ross writes in her discussion of the établissement of French Maoists, "as Mao was fond of asking, how can you catch a tiger cub without entering the tiger's lair?"[40]

Revisiting Sectarianism

In the spirit of Maoist self-criticism, *The Blue Pamphlet* revisits in a postcolonial mode Socialist Lebanon's theoretical premises on which their political analysis and practice were built:

The political axis of analysis was, and still is, the presupposition of a European-like capitalism that eradicates all inherited relations from the precapitalist formations, such as family ones and relations of political "feudalism" . . . and this main presupposition is bolstered by another one in conjunction with it, [revolving] around a working class which as soon as it enters the factory gains a class homogeneity [and] gets rid of its clan solidarities [*al-'asha'iriyya*]. (*TBP*, 19)

In the moment of auto-critique Charara irons out Socialist Lebanon's intricate theoretical work, as well as his own emphasis on the necessity of translation and transfiguration of Marxism. Nonetheless, he draws our attention to the increasing salience of the question of sectarian-regional-kinship solidarities and the Marxist metanarrative that tried to take stock of the problem of communal ties that divided the masses and hindered their practice according to their own economic interests. Charara's target at the height of his populist glorification of the masses is to show how the Marxist metanarrative, which predicated revolutionary practice on overcoming the different forms of social solidarities, was the product of estranged intellectuals. He continues:

And the persistence of this imaginary image has transformed it into a fixed political mode that we try to transpose to all phenomena, squeezing into it all important events. So we understood the national movement, and its kernel the Palestinian Resistance, as the realization of what capitalism could not achieve in the sphere of social relations. We were under the illusion that the Resistance's main role was to eradicate the fragmentation of the popular masses by the sectarian, regional, and kinship relations, i.e., we practically put the resistance in the place of the Lebanese capitalism we dream of! (*TBP*, 19)

Charara is referring to "The Two Resistances" (1969), his key text, which was built on a series of dualities that sought to account for the blockage of revolutionary practice by noting the disjunction between the economic infrastructure and the political superstructure. Lebanon, he had argued, is characterized both by the propagation of the universal laws of capitalist expansion in the economic sphere (commensurability) and the sectarian political brakes of the political system that were devised by French imperialism, which impede the birth of the interest-based politics of citizens (incommensurability). This duality is also inscribed at the heart of Lebanon's exploitative relationship with its Arab neighbors. Lebanon is economically integrated into the Arab world, thriving on the investment of Palestinian capital after the 1948 Nakba and

exports to the Gulf countries while being politically isolated from Palestine, via its politics of neutrality in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The ruling alliance itself reproduces this duality since it is conceived as the partnership between the banking and commercial bourgeoisie of the coast and the landowning families of the mountains. The hybrid Lebanese citizen—for example, Sunni from Beirut, Maronite from the mountains—is also the outcome of this dual structure, which combines the universality of the bourgeois notion of citizenship and the particularity of sectarian and regional affiliations.

Sectarianism, in "The Two Resistances," plays a very different role whether we are talking about the Lebanese ruling alliance or the people. Sectarianism, by splitting the Lebanese citizen, is responsible for stifling class-based politics. The split needs to be overcome for a "mature," interest-based political practice to take place. If we shift our analytical gaze to the composition of the Lebanese regime, we get a different picture. The split between universality and particularity is not internalized in its "hybrid" subjects. Rather, it becomes a sociological feature of the two groups—the bourgeoisie of the coast and the landowning lords of the mountains—that constitute it. Socialist Lebanon does not attach a sectarian attribute—Christian or Muslim—to the Lebanese bourgeoisie. Sectarianism is not treated as an essential component of the Lebanese bourgeois identity but as a veil that masks its defense of its privileges. During his militant days, Charara's analysis had to provide an account of the particularity of Lebanese sectarian politics and loyalties on a Marxian ground that takes class politics and exploitation as the universal underlying realities that explain the Lebanese social formation. He was faced with a puzzle of how to square the proliferation and multiplicity of apparent infranational loyalties and political divisions with a notion of politics that is predicated on the contradiction between Labor and Capital. The differential distribution of his universal/particular binaries (economic integration, commensurability, banking-commercial bourgeoisie; and political isolation, incommensurability, political feudalism, hybrid citizens) and the different meanings sectarianism acquires are his answers to the conundrum of explaining along class lines the multiple sectarian allegiances and divisions within the frame of one exploitative system.

Sectarianism has different ontological weights and plays a variety of roles in "The Two Resistances." It is at the same time the backbone of the Lebanese political structure, one of the main sources of identification of Lebanese citizens, and a mask covering class exploitation. Sectarianism is both a form of political power that fashions hybrid citizens and paralyzes their political practice and a veil that covers up the interest-driven politics of the banking-commercial bourgeoisie. The Palestinian resistance, the anti-imperial Arab agent par excellence

after it made its entrance into Lebanese politics, will contribute to the over-coming of the system's duality. Its intrusion into Lebanese politics unmasked the bourgeoisie's exploitation, which can no longer veil itself with sectarianism, and refashioned the sectarian subject into a revolutionary one.[41]

Two years before the war, Charara, under Mao's sign, recodes his previous theoretical and political quests to be on the lookout for the external agent that will overcome the fragmentation of the masses along nonclass lines, as an act of estranged intellectuals. Charara inverted his previous analysis, noting:

> We have neglected a key issue, which is that clan, family, neighborhood, and sectarian relations are relations of class struggle that are no less acute than exploitation relations in the factory, even if their forms veil themselves and differ. Since those who play the role of middlemen do not only receive a concrete material price for their roles, they often join the ranks of the commercial and financial bourgeoisie: since it allocates to them positions, jobs and supports their notability and their power. So that the fusion becomes complete between the "upper" middlemen (members of Parliament, important electoral keys, and high-ranking employees) and the bourgeoisie itself. . . . Working to reveal the forms of this struggle and investigate the issues it revolves around is a hard task that is awaiting our initiation, because it has long remained, and still is, on the margin of intellectuals' interests, especially those who are party-members. (*TBP*, 81–82)

Charara's widening of the definition of struggle to engulf social, institutional, and political dimensions beyond the exploitation of labor enabled what was previously seen as an obstacle to class struggle to be repositioned as part of it. Expanding the notion of class struggle to encompass the multiple communal forms of solidarity, though, is not merely a numerical addition of clan, family, neighborhood, and sectarian components to class. The forms of communal solidarity are politically *polyvalent*. They can constitute a "vital agent in curbing resistance against exploitation and oppression" (*TBP*, 81) without being

> fully geared to the advantage of the agents [between the bourgeoisie and the working class] and through them to the bourgeoisie and its power. For the masses, with their "class instinct" as Lenin says, use this weapon to their advantage. In a number of factories, the familial and local solidarity is overturned against the factory owner and the agent, and workers use it as a strong pressuring measure on the factory owner to retract a dismissal decision, a wage deduction penalty, or to consolidate a strike. . . .

> To rely on these relations of solidarity, and to work such as the masses
> will benefit from them against the agents, against the commercial and
> financial bourgeoisie and against the authorities, is a line we should not
> deviate from in expanding the people's struggle. (*TBP*, 82)

Two years before the war, Charara the militant, noting the growing opacity of
the masses, and the growing complications lodged at the heart of the revolu-
tionary subject, recast the scope and modality of political militancy away from
its restriction to workers qua workers, seeing in the "traditional relations of
solidarity" a potential to be exploited and mobilized in the struggle of the masses
against both the bourgeoisie and the political authorities. "This is the revolution-
ary content of 'dealing with reality as it is,'" Charara wrote, "and of dealing with
the exploited and the toilers first, and not from the perspective of the petite
bourgeoisie only" (*TBP*, 82). This expansion of the domain of class struggle
underlined the equivocal and political polyvalence of these communal forms.
They are at the same time an integral part of class struggle, a form of its mani-
festation outside of labor exploitation, *and* a weapon that can be mobilized
either by or against those who hold economic and political power. The politi-
cal polyvalence of the masses-as-they-are, so to speak, complicates revolution-
ary teleology.

In the wake of realizing the false prophecies of his previous theoretical
analyses and political lines regarding the historical *forces* that would deliver
the Lebanese working class of its fragmentation, Charara revised his analyses
of Lebanese capitalism, subjected the OCAL and the Lebanese Left to a scath-
ing critique, and radicalized his political position, calling for a "people's war."[42]
Before the outbreak of "real" violence, resulting in his crisis and disenchant-
ment, Charara wallowed in the glorification of the masses' violence:

> The people's war is not an armed struggle launched by an isolated or ad-
> venturous "vanguard." It is the eruption of the violence carried by the
> masses who throw it in the face of its enemies, in various forms inside all
> the spaces of the social order. It finds its unity and reaches its prime form
> in the direct confrontation with the imperial-classist domination and the
> political power that embodies it on a general level. (*TBP*, 90)

The Blue Pamphlet, a couple of years before the official beginning of the war,
bears the marks of the tension between the critic's scalpel, which dissects
the internal contradictions of the masses, and the remainder of the revolu-
tionary's hope in them as the subjects of emancipation, which glorifies their
violence.

During his établissement in Burj Hammud, Charara pursued his investigations of the disjunction between theory and practice, the politics of representation, and the paradoxes of emancipation. In March 1975, a month before the official date of the beginning of the Lebanese civil and regional wars (April 13, 1975), he published *Origins of Sectarian Lebanon: The Right-Wing's Mass Line*.[43] This brilliant, polemical, and long-neglected book is an intervention against the theorization of sectarianism by liberal, technocratic, secular, and Marxist politicians and intellectuals. Charara develops his earlier auto-critique and confronts head on the different theories that deploy secularism as an ideological mask and an instrument that will soon be vanquished by an external agent. He writes, "Employment, science, technology . . . sectarianism dies in the same way old empires did under the hooves of barbarian invaders . . . and sectarianism's barbarians come from Europe, a new 'land between two rivers' that exports the epidemic that decimates the ancient man, making him into a colorless employee, an intellectual that has dusted off the mountain's residues, and a technician with the passions of a calculator" (*Origins of Sectarian Lebanon*, hereafter OSL, 7). All these accounts of sectarianism are premised on a historicism— the European barbarians—that Marxist accounts partake in: "This "outside," Charara writes, "shares with the modes that preceded it and follow it, the fact that it forms the necessary direction of History's movement. It also shares with them history's apparition fully armed and in full gear from Jupiter's head, the god of gods in selected quotes from Hegel and Engels" (OSL, 8). The Left iterations of these theories make sectarianism an ideological mask that falsifies the underlying "real" social conflict. Sectarianism is then conceptualized as an instrument of sedition and division by you name it—landowners, Ottoman interests, the fighting imperial powers, and the local bourgeoisie. "In the beginning was unity and innocence," Charara writes ironically about the theoretical tropes organizing the accounts of sectarianism as the weapon of choice exploited by outsiders to divide the nation's citizens, and wielded by both outsiders and insiders to weaken working-class solidarity.[44]

Charara's book does not only criticize these dominant accounts of sectarianism that see it as a top-down phenomenon that was "created" by foreigners and elites to delude and divide the masses and that will soon vanish. It revisits the nineteenth-century Maronite peasant movements in Mount Lebanon against the sheikhs and lords—*muqata'ji*—mediated through his own reading of Mao and Gramsci to propose that sectarianism was constituted from below through

the political practice of the peasants. Charara's compressed history charts the movement of Lebanon's Maronites from the position of subalternity to dominance (*OSL*, 40) through the formation of a Maronite social and political force, a historical bloc, composed of peasants and led by traders, artisans, and clergymen (*OSL*, 74).

Amid the resistance to the lords, Charara writes,

> new relations were forged. Those relations made Europe, Capitalism, the Church, and the commoner's political and military organizational forms intertwined threads which are tied together at the juncture of the peasant's movement. This is how a deep-rooted mass line, which was tightly connected to popular struggle then, was constituted. This mass line carried the Lebanese political formation with its fixed features, namely sectarianism. This means that sectarianism is historically concomitant to the Mass Line that founded present-day Lebanon and not an incidental that can be cast off. This highlights the contradiction that can be designated as "The Right-Wing's Mass Line," which is at the heart of continuing political contradictions whose network form the superstructure of the Lebanese formation. (*OSL*, 97)

Charara's narrative charts how, in a very complex historical conjuncture characterized by capitalist penetration, European imperial interventions, Ottoman reforms, and Egyptian campaigns, the Maronite peasants' revolutionary practice against their lords fashioned Maronite political sectarian solidarities.

Charara's book is a very early constructionist argument that underscores the modernity of the phenomenon of political sectarianism against the widely circulated culturalist arguments that repeat ad nauseam the trope about essentialist, primordial loyalties that supposedly overdetermine Arab politics. The US-based historian of the Middle East Ussama Makdisi will make a similar argument about the modernity of sectarianism twenty-five years later.[45] Despite the similar conclusions Makdisi reaches about the modernity of sectarian relations of political solidarity, the character of the two interventions are very different. The post-*Orientalism* antiessentialism of Makdisi's work deploys a constructionist approach against Orientalist culturalist tropes that de-rationalize, look down on, and make an exception of Arab politics by highlighting the fatalism of "tribes" fueled by their atavistic passions. His is a culturally progressive move that marshals historical transformations and breaks to undo the imputed timelessness of a "traditional culture" that produces repetitive bloody episodes that are out of sync with an imputed civilized "modernity." In brief, Makdisi's postcolonial antiessentialist move marshals

historical discontinuities against timeless culture—modernity against tradition—to undo a particular colonial logic that singles out Arabs to classify them according to what makes them different, in this case sectarianism.

The character of Charara's much older intervention is very different. *Origins of Sectarian Lebanon* was written on the eve of the Lebanese civil war, after a decade and a half long parenthesis of political militancy that would soon be closed off for good. "The theoretical and political urgency of these questions," he writes in the last sentence of the book, "are fostered by the harshness of defeat and the determination of struggle" (125). It is a rethinking, born out of militancy, that underscores that sectarianism is neither a mask nor a tool that is contingent on a "pure social struggle" that is imposed on it from above by powerful players. Sectarianism, Charara argues, in a remarkably counterintuitive move, is not external to revolutionary practice, nor is it an impediment to it; rather, it is the result of it. The modernity of the phenomenon in Charara's account is not all that there is to the story. Rather, what is important is the fact that sectarian solidarities are not the result of false consciousness and top-down ideological imposition. Charara's and Makdisi's work on the same historical period, which underscores the modernity of sectarianism, constitute very different interventions. Makdisi marshals history to make a theoretical point against Orientalists and Western pundits that underlines that sectarianism is not a fatality. Charara, in contrast, is not concerned with the dichotomies of essence/construction and culture/history. The deep popular roots of sectarianism are highlighted to show not only the thinness of leftist accounts but also, in the wake of political losses, the recalcitrance of sectarianism in practice in contrast to its critique in theory.

Charara's account of practice and theory in nineteenth-century Mount Lebanon is written as a mirror image of his own auto-critique of militant experience a century later in *The Blue Pamphlet*. In contrast to the top-down modalities of leftist militancy, which seek to represent the masses—epistemically and politically—and end up hijacking their initiatives and reproducing the modalities of power they sought to overcome, we are presented with an account of grassroots practice that breaks free from the old relations of subjugation to fashion new modes of practice, organization, and relationships. For instance, instead of leftist parties' practice, which is premised on gaining power through increasing its institutional share of power, we are presented with an account of the Maronite Church as reworking existing relations. The Maronite Church's historical transformation made it into an institution with deep organic roots with its peasant base, which made it the only party that fulfilled "organizational, military, ideological and economic functions" (*OSL*, 107). "The Church didn't undertake its

political role," Charara writes in a direct echo of his critique of the Lebanese Left, "by taking over a centralized power that has fully formed and autonomous apparatuses. Rather, it worked on creating these apparatuses, or worked on readjusting the existing ones to the demands of the current tasks" (OSL, 108). The nineteenth-century Maronite Church, which was the major source for intellectuals then, looked at through the Mao-Gramsci prism is the mirror image of the twentieth-century Leninist vanguardist party. Last but not least, Charara underlines the feeble character of Lebanese nationalist ideology—in contrast, say, to Marxist theory—that was the offspring of the constitution of Maronite sectarian identity, despite the fact that the Christian bourgeoisie had long separated itself from its nineteenth-century peasant base. The theoretical thinness of this ideology, which wavers between an economic integration with the Arab world and a political isolation from it, with its dependency on Western powers, does not impede its practical effects. "To refute Lebanese ideology based on its 'incoherence,' its 'crudeness,' its 'feebleness,'" Charara writes, "does not rob it of its effective and practical source that nourishes it, even if its tongues are Michel Chiha, Saʻid Akl, Charles Malik, and Kamal al-Haj" (OSL, 121). Lebanese nationalist ideology is the mirror image of Marxist theory. A theoretically thin and incoherent ideology is much more practically effective than a thick Marxist theory and political analysis that he once thought held the key to a successful emancipatory practice. The evolution of the Lebanese formation, argued Charara, reproduces the sectarian line:

> Each time intellectuals of a certain sect (in the wide Gramscian sense), regardless of their inclinations, meet with its toilers—peasants and workers—the sectarian form plays the role of the unifying reference. This is practically always true regarding the Druze, whose peasants' conditions have not stopped deteriorating. It is also the case with the Shiʻa during their last "demands movements" in 1974. The "progressive content" [of the demands] is neither an exception nor a new feature. We have seen that the Maronite movement had a content, and was based on practices, that both carried an effective revolutionary potential that surpassed, in its political practices and its organizational forms, what the other movements have achieved till today. (OSL, 114)

Charara's Maoist episode stretched his Marxist analysis to its limits by revealing the paradoxes of emancipation, the impossibility of teleology, as well as the disjuncture between theory and practice. *Origins of Sectarian Lebanon* showed how peasant emancipatory political practice in the nineteenth century that contested the dominant order managed to rework the relations

of production, the political and military modalities of organization and ide-
ologies, and paradoxically give rise to a right-wing sectarian political formation.
Nineteenth-century Maronite peasants' practice was revolutionary, but it ended
up producing a sectarian formation and a right-wing ideology and politics. The
mid-1970s Left, as we will soon see, reversed the equation—revolutionary and
anti-imperial ideological demands were articulated on, or did not manage to
break free from, sectarian constituencies.

5. EXIT MARX/ENTER IBN KHALDUN
Wartime Disenchantment and Critique

When the community no longer raises objections, there is an end, too, to the suppression of evil passions, and men perpetrate deeds of cruelty, fraud, treachery and barbarity so incompatible with their level of civilization that one could have thought them impossible.
—SIGMUND FREUD

Le désespoir est une forme supérieure de la critique.
—LÉO FERRÉ

In *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory*, Enzo Traverso observes that the significant defeats the Left has suffered in the past did not break the tradition's spine. The hope in a revolutionary utopia, which provided both a historical perspective and a shared horizon of expectation, sustained the tradition through its many defeats. Traverso dates the exhaustion of the tradition's stock of revolutionary hope and the exit of History from the stage with the downfall of the communism:

> When communism fell apart, the utopia that for almost two centuries had supported it as a Promethean impetus or consolatory justification was no longer available; it had become an exhausted spiritual resource. The "structure of feelings" of the left disappeared and the melancholy born from defeat could not find anything to transcend it; it remained alone in front of a vacuum. The coming neoliberal wave—as individualistic as it was cynical—fulfilled it.[1]

Traverso's canvassing of global political transformations, from Left internationalism to the neoliberal wave, reinscribes the disaggregation of the Left's "structure of feelings" with the end of the Cold War. Similar historiographical markers are also put to use by keen observers of ideological transformations in the Arab world. "The fall of the Soviet Union," Michaelle Browers writes, "was a decisive event for socialist forces throughout the world and certainly

Arab socialism is no exception. Much of the political discourse of 'popular' democracy, the revolutionary party and Frontal politics, has given way to a more 'liberal' discourse of pluralism, human rights and civil society."[2] Browers, who is writing more than a decade before Traverso and is focusing on the transformations of political languages in the Arab world, highlights how the problematic of liberal democracy displaced the exhausted family of progressive languages that were preoccupied with revolution. This state of exhaustion not only affected the Marxist tradition as a grid of analysis and a set of conceptual tools but also had a detrimental effect on Marxist-grounded politics. Marxist-Leninist organizations such as Arab communist parties, but not exclusively so, were by the early 1990s shaken by debates revolving around questions ranging from whether they ought to change their names to the relevance of "the dictatorship of the proletariat" in the party's political agenda as well as measures of democratization internal to the organizations.[3]

Waddah Charara's trajectory is doubly contrapuntal vis-à-vis Traverso's and Browers's accounts. It presents a very early unraveling, with the beginning of the Lebanese civil and regional wars (1975–90), of the hope generated by the historical perspective of revolutionary utopias. It is also an exit from Marxist militancy and ideology that displaced the question of the political away from the centrality of class politics toward the investigation of the socio-logics and modalities of power of infranational solidarities as he observed the division of the Lebanese masses into their different Christian and Muslim sectarian constituencies. Charara did not substitute one ideology (Marxism) for another (liberalism). Rather, as we will soon see, he examined how the political could not extricate itself from, and carve out, an autonomous sphere outside of communal relations of solidarity. It is not the collapse of communism that eclipsed the faith in History, but the fragmentation of the revolutionary subject along communal lines that foreclosed the possibility of autonomous political practice.

The critical distance Charara took from the warring camps was a very rare move at the time. He was probably the first of his cohort of leftist militants to pay attention to, and theorize, the communal logics—predominantly sectarian, but also regional and kinship based—and the modalities of power at work in the Lebanese civil war and their impact on thick ideological politics. Reinserting his intervention into the problem-space of the 1970s Left before the ebbing away of revolutionary tides reveals to us how divergent his solitary and farsighted diagnosis of the war was from the positions of leftist political parties and former comrades. Charara was a bellwether of sorts for the waves of disenchantment to come of leftist intellectuals around a decade and a half before the fall of the Soviet Union. With the waning power of the Left in the following

years of the war—the Syrian military intervention in 1976, the assassination of Kamal Jumblatt in 1977, the withdrawal of the PLO after the Israeli invasion of 1982, the increasingly inter- and intrasectarian nature of the war, as well as the rise of Islamist political forces—a number of leftist militants would experience successive waves of disenchantment. During his Maoist interlude (1972–75), which witnessed mobilizations and military clashes between the Palestinian resistance and the Lebanese authorities (May 1973), omens of the devastations to come, Charara took stock of a decade of Marxist militancy. His corrosive auto-critique targeted the building blocks on which he, alongside his comrades, sought to inaugurate a revolutionary political project. In brief, the political party he cofounded was no longer the collective agent of emancipation; his militant intellectual comrades no longer constituted a revolutionary vanguard; and revolutionary theory was no longer the royal road to effective practice. Disenchanted with the party, militant intellectuals, and revolutionary theory, Charara turned to Maoism, placing his ultimate militant wager on the masses. Despite the acknowledgment of the difficulty of holding on to a teleology of emancipation, his militant catechesis took the form of a romantic mythologization of the masses, whose revolutionary violence makes History unmediated by the authoritarian apparatuses of the party. Retrospectively, one could map the salient objects of Charara's revolutionary trajectory before disenchantment and their accompanying practices along the following lines: *revolutionary theory* (Socialist Lebanon, 1964–68, translation/transfiguration); *revolutionary organization* (Socialist Lebanon/OCAL, 1969–71, political union); *revolutionary masses* (*Blue Pamphlet* movement/solo militancy, 1972–75, établissement). Waddah Charara, who is of Shi'i descent, was in the first months of the fighting still living on and off in Burj Hammud where he had relocated in 1973 for his établissement.

In a country where national consensus is a rare currency, April 13, 1975, stands in for the beginning of the civil and regional wars that lasted until the end of 1990. On that day a car fired shots at a congregation of Phalange partisans in front of a church in 'Ayn al-Rummana, a Christian suburb east of Beirut. The shootings wounded a number of people, "to which the Phalangist militiamen reacted a few hours later by machine-gunning a bus heading for the Tall al-Za'tar refugee camp, killing 21 Palestinians. Fighting broke out throughout the southeastern suburb of Beirut between the Phalange and the Palestinian resistance and their Lebanese allies."[4] Charara continued to commute between Beirut and Burj Hammud until September 1975. Around the end of the month, on either September 24 or 25, Charara took a cab to Beirut with Fares, his flatmate at the time, leaving everything as is in their apartment.[5] This proved to be

his last day in Burj Hammud. "Things exploded a bit after that," he recalls, and "Black Saturday happened . . . and I never saw the apartment again and the books of course. Everything was gone. This [établissement in Burj Hammud] was the last attempt to contact people and to call for something."[6] The "Black Saturday" massacre took place on December 6, 1975, when, after discovering the bodies of four young men associated with the right-wing nationalist Phalange Party, Christian militiamen established checkpoints in Beirut, stopping cars, lining up and murdering "some 200 innocent Muslims, mostly port workers."[7] On January 18, 1976, the Christian forces attacked Karantina, a northeastern multiethnic (Kurds, Armenians), multinational (Palestinians, Syrians, and Lebanese), predominantly Muslim working-class suburb under the control of the Palestine Liberation Organization, which is contiguous to Burj Hammud. After conquering Karantina, the militias massacred hundreds of civilians. Two days later, the Lebanese National Movement and Palestinian forces attacked the Christian coastal town of Damur south of Beirut, and committed a massacre against its inhabitants. The outbreak of the civil war in the spring of 1975 closed off for good Charara's nearly two decades of militant life (1958–75): seventeen years of militancy inaugurated on the eve of the 1958 clashes, a stint of radical activism bracketed by two civil wars.

Charara, who was stunned by the sectarian forms of the killing, destruction, and pillaging, began to take stock of the logics governing the wartime practice. In the opening paragraphs of "Hurub al-Istitba'" (Wars of Subjugation) the opening chapter of a book of essays carrying the same title, (February 1976, hereafter cited as WS), he wrote,

> Numerous phenomena have come to dominate the surface of our lives in the past ten months, phenomena where blood mixed with cut limbs, and hot ashes with spilled viscera from pierced bellies. . . . Spectators used to close their eyes in horror at the movie theaters whenever [Luis] Buñuel and [Salvador] Dalí's blade would cut through a cinematic eye in "*An Andalusian Dog*." We now began tallying sliced eyes. And between one round and another, laughter filled the theaters showing "action movies" with pity: *Bloody Mama* is evil because she killed three or four policemen![8]

Charara compared the violence, pillaging, and battles in Lebanon from April 1975 to February 1976 with the differential responses of moviegoers to violent scenes in Luis Buñuel's *An Andalusian Dog* (1929) before the war and Roger Corman's *Bloody Mama* (1970), shown during the war. They had an audience whose everyday lives had become so exposed to bloodshed that the

meaning of violent scenes in movies was experienced as comic relief. Inasmuch as the radical change in the everyday life of moviegoers had led to their recoding of the movies' original messages, the war would also have a great effect on Charara's theoretical and political positions, his authorial voice, and the location from which he wrote. The sectarian form the violence took in the first few months of the war brought a very early and final disenchantment with the masses as the subjects of History and with emancipation as a horizon of political practice. Charara also radicalized and extended his earlier critique of the OCAL to encompass the Lebanese National Movement (LNM), the front of leftist and Arab nationalist parties, led by Kamal Jumblatt, who fought alongside the Palestinian resistance against the Lebanese nationalist, overwhelmingly Christian, parties.

The Lebanese National Movement: Parties of Rule or Parties of Revolution?

In the fall of 1977, a MERIP writer asked Traboulsi, "Could you give an overview of the Lebanese National Movement?" The LNM, he answered,

> seems unique in the Arab world, in that it's the first time any Arab people has come to the defense of the Palestinian resistance. We believe we are unique in that sense, but the defense of the Palestinian revolution is a Lebanese patriotic duty. We have been struggling for years to have Lebanon play its role, and pay its share in the Arab liberation movement and its anti-Zionist struggle. One characteristic of the Lebanese regime prior to the war was a very flagrant contradiction between its economic integration in the Arab world and its political and cultural isolation from the Arab world. We have struggled to put an end to this. The term "isolationist" is scientific, denoting those currents, groups and political forces that believe they can live for the rest of their lives depending economically on the Arab world while isolating themselves politically and culturally.[9] This isolation has always meant a policy not of independence but of subjugation to Western imperialists.[10]

Traboulsi leaned on Socialist Lebanon/Charara's theoretical heritage in reformulating the critique of the Lebanese system put forward in "The Two Resistances" (1969), which now became a centerpiece of the Left's wartime ideological arsenal. He also touched upon the transitional program for reforms proposed by the LNM, which "gives priority to the setting up a secular state and abolishing confessionalism in political representation. This is the most essential demo-

cratic achievement to be struggled for because it affects the interests of the wide Lebanese masses."[11] The transitional program put forward by the Left did not address the socioeconomic question.

Much later Traboulsi provides an explanation in his memoir: "Jumblatt did not want to scare the bourgeoisie, and especially its Muslim wing, since he was predicting to win it over to his program of political change; he ended up being disappointed."[12] Socialist Lebanon's early analysis of the anxiety generated by the social question in a Lebanese Left dependent on an alliance with powerful political leaders with a sectarian constituency, like Kamal Jumblatt, was, and still is, prescient.

Waddah Charara lambasted the LNM's proposal for reforming the Lebanese system. In "Reform from the Center" (November 1975), he wrote:

> If the masses are supposed to be the water that the militants ought to circulate in with the happiness of the swimming fish, in this case the "masses" in the text are the water that drowns the fish, i.e., the problem. Of what masses is the text talking about? If the question was posed before the last civil war, and notably the last two months (since mid-September), it would have seemed an exaggeration that need not be investigated. But the program seeks to mobilize masses that are sundered by a sectarian civil war as wide as the masses themselves. (WS, 117)

Charara in this passage borrowed Mao's exhortation to militants to relate to the people like a "fish to water" to highlight the gap separating the Left's ideological languages of representation of a unified revolutionary subject—the masses—and their sectarian divisions. "When the program talks about the 'Lebanese' masses' that are looking forward to a 'national progressive regime,'" he wrote, "it is in general talking about one group, or one direction within this *Muslim* group" (WS, 119). Charara reiterated in this essay his long-standing critique of top-down reform programs, instrumental modes of militancy, and external ones that kept the political outside of, and separate from, the social formation. These external modes of political party militancy, he noted, focused on seizing a share of power "without tackling its foundations, forms, and functions or concentrated on widening power in sectors that the state could not dominate" (WS, 132). These political parties, concluded the disenchanted Marxist, are "'political' parties, in the narrow sense of the word, i.e., **parties of rule** and not parties of **social revolution**" (WS, 132).[13]

Charara's harsh and minoritarian critique not only separated him politically from Fawwaz Traboulsi and Muhsin Ibrahim, who held leadership positions during the war, it also distanced him intellectually from former comrades like

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Aziz al-Azmeh, the Syrian historiographer and Islamic studies scholar, who offered a contrasting interpretation of the events.[14] al-Azmeh offers an account that recapitulates again Charara's "The Two Resistances," the theoretical text with multiple political and academic afterlives in both Arabic and English, while arguing against the prominence of sectarian solidarities. "Through the Palestinians," he writes, "the Lebanese entity was reinserted into its Arab context and deprived of that artificial isolation which had hitherto served to maintain the political safeguards necessary for its international economic role."[15] "Attempts to set up sectarian Shi'i organizations were very short lived," al-Azmeh notes:

> The "Movement of the Disinherited" of the Imam Musa as-Sadr, as well as his military organization, Fityan Ali, had hardly got beyond a few mass rallies when the Shi'is decided they did not want to star in a bad melodrama and opted for the leadership of men like George Hawi of the CP, a Greek Orthodox from the Matn, or Fawwaz Trab[o]ulsi, of the OCAL, a Catholic from the Southern Biqaa (PF, 62).

Political radicalization did not only occur among the Shi'a but was also at the heart of the transformation of the Sunni community. "Yet it should be noted," al-Azmeh asserts, "that not all of the largely Sunni organizations took this leftward secular and radical trend" (PF, 66). That said, he continues, "such residues of traditional confessionalism are unimportant in any effective sense today yet such movements have participated emotionally and, in some cases, militarily, with the left-wing forces which are grouped around what has been termed the cause of the Palestinians" (PF, 66–7). al-Azmeh's analysis, like Charara's, takes the Lebanese sectarian communities as the units of analysis but draws the opposite conclusion by giving prominence to the ideological factor over the sectarian and to the presence of Christians at the head of communist parties whose body is considerably Shi'i.

The Breakdown of a Common World

In the introduction to *Wars of Subjugation* (1979), Charara writes, echoing Émile Durkheim, that "the war [Lebanese civil war] was a total *social fact* as much as it was a political one, and maybe more so" (*WS*, 10). The essays that are assembled in the book abstracted themselves from the course of events and the political divisions in order to examine "the social dimension (or the socio-historical as Castoriadis says) [which] reveals the unity of the implicit rules that

govern the warring parties and tear Lebanese society apart. . . . for it was not a civil-communal [*ahliyya*] battle in vain, and it did not lead to a relative fusion of the different forces into two sectarian groups randomly" (*ws*, 11). The outbreak of the fighting revealed to Charara the close intertwining of the domain of the political with the logics of communal—sectarian, regional, familial—solidarities, which makes the labors of conceptual subsumption and ideological generalization difficult.

The "war," he observes, was in fact a multiplicity of small, local wars that cannot be subsumed under one general category. In a small country, where the citizens' sect and place of birth are inscribed on their state IDs, the act of killing, the former militant observes, is a direct unmediated act that targets for the most part "faces, names and belongings" that are well known (*ws*, 231). The fighting that erupted in the different parts of the country did not constitute "one, common war, rather there were as many wars as there were fronts: the war of 'Ayn al-Rummana-al-Shiyah, the war of Dikwana-Tall al-Za'tar, the war of Miryata-Irdi, the war of Tripoli-al-Qibba" (*ws*, 231). "If there is no doubt," Charara affirmed, "that these local wars are nurtured by common political elements, what is sure is that these common factors did not replace the local enmities and did not eliminate the harshness of revenge" (*ws*, 231). "Wars of Subjugation," will proceed to diagnose the multiple modalities of operation of the communal relations of solidarity, which undermine the possibilities of a politics that rests on a common, unified ideological criteria.

Charara's diagnosis of the entanglement of the political in the multiple webs of the social fabric leads him to rethink the operations of power in dialogue with Gramsci, whose work he translated, and by reactivating concepts from Ibn Khaldun's work. The Lebanese civil wars, he registers, reveal that the politics of sects, families, regions, professions, political parties, and Arab regional politics carry heterogeneous, and independent, "codes of internal relations and rules of internal hierarchy" (*ws*, 233). "The difference of criteria and their variety (despite the intertwinement of some of them)," he notes, "raises difficult obstacles in the face of power as hegemony and not as dominance" (*ws*, 233). Power qua hegemony presupposes a political leadership that generalizes an encompassing set of criteria that covers multiple professional and administrative spheres, concealing in the process the basis of its power, while dominance is content with an "an external possession of instruments of power: armed forces, administrative apparatuses, a share of production" (*ws*, 233). In his deployment of Gramsci to make sense of wartime practices, Charara is far from positing a stark either-or scenario, where in a particular social formation power either solely operates as hegemony or as

dominance. Power operates differently depending on the different articulations of hegemony/dominance. At the deep end of the spectrum, when hegemony's capacity to generate a "common sense" is at its weakest, and the necessity of direct domination is at its apex, "power takes a form that Ibn Khaldun knew perfectly that of *iltiham* [fusion] and *istitbaʿ* [subjugation]" (*ws*, 233).[16]

Gramsci's elaboration of his conceptual arsenal—such as hegemony, historical bloc, war of position, war of maneuver—that Charara drew on during his militant phase took place in the wake of the failure of socialist revolutions in Western Europe in the 1920s. His critique of "economism," by turning his analytical gaze to the political and ideological terrains and investigating the relationship between hegemony (consent) and domination (force), was an attempt to understand capitalist societies' sources of resilience.[17] Gramsci and Charara were both forging new concepts in the wake of political events that challenged an older theoretical understanding. That said, the Lebanese civil wars, which resulted in the fragmentation of Lebanese society into its infranational—sectarian, regional, kin—components and the breakdown of the Lebanese state, was the obverse of capitalist society's resilience against revolutionary transformation as a result of the moral and intellectual leadership of its dominant class. The external modality of power at work in Lebanese society, a formal dominance, as Charara dubbed it, does not target the internal social bonds of dominated groups. The subjugating power does not seek to fashion new subjectivities. It is content with subjugating a group or a community while leaving their internal relations, hierarchies, and codes intact.

The Lebanese civil wars were attempts at mutual subjugation while none of the warring sides engaged in attempts at interpellating actors from the opposite side of the trenches. Charara proceeds to diagnose the fighters' practices as they relate to land, bodies, and commodities with the foundational trinity of political economy in mind. It is the "deep nature" of the conflict, Charara writes, in reference to its social dimension, that accounts for its "barbarism" (*ws*, 235). In the battle for subjugation, the destruction of the adversary's material and moral forces—primarily its bodies and properties—tops the list of missions to accomplish. "The political body, when dominance [in distinction to hegemony] is in effect," Charara notes, "is not a general abstract labor power that has been emptied of its individuality, its desires, its attachments and had its power to symbolize excised, before turning it into a disciplined tool of production and consumption" (*ws*, 235). Rather, it is "a body in 'solidarity,'" a carrier of both attachments to and detachments from family, sect, and neighborhood (*ws*, 235–36). The personal body, the point of intersections of multiple attach-

ments and detachments, then becomes the site of a semiotic interrogation with the aim of revealing the side it belongs to. In becoming a symbol, it also becomes a body for defacement and mutilation, since what the killers are after in liquidating an individual is his belonging to his sect. Defacement "is a summoning of the sect's large body" (*ws*, 236).

Concrete communal belongings that mark bodies and property mediate all relationships in a wartorn capitalist society where liquidated individuals are stabbed multiple times and property destroyed. When the body is a stand-in for communal belongings, commodities become part of "the owner's body (the owner = the sectarian group). The owner is therefore not addressed from the perspective of his position vis-à-vis power and production, and their relations" (*ws*, 236). As for land, it acquired in the conflict a "mythological 'place'" that took the form, more predominant on the Christian side, of cleansing it from "the 'foreign' patches that contaminate the pure metal" (*ws*, 237). Here, too, Charara emphasizes, that what was at work in the sectarianization of geography was not solely interest driven, functional, and pragmatic practices that are part and parcel of winning a battle. "Expulsion," he writes, "comes hand in hand with all forms of abuse, and humiliation, and the symbol regains its power and efficacy: bulldozers are used so that there is not a single wall—not even a tin wall—left standing, and empty, fissured houses are burned down by a purifying fire so that no trace of impurity is left" (*ws*, 237).

Charara's interpretations of wartime violence, which combined ideology, politics, and economics with magical and ritualistic behaviors—killing and defacing; looting and destroying; evicting and burning down to purify—led him to call into question the distinctions of social theory that are built on separating these spheres from each other. Charara noted that these distinctions—say, between magic/ritual and capitalist economies/ideological politics—are not suitable to analyzing the situation. "We were summoning up capitalist distinctions," he added, "without any critique or differentiation (even if they reached us through Marxism)" (*ws*, 238). Note that in this passage he did not refer to these distinctions as Western, modern, or Enlightenment, but as capitalist, ones. The form of Charara's critiques of Eurocentrism, like his earlier one in *Origins*, is less to show how the "universal" categories of history, social theory, and political economy cannot escape their European origins.[18] Rather, faced with the urgent question of how to interpret wartime violence, he begins by criticizing social theory's binary distinctions before turning to forging a new conceptual universe.

Charara reactivated Ibn Khaldun's concepts to account for how power oper-
ates during the Lebanese civil wars, but it was Marx that predominantly sup-
plied the theoretical ground for why it did so. His account of the multiple and
heterogeneous foci of power at work in Lebanon that foreclose the possibility
of articulating a political project that abstracts itself from these sites, general-
izing in the process a set of common criteria, was not a return of sorts to a
theory of the essentialist culturalist attributes of Arab societies, or a historicist
move emphasizing the persistence of precapitalist remainders in the present.
"Is capitalism's metal (and its parliamentary democracy) different from the one
the people of the backwards country, their relationships, and their world, are
made [of]?" "The matter is not sure," he answers (*ws*, 239). The entanglement
of the political in the social was not an account of a failed, or backward, moder-
nity but the form modernity took in Lebanon:

> Sectarianism, familialism, and regionalism were not the "remainders" of
> precapitalist social relations. And while all of them were based on ele-
> ments that predate capitalism, they only rose to prominence in organ-
> izing social and political life inside the movement of capitalist expansion
> on the one hand, and inside the formation of the Lebanese state with its
> frontiers, administration and hierarchies on the other hand. (*ws*, 250)

The former Marxist militant elaborated an account of the working of Lebanese
capitalism that underlined the relative autonomy of small-time producers and
the processes of formal subsumption of labor that boosted communal relations
of solidarity by incorporating them into the relations of production. Capital-
ist production in Lebanon was wary of "uprooting the artisan or the peasant
from their relations [of production] and from 'liberating' these producers from
them" (*ws*, 239). The reason why capitalism did not eliminate the world of
artisan labor and small and family-owned farming by transforming them into
wage laborers "was not, of course, [because of] the sentiments of capital and
its compassion." Rather, it was because the artisan and the peasant "own an
effective tool of pressure on the landowner and through him on the appara-
tuses of rule and its politics" (*ws*, 239). If the landlord's family wishes to play
any political role, it has to "grant, even if partially, peasants' demands, whether
related to leasing the land or taking charge of its crops" (*ws*, 240). "More-
over, the bourgeoisie," wrote Charara, moving from the peasant-landlord rela-
tion into analyzing the constitutive features of Lebanese capitalism, "resorts
to expand its sphere of exchange and to break the link that ties production

to local consumption (through developing commercial capital) without resorting to stripping the peasant and the artisan of their means of production, and without paying an exorbitant political and ideological price for it, which is the formulation of a sharp class consciousness" (*ws*, 240).[19] The Lebanese commercial bourgeoisie therefore did not extract its surplus at the point of production, which was done by "autonomous" producers, but in the sphere of circulation and marketing under its control, such as by exporting to neighboring Arab countries. In the case of both the landlord-peasant relation and the bourgeois-worker relation, capital's Lebanese path did not "free" the laborers from everything but selling their labor power. Lebanese peasants and artisans retained some degree of control over their means of production, which therefore preempted the development of class consciousness.

Moreover, production units are characterized by "a weak division of labor," which means that the "labor of abstraction that capitalism performs on social relations and on labor power specifically is still preliminary" (*ws*, 243). Labor still relied on an artisanal unit of production and "the worker, in this case," added Charara, "is not transformed into an 'appendage' to the machine or production" (*ws*, 243). Therefore, inherited skill still plays its role and "the village (and kinship generally) has retained its function in professional preparation" (*ws*, 243). The dominant social relations, Charara wrote, have moved from society into the units of production, as in the cases when Lebanese capitalists make use of family hierarchies by "appointing a small-time notable in his family or village as a foreman in the factory supervising one of its divisions. And the small notable will participate in choosing some of his divisions' workers from his family or clan" (*ws*, 245). This resulted in controlling worker absenteeism and confrontations with factory owners through family relations. Moreover, the Lebanese bourgeoisie makes use of sectarianism to pit workers against each other, as when "using certain workers [from a different sect] as supervisors over others . . . and distributing wage benefits along sectarian lines; increasing wages along sectarian belonging . . . and this way, part of the workers is controlled and the other subjugated" (*ws*, 245). Therefore, "the (Lebanese) bourgeois organization of labor" concluded Charara, "consolidates at the end of the day the relations of solidarity that it seeks to subjugate" (*ws*, 245). And "if this subjugation is an essential element in its [bourgeois organization of labor] strategy, it is also simultaneously," Charara wrote, "an essential element in the workers' resistance to capitalist relations of production. And this is because subjugation preserves the familial and sectarian relations of solidarity" (*ws*, 245). While Charara noted how these relations of solidarity, which are used to control and divide workers by the bourgeoisie, work also in the opposite direction to re-

sist the latter, recapitulating his analysis in *The Blue Pamphlet* (1973), he did so in the wake of the civil war as a detached social scientist in a constative manner. The days of militancy are over.

In the following section, entitled "Solidarity Relations against Capitalism and the State," the author wrote as if he had just realized that his analysis—springing from a Marxist ground and addressing privileged political economy themes—was entangled in what he was in the process of leaving behind. He wrote: "These phenomena [relations of solidarity] are not restricted to the domain of production (and if we emphasized their effectiveness in this particular domain, it is because this domain is privileged in the official leftist analysis, fostering deep-seated political illusions). Rather, they surpass it [the domain of production] to [affect] the different aspects of social life" (*ws*, 246).[20] That done, Charara proceeded to explore the other manifestation of these strengths and transformations of the relations of solidarity, such as in Lebanese modern cities that rearticulated the function of *iltiham* (fusion) that keeps family, and group units, cohesive, by inscribing it within a market, "which is not only different by its extension from the past one, but also in the tendency of economic values to dominate, and in its internal hierarchization depending on the relation with imperial centers, and by its inscription within state relations" (*ws*, 247).

Charara's diagnosis of the Lebanese state paralleled the one he put forward about capitalist production. The loyalty to the state remained a "formal" one that does "not touch the internal relations of these groupings, and does not work on changing their forms and logics, despite the transformations it effects on their general function" (*ws*, 251). This "formal adherence" had serious consequences for the state, which had to share its citizens' loyalty and its sovereignty on its own territory with

> the leaders of family-regional-sectarian groups and their blocs, with the *millet* blocs and their councils and institutions (hospitals, property and schools), with the armed wings of these blocs (armed clans, armed strongmen, militias), in addition to the rule's retinue, and the agents or friends of civilian and military apparatuses that are concerned with "general" security, i.e., the sharing of allegiances leads to the sharing of organized and legitimate violence with the state—which is the one that "should" monopolize this violence, in a legal framework that generalizes the European experience. (*ws*, 251–52)

It was in opposition to this *common* modality of power that governs and divides Lebanese society and reaches its maximal limits in times of civil war that Charara proposed, fleetingly, without much elaboration, the *logic* of the state:

"and one cannot transition from the logic of subjugation to the logic of the state but through a different socio-historical foundation" (*ws*, 12). The former Maoist militant retains his apprehension of top-down politics, however. Transitioning to the logic of the state cannot be the result of a political imposition from above. The problem is that this sentence does not designate a subject that could potentially lay this new foundation.

Charara's formulation of the question of the social fabric primarily in the guise of sectarianism in the beginning of the civil war not only entailed the acknowledgment of the primacy of these communal solidarities in the face of ideological programs. More importantly, it attempted to underscore how these forms of solidarity were transformed historically and produced and reproduced in the present. "Killing, pillaging, defacing, and destroying," Charara underscored, "are at the heart of our contemporary 'traditions and habits' . . . and are not remainders from the past but are constitutive of the present we build every day" (*ws*, 230). *Wars of Subjugation* was a hard-hitting intervention against the attempts of the Right and the Left to evade responsibility for sectarian violence that drew on nationalist/culturalist and historicist registers, such as these acts are not part of "our traditions"; these are "mistakes" on the way to building bright futures; these are a consequence of "precapitalist remainders" that will soon melt into thin air.

In *Origins* (1975), the Lebanese sectarian structure was the paradoxical outcome of the masses' political practice, while in *Wars of Subjugation* the political could not escape the communal—sectarian, regional, and family—structure.[21] In order to avoid falling back on a metaphysical cultural essentialism that reifies sectarianism, Charara, as we just saw, emphasizes the modernity of these relations and grounds his account in a Marxian account of Lebanese capitalism's trajectory—formal subsumption—and the formation of Lebanon's sectarian state, as well as the rearticulation of these forms of solidarity in the wake of rural-urban migrations and their insertion in a capitalist economy. The arguments of the two books can be schematically represented in the following way. *Origins*: masses/hegemony/diachrony/history, and *Wars of Subjugation*: social fabric/dominance-subjugation/synchrony/structure.

Charara's works right before and right after the war articulate two notions of the political that are in tension with each other. The first is a celebration of the masses' autonomous political practice that remakes their world as it refashions their own subjectivities. It is a romantic, populist notion that highlights the primacy, autonomy, and creativity of political practice from below. It is anchored in a critique of the division between manual and intellectual labor and of top-down and instrumental politics, whether carried out by states, left-

ist parties, organizations, or experts. The second notion, which is implicitly articulated in *Wars of Subjugation*, pits the logic of the state against the civil war's logic of subjugation. It reasserts the need for a politics that is grounded in common criteria that rise above the particularities of infranational communal solidarities. Ahmad Beydoun captured Charara's oscillation between a militant celebration of the autonomy of the political against the instrumental top-down practice of organizations and a disenchanted observation of its entanglement in the social fabric in the title of his review of *Wars of Subjugation*: "Waddah Charara: 'The Democracy' of the State or 'The Depth' of Freedom?"[22] Beydoun returned to, and rearticulated, Charara's oscillation as one between *"la politique-expression"* (a politics-as-expression) of the revolutionary subjects' practice and "*la politique-maîtrise*" (politics-as-mastery) of the murderous infranational divisions of the social fabric by a transcendent state.[23]

From Zahi Cherfan to Waddah Charara: Death of an Organic Intellectual, Birth of a Ṣuʻlūk

The opening passage of *Wars of Subjugation*, in its literary tone, its references to Buñuel, Dalí, and *Bloody Mama*, bears witness to a departure in form, content—the artistic references—and the locus of enunciation in the writings of one of the most influential New Left Marxist militant intellectuals of his generation. In October 1974, seven months before the outbreak of the civil wars, Zahi Cherfan—Waddah Charara's pseudonym—wrote the following:

> Just from enumerating some of the new phenomena [one can realize] the extent of actual victories that the student movement achieved in facing the authorities. Some of its elements, in Beirut, Baalbek, Saida, Tyre, Nabatieh and Tripoli no longer bother with the democratic legality and its interior minister. These elements no longer stand vulnerable in the face of oppression forces trained by the authorities to exert direct bodily violence, and no longer believe that violence is a monopoly of the reactionary authorities in the service of stability, the hotels, and the factory owners. (*ws*, 147)[24]

In this passage, Charara evaluated a certain line of action undertaken by the student movement, while taking it "upon himself to rectify 'deviations'" in its path.[25] Less than a year before the outbreak of the war, his coordinates on the political plane are precise. Charara/Cherfan is writing from a militant leftist position, critically assessing the movement so that its actions may yield more fruitful results in the future. The militant imagined his community of readers

and the role his written interventions were predicated to play. Ahmad Beydoun outlined the contours of the militant position Cherfan/Charara occupied: "There is a good thing that is starting and we have to make sure to put it on the right track. . . . Obstacles on the way are numerous, and the errors we committed and those we may commit are likely not the product of chance. . . . But it is unacceptable that our efforts come to an end . . . or to put it briefly 'there is always something that can be done' (Sartre)."[26] Beydoun, who also withdrew from leftist practice at the beginning of the war, alluded to how Charara's militant position "exacts from the text a heavy theoretical price," noting that it "seems forced to 'pave' the ground under the feet of the student movement to the extent of surprising whoever reads 'Wars of Subjugation.'"[27]

Charara's earlier prewar essays, either unsigned or written under his pseudonym, were activist interventions. They were analyses of specific situations geared toward either evaluating a certain line of action or formulating political positions, and at times they were used as theoretical education texts. When writing was in the direct service of the people's cause, it de facto excluded certain subjects and forms that might detract from the pressing and primordial political task. It left no room for the militant writer to dabble in analogies, artistic references, and a prose that might eat away at its political yield by distracting the reader. Linguistic "flourish" may detract from the seriousness of the matter, relegating the militant to the status of an intellectual who tinkers with culture in distinction to a revolutionary who formulates political positions. Moreover, Charara adds, "Why use these metaphors when you were convinced that analysis that takes for its base economics and grand transformations is self-sufficient? Its intelligibility is within it. So why borrow and use analogies from other fields like cinema, theater, poetry?"[28]

One of the first pieces Charara wrote after he put an end to militancy was a text in two parts relating his experience as a public school teacher. It weaves together autobiographical threads, an analysis of the Lebanese educational system, and a close observation of the minutiae of power relations inside schools as well as insightful comparisons between schools and political parties.[29] We have come a long way from the unsigned articles of Socialist Lebanon. Not only did Charara's prose become denser with analogies, casting a much wider net of references, but he also moved from not signing texts at all and using a pseudonym to writing autobiographical pieces. Engaging in this genre of writing would have been unimaginable, or, if that is too strong, unlikely only a few months earlier, when he was still one foot soldier of History, albeit a distinguished one, among others.[30] Wartime disenchantment established the conditions of possibility of thinking and writing about his personal and collective

pasts, distilling experiences into texts as well as venturing into new registers of political analysis, subjects, and styles of writing.[31]

In "Marxism and Form," a review essay mostly addressing *Spectrum*, a collection of texts by Perry Anderson, Stefan Collini observes how in the 1960s and 1970s, when "it was possible for Anderson and his collaborators to believe that history was on their side, that the proper union of intellectual labor and working class militancy would help bring about the socialist supersession of capitalism," Anderson's writing "did not feel the need to make any concessions to those who were uninitiated theoretically or unsympathetic politically."[32] "The task was too urgent," he adds, "the stakes too high, and in any case the 'bourgeois' media were too complicit with capitalism and its political outriders."[33] While these essays retain their brilliance today, Collini continues, "one cannot help noticing how the whiff of sectarianism, of laying down the 'correct' line *now* hangs about some of these articles like stale cigarette smoke."[34] In going over Anderson's trajectory, Collini, the intellectual historian, notes that with the changes in the political landscape taking place in the 1980s and 1990s, a time when it became much less convincing to think that history was on one's side, Anderson "appears to have undergone something of a political or intellectual crisis . . . leading not just to reassess the prospects of the left in a world dominated by neo-liberalism but also, one may infer, to reconsider the function of his own writing."[35] He then asks, "Yet to what readership, so much of the world having changed, does Anderson now address himself, and from what vantage point, so many of the old doctrinal certainties having shriveled, does he now write?" Collini answers, "Olympian universalism," a designation that he sees fitting Anderson's commitment to Enlightenment reason and the scope of his work. Anderson is a "universalist in the geographical as well as philosophical sense, attending impartially to developments in all parts of the world."[36]

Collini's review reminds us that transformations in intellectual labor accompanying the ebbing away of the 1960s revolutionary tides are not an exclusively Arab affair. Having said that, if Anderson reinvented himself as an Olympian universalist, for whom and from where was Charara writing after his disenchantment? The first person plural Charara uses throughout *Wars of Subjugation* is, to say the least, problematic. Who does this fictitious "we" refer to? It cannot refer to the Lebanese Left since he is overtly critical of it. Moreover, his exit from the Left was not accompanied by a right-wing conversion. To put this loss of identification in the words of Ahmad Beydoun, whose ties to Charara were strong at the time, "we were forced," he recalls, "as a result of the *diagnosis* to take a great distance from the National and Palestinian camp, and of course [regarding] the other camp [the right-wing and Christian parties] it was taken

for granted. So, we found ourselves . . . against all sides. Very early on, there was an impossibility of identification with any of the sides in the war, because of the war itself."[37]

The shift from class-based investigations into the conceptualization of communal relations of solidarity led to a reconfiguration of Charara's style of critical analysis, his theoretical universe, his horizon of expectation, and his redefinition of the function of intellectuals. It dislocated power from its previous possessors, the dominant classes and the state, to lodge it in the logic of the social fabric. The Lebanese civil war ended the militants' wagers on designating a revolutionary subject that will carry out the task of emancipation. The acknowledgment of the incapacity to a carry out an autonomous, common political project that is not enmeshed in the logics of communal solidarity signaled the unraveling of a utopian future of emancipation as the horizon of expectation of political practice.[38] Consequently, Charara developed a form of immanent critique and rearticulated the role of the intellectual in congruence with the substitution of class by community. The critic is the one who took up the role of "unmasking subjugation whenever it is cloaked with 'modern' ideologies or *asala* [authenticity]" (*WS*, 12). This rearticulation of the role of intellectuals as unmaskers of the logics of practice that lie beneath the surface of political discourse, regardless of its ideological colors, led to a stance of "permanent critique." This is not, he asserts, because of an incapacity "to be 'positive,' but because it is hard to articulate division and contradiction in the language of *belonging* that shortly after will turn into multiple oratory arts: laudation, eulogy and satire" (*WS*, 12). "The war," recalls Ahmad Beydoun, "very early on revealed itself to be a new situation, a new story, a new logic. It was over [for us]. We could not work in this situation, so we started to become 'individuals' (*afrad*), we disbanded, and each of us, approximately, became by himself."[39]

In the opening paragraph of his review of *Wars of Subjugation*, Beydoun highlighted the minoritarian position occupied by Charara who "stands alone in a desolate tight spot," who does not abide by the rules of production of Lebanese political discourses. "For amongst the protocols of competition in this field—cluttered with dullness," adds Beydoun sarcastically, "is that the valiant knight does not stand aside, but always in a *known group*, never reaching the battleground having forgotten his father's name, because he has to declare his linage before attacks and retreats: 'I am Ali son of Hussein son of Ali. . . .' And Waddah Charara has no lineage . . . or at least he declares that what he is saying cannot be spoken in the 'language of affiliation.'"[40] Beydoun's text brought out the solitary and impossible position Charara occupied by writing from a

nonaffiliated position in the first years of the war, noting the refusal of engagement with his work. Lebanese political languages, he wrote "are fences, and no one is interested in getting closer to another—through dialogue—or bringing him closer. . . . And Zayd's son and 'Amr's son may fight and later become like brothers again. However, neither fighting nor fraternizing owes anything to the rhymes [*ahaji*z] they exchange between them."[41] Beydoun reactivated the vocabulary of Arab patrilineal lineages to describe the fragmentation of shared spaces and idioms of public discourse, when in times of war texts like a coat of arms bear the insignia of the "tribe." The passing of the "masses" went hand in hand with those who seek to represent them, the family of organic and vanguardist intellectuals. The organic intellectual was dead and replaced by the tribe's poet singing his kin's glories. Charara and Ahmad Beydoun were among the first of this cohort of militant intellectuals to become "individualized" in reference to their double dissent from their leftist political parties and their communities. They refused, after their disenchantment with the Left, to retreat into the fold of sectarian identities, which would have entailed for both of them to start writing as Shi'i intellectuals, not necessarily from within the religious Shi'i tradition but from within the sectarian perspective of the community's interests.

In his historiographical magnum opus, Beydoun associated the standpoint of the critical historian who does not seek to write Lebanese history from the standpoint of his own community with that of the *sa'alik* in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic era. If Charara's sociological immanent critique took the form of unmasking the logics of subjugation that are cloaked in a multiplicity of ideological languages, whether secular or religious, Beydoun's develops a historical form. The critical historian in his reading is the one who steers away from writing a history whose matrix is the "ego-ideal" of the community. Immanent historical critique is another name for the disjunction between the community's own narrative of itself and the historian's account. This disjunction, writes Beydoun, "transforms the historian into an individual; that is, into a *su'luk*, in the old tribal terminology. We prefer the term *su'luk* to 'citizen,' which was invented by the French Revolution." This is because in Beydoun's account the labor of abstraction that produces the "citizen" through abstracting him from his attachments, and inserting him in a world of interchangeable citizens, did not take place. This individual qua historian is the exception and not the norm, which makes him a su'luk. That said, continues Beydoun, "he did not fall from a cloud. He finds his place of birth in a relatively recent social sphere; this lumpen-State (the actual State) that is at the crossroads of the communitarian lines of struggle, and that tends, in reality or ideally, to separate itself from these

lines. The communitarian historian weaves a totally smooth, total myth. The individual-historian is led by his methodology to put his finger on the fault lines of communitarian myths."[42]

Beydoun provides an alternative genealogy of the critical, dissenting "individual-historian" away from an account of modernity that emphasizes the coming into being of a society characterized by abstraction, commensurability, and interchangeability whose political form entails equality between citizens. The shape of Lebanon's postcolonial modernity renders the "individual-historian," who is the product of the modern "Lumpen State," closer to the pre-Islamic sa'alik, outcasts who, either by choice or expulsion, were no longer members of their tribes. Beydoun's association of the critic with the individual qua su'luk, in the wake of Marxist disenchantment, is the Lebanese answer to Anderson's "Olympian universalism." It urges us to inquire into the political, social, and economic conditions of possibility of adopting an "Olympian universalism." Another way of putting this is to ask, from where can you adopt an Olympian position? And to whom? The critic as su'luk is another acknowledgment of the difficulty of articulating a critical discourse that could assume a hegemonic function in a wartorn, communally divided country, where there are no "citizens" and no common political community.

In Charara's case as well, the acknowledgment of the multiplicity of criteria of power, which work according to the logic of subjugation and preempt the formation of a hegemonic political Left, steered his critical project in new directions and into new forms of articulating critique. In the wake of his observation of the failure of political abstraction and commensurability, and the incongruity of wartime practices with the categories of social and political theory, Charara relinquished the labors of theoretical abstraction that seek to conceptually subsume the discourses and practices it studies. This new modality of critique builds on Charara's Maoist phase, during which he also discovered the empirical richness of al-Jabarti's historical works, which clearly revealed to him the poverty of the theoretical discourses of towering contemporary Arab thinkers—such as Abdallah Laroui—and scholars of the Arab world who sought to subsume a very rich, contingent, and contradictory history under a few concepts.[43] In the wake of the war and his exit from militantism, he leaned on his Jabartian-Maoist heritage to fashion a form of immanent critique that confronted the coherence of the self-proclaimed discourses of political parties and communities with the contingency and multiplicity of historical events, discourses, logics, and practices that fashioned them. This form of immanent critique, as it is put to use, for instance, in Charara's detailed work of historical sociology on the formation and rise of Hizbullah, the Lebanese Shi'i militant party,

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and its ensuing clout over its community bears a number of traits in common with Nietzschean/Foucauldian genealogies.[44] It seeks to disrupt the coherence of the account the group, in this case the Shi'i Islamist military party, gives of itself, emphasizing contingent events that led to its formation, destabilizing the certainties of the group's own version of its rise and subsequent achievements. In brief, it seeks to emphasize the contingent, historical, prosaic elements in contrast to the heroic and epic dimensions in the Islamist political party's own self-image.

Charara's texts are notoriously difficult partly because of the author's methodological dictate to stay as close as possible to the thickness and dispersion of the materials he is working with. It is a reflexive method that strives toward finding the most adequate form to represent the modern transformations and fragmentations of societies divided by communal solidarities. If political universals, in the form of hegemonic projects, are preempted by proliferating logics of subjugation that tear states, societies, and institutions apart, preventing the formation of a totality, then it would be difficult to apprehend the state of division through a set of abstract universal concepts that pretend to subsume these incommensurable multiplicities. The end product is a chameleonic language that is differently colored by the language and internal references of the materials it is working through. Ibn 'Arabi's precept "Know your God, the Knowledge of a Chameleon" became one of Charara's methodological guiding lights.[45]

Orphans of the revolution, Charara and Beydoun became Lebanese citizens in a wartorn polis and "public intellectuals," without a public at the beginning of the war. Their early disenchantment and articulation of the centrality of communal solidarities during the civil war raises historiographical, theoretical, and political questions. First, it calls into question the predominant historiographical signposts that are deployed in writing histories of the international and Arab Left that seek to ground their narratives in landmarks that supposedly parallel the internationalism of the tradition and those events that are elevated to the rank of global events—the implosion of the Soviet Union. These sweeping narratives associated their global historiographical markers with grand ideological shifts as well: Marxism to liberal democracy or to neoliberalism.

Second, it raises the theoretical question of where do you fashion a critical project from, and how you do it, once you acknowledge that community is the problem, so to speak, without becoming a liberal, like some of their former comrades. The sociological and historical immanent critiques they formulated retained at their core Marx's commitment to the formulation of a reflexive

critique. Unlike liberalism's grounds of persuasion, which rest on a belief in the context-less universalism of reason, the Marxian tradition emphasized that the persuasiveness of ideas "depended on historical and situational factors like *class*."[46] It is the Marxian tradition's "emphasis on the social mediation of rational plausibility" that generates its deep theoretical engagement with the question of translation, which, through its theoretical mapping of a society's mode of production, social structure, and so on, ought to guide emancipatory political practice.[47] In noting that community displaced class as the main category of social mediation, they inhabited the difficult position where they couldn't fall back on a liberal celebration of context-less reason, while their own theorization also foreclosed the possibility of Marxist emancipatory political practice. It is this attachment to reflexivity after the passing of revolutionary hopes that makes them, to me at least, more sophisticated and interesting than Arab and non-Arab Marxists who, like Perry Anderson, retreated to an Olympian universalism and a defense of abstract, context-less reason against authoritarianism and religious politics.

In becoming critics of communal relations of subjugation and the mythohistories Lebanese communities spin about themselves, their reflexive critical practices, which took stock of their diagnosis of the difficulty of economic and political abstraction, moved away from critical theory's powers of conceptual subsumption. Their critiques became increasingly distant from the critical theory that they spent the past two decades of their lives reading, translating, and writing. Paradoxically, it is their commitment to reflexivity and to diagnosing the contours of their present, which they developed during Socialist Lebanon's days, that contributed to marginalizing them from the cosmopolitan world of traveling theory, as they increasingly articulated critique in a sociological and historical mode. This is why I focused on *Wars of Subjugation* and Beydoun's sharp reading of it. This volume marks Charara's initial movement away from Marxist concepts and into his Khaldunian-inspired analysis of the logics of operation of communal solidarities. In it one detects the movement of thought at critical hinge-moments, when the labor of beginnings, of clearing the conceptual ground, and making the case for a new interpretive idiom is performed on the ground of, and by engaging, the earlier—Marxian—one. The traces of these labors would soon vanish from view, erasing the historicity of the problem-space from what would become a normalized paradigm had initially emerged.

Last but not least, their diagnosis raises questions that still plague Lebanese political practice. If community is the main category of social mediation, and the logics of subjugation are still at work to varying degrees depending on the

local, regional, and international conjunctures between the different communities, then engaging in politics always entails deciding whether practice ought to be articulated from within these communities' boundaries while relying on their solidarities, or outside of them, like the 1960s Left half attempted to do. I say half because its autonomy was compromised with its alliance with the more powerful Kamal Jumblatt, who had a double life, one inside and the other outside the Lebanese sectarian system. Jumblatt's duality was nicely captured by a distinguished representative of the prewar establishment's political club. In the aftermath of the last parliamentary elections before the war (1972), Saeb Salam, four-time prime minister of Lebanon, said of Jumblatt, who was awarded the Lenin Peace Prize by the Soviet Union (1972): "We welcome Kamal Jumblatt, the son of the noble Lebanese house and the leader of the esteemed sect [the Druze]. We, however, utterly refuse to deal with him as a promoter of strikes and sabotage and the protector of the Left and communism, and the exploiter of popular causes."[48]

Coda—Marxism in Crisis: Antitotalitarianism, Nationalism, and Post-Marxism

The first years of the Lebanese civil war in 1975 coincided with the antitotalitarian moment in the French intellectual field that cut short the leftist and Third Worldist militancy of the 1960s' shifting intellectual and political preoccupations to the support of dissenters from the Soviet Union and issues of human rights. In *Wars of Subjugation* Charara digressed a little from the diagnosis of wartime violence to ironically note that if the capitalist metropoles practiced their "barbarism in 'Sun My' or 'My Lai', that's imperialism. . . . The Archipelagoes of political concentration on the other hand do not concern us, for we are in the national democratic phase, and we befriend those who befriend us, like Vietnam" (*WS*, 227).[49] I was intrigued by the use of "Archipelagoes" in this fleeting critique of the Left's silence on the violence perpetrated by its own camp, and whether it was a reference to Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*. Charara, it turned out, had read the book on his rooftop in Burj Hammud as soon as it came out in French, during his years of Maoist militancy (June 1974).[50] The publication of *The Gulag Archipelago* had a tremendous effect on France's intellectual field:

> Unable to ignore so unimpeachable a source, Dreyfus and Dostoevsky in one, non-Communist intellectuals underwent a Damascene conversion. The scales fell from their eyes, exposing them not only to the true

enormity of "real socialism," but to the realization that the worm was in the bud. Not Stalin or Lenin, but Marx—and, in a flight backwards, Hegel and Rousseau (possibly Plato)—was the progenitor of the *univers concentrationnaire*. Contra Sartre, [Raymond] Aron, Camus and Castoriadis had been right all along.[51]

The "gulag effect" was spearheaded by former militant intellectuals of different generations. Both Claude Lefort (1924–2010), a student of Merleau-Ponty's and cofounder with the Greek polymath and revolutionary Cornelius Castoriadis of Socialisme ou Barbarie (1949–65), and the younger André Glucksmann (1937–2015), member of La Gauche Prolétarienne (1968–73), produced book-long essays on Solzhenitsyn.[52] The two commentaries "reprimanding other intellectuals for not listening to Solzhenitsyn, and developing political philosophies proclaimed in his name . . . were highly influential in the developing critique of totalitarianism."[53] The Solzhenitsyn years, from the mid- to late 1970s, left their mark on newspapers (*Le Nouvel Observateur*), journals (*Esprit*), and scholarly works such as that of the anthropologist Pierre Clastres and on François Furet's influential *Penser La Révolution Française* (1978).[54] Michel Foucault's oeuvre also stands witness to the mood of the age. The first edition of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975) "compares the Gulag and the West's disciplinary institutions, which he describes as an 'archipel carcéral.'"[55] The new media "stars," a number of whom were former '68ers, of this anti-Marxist intellectual movement who became known as "les nouveaux philosophes" made the cover story of *Time Magazine* in the autumn of 1977 with the title "Marx Is Dead," the international press "betraying evident pleasure at the discovery (at long last!) of a group of young, handsome and militantly anti-Marxist French intellectuals."[56]

Back in Beirut, the circuits of traveling revolutionary theory and militants were also interrupted, although it was less as a result of theoretico-political waves. The fragmentation of the subject and agent of revolution along communal lines and the resurgence of identitarian binaries in the wake of the Iranian Revolution foreclosed both the politics of internationalist solidarity and the mediation between theory and practice that the earlier practices of translation and transfiguration had enabled. A decade had passed since the Marxist and anticolonial publications published by Maspero were read, discussed, and translated by eager twenty-something men and women in Socialist Lebanon circles. In the early 1980s, François Maspero ended up selling his publishing house, which became Éditions la Découverte, after he stipulated that the name

be changed. The internationalist circuit of Left traveling militants also came to a halt. The Dziga Vertov Group, which included the Swiss-French director Jean-Luc Godard, spent three months in 1970 shooting in Palestinian refugee camps in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon in preparation for a film in support of the revolution that was to be titled "Til Victory: Thinking and Working Methods of the Palestinian Revolution." It was commissioned, and partially funded, by the Information Service Bureau of Fatah. In mid-1980s Beirut, after the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the defeat of the Palestinian resistance (1982), and the increasing inter- and intracommunal divisions, circulating was fraught with many more dangers for westerners, including potential kidnappings by the newly formed Islamist groups.

These political transformations, which had started to bring the earlier decades of Marxist internationalist militancy to an end, were not confined to the Arab or Muslim worlds. In the first lines of *Imagined Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson, working from another part of the world, revealed how nationalism, one of the perennial thorns in Marxism's side, had made another cut in the leftist internationalist fabric:

> Perhaps without being much noticed yet, a fundamental transformation in the history of Marxism and Marxist movements is upon us. Its most visible signs are the recent wars between Vietnam, Cambodia and China. These wars are of world-historical importance because they are the first to occur between regimes whose independence and revolutionary credentials are undeniable, and because none of the belligerents has made more than the most perfunctory attempts to justify the bloodshed in terms of a recognizable *Marxist* theoretical perspective.[57]

The globally interconnected world, united by the ideological coordinates of emancipation from capitalism and imperialism and fashioned by the internationalist solidarity networks of militants and the labors of conceptual transfiguration, had begun its disintegration from different corners.

Charara's wartime theory of the difficulty of achieving hegemony in societies that are deeply divided along communal lines, where it is difficult to separate political practice from the social foundations on which it rises, reveals the limits of post-Marxist theories that, in the mid-1980s, supplemented the last great Marxist debates of the 1970s. These theories, and here I have in mind Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's distinguished contributions, sought to move beyond a class essentialism by deconstructing and reactivating Marxist categories and dissociating the notion of antagonism from its class referent.[58] As a result, the political actors and social movements that

can potentially carry out emancipatory struggles have been multiplied, beyond the contradiction between Labor and Capital and the proletariat as the presupposed universal subject of revolution. Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical project rested on asserting the autonomy of political activity and a hegemony that constituted a politically specific universality as a result of a contingent articulating practice:

> As we argue, only one particularity whose body is split, for without ceasing to be its own particularity, it transforms its body in the representation of a universality transcending it (that of the equivalential chain). This relation, by which a certain particularity assumes the representation of a universality entirely incommensurable with it, is what we call a hegemonic relation. As a result, its universality is a contaminated universality: (1) it lives in this unresolvable tension between universality and particularity; (2) its function of hegemonic universality is not acquired for good but is, on the contrary, always reversible. Although we are no doubt radicalizing the Gramscian intuition in several respects, we think that something of the sort is implicit in Gramsci's distinction between corporative and hegemonic class.[59]

Charara's analysis signaled the difficulty of a hegemonic articulation in a political terrain saturated by communal solidarities that form an integral part of capitalist relations of production and of the modus operandi of the workings of the Lebanese state. *Origins of Sectarianism* signaled the difficulty of the Maronites in the twentieth century both to represent their own interests and to craft a hegemonic pro-Western Lebanese nationalism that is economically integrated into, and politically separated from, its Arab surroundings. The clashes of 1958 and the wars that began in the mid-1970s bear witness to that. More recently, Hizbullah, the militant Shi'i Islamist political party and militia, attempted to articulate a hegemonic vision of Lebanon along the lines of its own agenda of a "Culture of Resistance," in alignment with the Syrian and Iranian regimes, against the Israeli breaches of Lebanese sovereignty and the dictates of US foreign policy. In all of these cases, the condition that Laclau and Mouffe describe, in which a "particular social force assumes the representation of a totality that is radically incommensurable with it" to form a "hegemonic universality," failed. The divisions of the Lebanese state along its confessional lines, by enmeshing political practice in the multiple webs of the social fabric, ensured the prevalence of multiple countervailing powers that has till now foreclosed the emergence of dictatorial or authoritarian regimes, such as the ones ruling neighboring Arab countries. The obverse of that coin is that those

same countervailing powers, whether they are represented in the state apparatus or not, have, through their mutual attempts at subjugating each other, produced a constant oscillation between civil wars and "cold civil-communal peace"—and thus have so far preempted the formation of a totality that could be represented by a particular political force.[60]

6. TRAVELING THEORY AND POLITICAL PRACTICE

Orientalism in the Age of the Islamic Revolution

I speak of "occidentosis" as of tuberculosis. But perhaps it more closely resembles an infestation of weevils. Have you seen how they attack wheat? From the inside. The bran remains intact, but it is just a shell, like a cocoon left behind on a tree.

—JALAL AL-E AHMAD

Our culture was felt to be of a lower grade.

—EDWARD SAID

My dear friends, you should know that the danger from the communist powers is not less than America. . . . Both superpowers have risen for the obliteration of the oppressed nations and we should support the oppressed people of the world.

—AYATOLLAH RUHOLLAH KHOMEINI

In the span of a few years (1972–76), as he confronted organizational crises at the heart of the OCAL he helped found (1970–), militant setbacks (1972–73), and the eruption of fighting (1975–), Waddah Charara attempted to take stock of the fast-paced unfolding of events he took part in, and observed, in a politically saturated, polarized society. Leaning on theoretical resources from the Marxist tradition Charara's works from that period called into question the Left's theories of the workings of capitalism and sectarianism in Lebanon. In his late militant years (1973–75) Charara's populist Maoism first turned "backwardness into an advantage" by celebrating the revolutionary potential of the masses as they are, enmeshed in their communal forms of solidarity in their neighborhoods, outside of an imaginary idea of the "factory worker" devoid of attachments.[1] He attempted to resolve the militant's conundrum by stretching the notion of class struggle so that it encompasses communal solidarities while acknowledging how including these forms redefines the notion, foreclosing the possibility of emancipatory teleology. Second, it showed the founding paradox at the heart of modern Lebanon, by underscoring how sectarianism is a modern outcome of nineteenth-century Maronite peasants' struggle against their lords.

Both these accounts celebrate and highlight the primacy of political practice from below and, in *Origins of Sectarian Lebanon*, its capacity to fashion subjectivities and new military, economic, and political forms of organization. The autonomy of the political, and of the masses' own initiatives, were advanced as an internal, minoritarian, oppositional argument against top-down organizational forms, and against vanguardist and instrumental political practices. It also targeted a common Marxist theoretical trope that takes the form of designating the agent, for example, capitalism or the Palestinian revolution, that will get rid of difference—sectarianism as a brake on revolutionary politics—and pave the way for a "difference-free" emancipatory political practice. After the outbreak of the fighting, he underlined again the poverty of social and political theory in accounting for the logics of power, and the forms of violence, at work during civil wars.[2] Ibn Khaldun's accounts of fusion and subjugation supplemented Mao's and Gramsci's emphasis on the political and the operations of hegemony. Charara moved from a celebration of the autonomy of the political will of the masses against a vanguardist Marxism to the practical realization of the structural primacy of the social fabric over the political and the ideological. This last move foreclosed the hope of an emancipation-to-come. Political practice no longer made History. It became hostage of the social fabric's structural times of repetition.

Charara inhabited an impossible position that did not easily align itself with the axes of theoretical and political positioning either in Arab cultural spheres or in the Western academy. It was an anti-anti-imperialist political position that articulated an immanent critique of communal politics—and adopted a genealogical approach to the history of Arab societies and discourses while leaning on their own theoretical resources—coupled with a muted attachment to a horizon of emancipation from the communal logics of subjugation. It was, at one and the same time, *politically* critical of the Left and subsequent Islamist militant anti-imperialist forces, *theoretically* Arab-Islamic, and *normatively* attached to an overcoming of the permanent civil wars produced by the logics of subjugation. Charara's impossible position will be at odds with the anti-imperialism of diasporic thinkers, like Edward Said, who subjected the West's knowledges of the non-West to critical scrutiny, revealing their entanglement with power, and of the majority of his former comrades at home who splintered in different political directions in the wake of the fragmentation of the revolutionary subject into its infranational communal solidarities and the high tides of militant Islamist political practices after the Iranian Revolution in 1979.

This chapter takes the critical reception of Said's *Orientalism* as its focal point, to chart the theoretical and political divergences that separated Left

militant intellectuals at home from diasporic critics who were initially brought together by their support of, and engagement with, the Palestinian revolution in the wake of the 1967 defeat. In doing so, I also highlight Charara's solitary position along these cardinal axes that came to delimit the different positions of thinkers and intellectuals. Charara's critiques of Eurocentrism, and the modernizing distinctions of social theory that separate myth and ritual from politics and economics in the face of the salience of communal forms of solidarity, have much in common with Arab diasporic modalities of criticism and with the South Asian ones that will inaugurate the field of postcolonial studies in the Anglophone academies. Having said that, these agendas of criticism, operating in different problem-spaces and arising from different personal and political experiences and sensibilities, will become increasingly at odds with each other. For instance, both Charara and Ranajit Guha, the inspiration behind the Subaltern Studies collective, who were also influenced by Gramsci's and Mao's thought, used the same expression, "dominance without hegemony," to diagnose their respective postcolonial modernities. Having said that, this term does different labors for these two thinkers. For Guha, "dominance without hegemony" is imbricated within a historical project critical of the postcolonial state that reveals the continuities between the rule of colonial and national elites. Charara's argument in *Wars of Subjugation* about the imbrication of the political in the social was formulated in the aftermath of the state's breakdown and the acknowledgment of the impossibility of revolutionary practice during a sectarian civil war. As the subaltern historians posited the subaltern as the new revolutionary subject, Charara was affirming the impossibility of identification with any of the warring parties.[3]

Charara's critique of the Lebanese and Palestinian anti-imperialist Left, and his focus on the logics of subjugation and the mutating resilience of forms of social solidarity, will come to clash with the anti-imperialist critique of Eurocentrism that singled out the epistemological layer for criticism, catching like wildfire in the wake of Said's *Orientalism* (1978). This critique unmasked how Western concepts, artworks, traditions, and disciplines reified non-Western difference and marked it as inferior and backward. It revealed the entanglement of representations of non-Europeans in the colonial enterprise. These critical strategies also showed how modern "universal" categories could never escape their own European particular origins. Therefore, their deployment across the globe by Westerners and non-Westerners was not part and parcel of a universal process of modernization but an imperial act of epistemological and ontological violence. To put it briefly, they injected history into the culturalist reifications of Orientalists to undo the exceptionalism of the "Orient" and

foregrounded the culturalism of unmarked universal categories. Both these strategies are acts of theoretical anti-imperialism—they are defensive vis-à-vis non-Western societies and extend the critique of Western imperialism beyond the economic and the political to the discursive.

The critical works of Said and Charara, who were both writing in the mid- to late 1970s, shared an important feature. They both sidelined the ideological dimension of the political by uncovering deeper and more fundamental planes than the ideological one that organizes the difference between Left and Right, progressives and reactionaries. They did it from different angles, though. The first showed how, in practice, the political could not extricate itself from the *social fabric*, while the second argued in theory how it could not extricate itself from *discourse*. The primacy of the social fabric, and of the discursive, sidelined the political and rendered the ideological more or less epiphenomenal to what came to be posited as a deeper structural ground. Moreover, both authors posited that modalities of operation of the social fabric, and of Orientalist discourses, managed to both transform themselves historically while reproducing themselves. The communal forms of solidarities are modernity's offspring, whose articulation is transformed with the modern state, capitalist penetration, and urbanization, while retaining their function. *Orientalism*, in Said's text, can digest and incorporate works by different traditions and authors—for example, Oswald Spengler, Darwinism, the Freudian tradition—and transform itself from textual hermeneutics to area studies modernization theories while retaining its structural knowledge-power features.

This is where similarities end. At a time when diasporic intellectuals were theoretically criticizing their disciplines for their culturalist reifications, militants and intellectuals at home were discovering, and confronting politically, the problem of the social fabric. To put it somewhat crudely, when the Manchester anthropologist Emrys Peters was dealing with genealogies of Shi'i families, equilibrium models, and trying to account for historical change and reproduction, Socialist Lebanon's militant intellectuals, many of whom came from southern Shi'i villages—the same area Peters was doing fieldwork in— were reading Marx, Althusser, Gramsci, and Foucault to formulate a revolutionary project.[4] Anglophone metropolitan academic fields, as I have noted earlier, were theoretically "belated" vis-à-vis the readings of Lebanese New Left militant intellectuals. That said, belatedness is not only an "abstract" temporal marker that connotes a before and an after. It is a function of power that inscribes itself temporally. When anthropologists and literary critics drew on these same theoretical resources in the mid- to late 1970s to subject their disciplines to critique, these by now disenchanted militants had already left these

theories behind to home in on understanding the communal violence that was tearing the country apart.

In the wake of the Iranian Revolution, the politics of culture will come to occupy center stage, adding further complications to the multiple communal politics at work. Diasporic oppositional intellectuals had to increasingly face the problem of the politics of representation of Islam. This took the form of opposing increased racialization and discrimination where they lived, and an anti-imperialist, anti-interventionist stance against multiple strands of imperial liberalism, feminism, and so on. Whether on the internal front or the external one, the diasporic oppositional position could be articulated within a theoretico-political jargon of binary opposition: colonizer/colonized; empire/resistance, self/other; majority/minority; secular liberalism/Islam. Things were not nearly as clear-cut and easy in the Arab world. For instance, the aftermaths of the Iranian Revolution witnessed the formation of militant Islamist parties that confronted the anti-imperialist Left. By the late 1980s the Lebanese Left had lost its ideological, political, and military confrontations with the nascent Islamist groups. Militants and thinkers had to confront a host of political and military powers—foreign interventions, Arab regimes, militant Islamist political parties, and infranational communal forces—that could not fit neatly into the anti-imperialist binary matrix.

With every intra-Arab major event that will take place, starting with Lebanese civil war or even the Jordanian Black September until the Arab revolutions, without forgetting the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the pan-Arab political consensus around "Empire" as the main contradiction, which reached its zenith during Nasser's reign, will slowly erode. The Syrian revolution will reveal the moral and political bankruptcy of the Arab and international anti-imperialist discourse that denied its solidarity to Syrian revolutionaries from the beginning on the basis of a geopolitical support of a "progressive," "anti-imperialist," "secular" regime. All of these events, forces, and powers could hardly be squeezed within the binary matrix of diasporic intellectuals who have developed the *theoretical* critique of Empire at the time when leftist and secular nationalist *political* anti-imperialist forces were being sidelined by Israeli invasions, authoritarian regimes, communal forces, and militant Islamists who took from them the anti-imperialist mantle.

Even when oppositional diasporic intellectuals such as Said were critical of the authoritarianism of regimes and of communal infranational politics, these practices did not constitute for them an *event in theory* that steered them toward a conceptual investigation of the modalities of power at work. Their criticisms remained ideological ones that condemned the abuses of power and

corruption of authoritarian rule, or called for upholding values such as freedom of speech and human rights, but did not displace Empire as the main object of their political and theoretical cathexis.

In other words, this is a story of the dispersion and fragmentation of a generation of intellectuals, both at home and in the diaspora, who were brought together by, and became political allies and fellow travelers, of the Palestinian revolution in the late 1960s. The military defeat of 1967 snatched academics at home and in the diaspora, like Edward Said and Sadik al-Azm, from their professional lives and threw them into the political fray.[5] The meteoric rise of the Palestinian revolution, as the alternative revolutionary force in the wake of the defeat of the "progressive regimes," brought together the new political converts, as well as the militant intellectuals of Socialist Lebanon. It won't take much time before the two academics and the militant intellectual (Said, al-Azm, and Charara), who were united in the wake of 1967 by their solidarity with the Palestinian revolution, will go their separate political and theoretical ways. The relationship of al-Azm, a fellow traveler of the Palestinian New Left, with the revolution deteriorated after the events of Black September in 1970, during which it clashed with the Jordanian army. al-Azm wrote a book lambasting the failure of the Palestinian experience in Jordan.[6] It caused him several problems. He lost his job with the PLO's Research Center (Markaz al-Abhath al-Filastini) in Beirut, which he took part in founding, after Arafat considered him persona non grata, and he was forced to use a pseudonym whenever he published pieces in *Shu'un Filastiniyya* (Palestinian Affairs).[7] Very early on, Charara theorized the revolutionary potential of the Palestinian resistance, dubbing it the detonator of Lebanese contradictions in 1969, calling a few years later on the masses to fuse with it at the height of his Maoist phase of militancy (1973). In the wake of the civil and regional wars, he would grow increasingly distant from and severely critical of the military and political practices of the Palestinian resistance in Lebanon. Unlike al-Azm and Charara, whose critique of the Palestinian revolution pertained to its intra-Arab practices in Jordan and Lebanon, Said will resign from the Palestinian National Council much later (1991) in protest over the terms the PLO agreed to for going to the Madrid conference, before becoming a vocal critic of the Oslo accords (1993) and their legacies.

Fragmentation and Conversion of the Revolutionary Subject

In the wake of the Lebanese civil and regional wars, the posited Arab revolutionary subject began its division into its infranational, regional, familial, and sectarian components. A couple of years later, the Iranian Revolution of 1979

and its regional aftershocks brought to a close the anticolonial age of national liberation inaugurated by the Egyptian Free Officers in 1952, nearly thirty years earlier. What took place in Iran proved that Islam, to the chagrin of a couple of generations of modernization theorists, could be an endogenous revolutionary force. Why go to Marx, a nineteenth-century European thinker, when you could politically mobilize the masses through their own autochthonous tradition? Moreover, a decade and a half after its rise, the Palestinian revolution was defeated in the wake of the brutal Israeli invasion of Lebanon (1982).

These thirty years, from the Egyptian Revolution of July 1952 to the June 1982 invasion, would constitute the thick ideological interlude during which political questions, namely, anticolonial ones, were negotiated for the most part on a common discursive ground, which began its splintering by the late 1970s. It was this age of thick ideological politics that produced the demand for intellectual labor and theories to guide political practice toward achieving socialism, Arab unity, and national liberation, as well as arguments about the appropriate organizational forms this practice ought to take: Would it be a loose collective leadership? A Marxist-Leninist democratic centralism? Or a more a Maoist inspired mass line? The most appropriate modes of militant struggle were also debated: Should it be conventional warfare by the regular armies of the nation-states? Or should one adopt a national popular liberation war, and follow the foco theory of revolution? Whether they understood themselves as a Leninist vanguard, Gramscian organic intellectuals, or swimming like a fish in the masses' waters following Mao Tse-Tung's aphorism, the labors of militant intellectuals were predicated on the presence of the people, a universal subject and agent of emancipation. This fragmentation not only destroyed the societal and discursive ground from which their theories rose but also dispensed with the role of the progressive committed intellectual and the revolutionary militant intellectual: Where does he speak from? And to whom does he address himself after the fissuring of the masses—the revolutionary subject—into a multiplicity of regional, familial, sectarian, and religious loyalties?

From the 1980s onward, the stark secular/religious and modernity/authenticity binaries would come to replace the earlier multiplicity of ideological shades. The vigorous arguments in the 1960s and early 1970s on the most appropriate forms of socialism would soon be perceived as faint echoes of a vanished world. One can get a glimpse of these larger historical transformations in following the successive theoretical and political turns of Georges Tarabishi, the prolific Syrian thinker (1939–2016). Tarabishi, who started out as an Arab nationalist and a member of the Baʿth Party, later steered toward Sartre and Marxism, the title of his first book (1964).[8] Sartre's positions in the wake of the

June 1967 war, which did not express solidarity with the Arabs' cause, shocked the Sartrean Arab intelligentsia. "In a few days," Tarabishi recalls, "his [Sartre] aura crumbled."[9] With the beginning of the Lebanese civil and regional wars in 1975, Tarabishi took refuge in Freudian psychoanalysis: "He [Freud] helped me to stay alive intellectually and psychically, he was a protecting father against all this barbarian auto-destruction."[10] In the 1980s Tarabishi began reading and commenting on the Islamic tradition (turath), engaging in a "struggle against Islamism," and founding, in 2007, a decade before his death, the League of Arab Rationalists.[11] Dwelling in the ruins of the Left and having lost their revolutionary organizational moorings, some of these former revolutionaries would retreat to guard the Enlightenment's temple.

If militant intellectuals of the late 1960s attacked the Arab regimes and revolutionaries for not being radical enough, three decades later some would withdraw to a defense of liberal and democratic ideals. "Don't you agree with me that some old Marxists have taken off their cloaks and put on secularist and sometimes fundamentalist ones?" al-Azm was asked in 2007. "This is true," he replied, affirming that with the failure of socialist experiences, a majority of Marxists have "retreated to the second line of defense."[12] In a retrospective gesture, al-Azm tells his interviewer that his generation of Marxists thought they were defending "a more advanced set of values" than "human rights, social justice, democracy and the rotation of power," which were brought forth by the French Revolution and the "liberal revolution."[13] al-Azm then points out that a substantial number of Marxist intellectuals staged a defense of these values "in the face of a 'Medieval Talibani' march . . . we are now faced either by the emergency and martial laws [of the postcolonial regimes] or the Taliban model."[14] Unlike Charara's immanent sociological diagnostic critique, al-Azm's description of the political situation is an ideological lament mapped on a secular/religious Enlightenment grid. al-Azm sees in the retreat to liberalism—a historicism in reverse—an insurrectionary ideological language that calls for the defense of the "values" that are threatened by state authoritarianism and the forces of "medieval" religious forces. His diagnosis was not uncommon in the years preceding the Arab uprisings. Samir Kassir, who defined himself as a secular, westernized, Levantine Arab, wrote the following:

> If it is primarily a consequence of the democratic deficit, the rise of political Islam could not constitute an answer to the impasse of Arab states and societies. While it is a resistance to oppression, it [the rise] is also born from the failure of the modern state and the ideologies of progress

and in this sense it has a resemblance to the rise of fascisms in Europe. Actually, the social conduct of Islamist movements reveals a number of analogies with fascist dictatorships once the religious veil that envelops them is uncovered.[15]

While al-Azm (1934–2016) and Kassir (1960–2005) belonged to two different generations, separated by a quarter of a century, these two intellectuals were bound by a common affiliation to a defeated leftist tradition and the vision of total emancipation it sustained.

Shifting the analytical gaze inward toward the culture of these societies, inaugurated as a minoritarian position in the wake of 1967 and propelled then by the ethical impulse to take responsibility for one's defeat, became more and more normalized, and at times acrimonious, among some disenchanted leftists. Some, such as the Tunisian ex-Marxist al-Afif al-Akhdar (1934–2013), welcomed foreign military operations during the US invasion of Iraq (2003) as the solution to the deadlock of "unenlightened religious culture" and authoritarian rule.[16] In 1965, three years after Algeria's independence, al-Akhdar took part in the meeting between Che Guevara and Abu Jihad at the Hotel Elité in Algiers.[17] Forty years separate the victory of the Algerians against French colonialism (1962) and the American occupation of Iraq (2003). Forty years also separate the meeting of Al-Akhdar with Guevara in Algiers from his celebration of the US missiles on, and the invasion of, Iraq. The harsh prose of this veteran of national liberation struggles, Marxist ideologue, and militant alongside the Palestinian resistance from 1962 until he left Beirut for Paris in the first years of the Lebanese civil war (1975–90) is not his alone.

Facing those disenchanted leftists who had elected the question of culture and modernity as "the main contradiction" were their ex-comrades who remained attached to the question of politics and empire as the central contradiction, critically aligning themselves at points, as fellow travelers, with nascent militant Islamist parties, such as Hizbullah and Hamas, who took on board the national question. The fracturing of the Marxist ground of total emancipation from colonialism and imperialism, economic exploitation, and tradition split the inheritors into those coalescing around the first leg of the tripod, focusing on geopolitical analysis (game of nations), the balance of powers, and imperial intervention (external causes), and those emphasizing culture, sectarianism, and religion as the internal impediments to progress (internal causes). In the splitting of the Marxist inheritance between culture and geopolitics, the socioeconomic question found no heirs. The calls of the very few who claimed it were muffled in a setting saturated by questions

of authenticity/modernity, authoritarian rule and civil wars, and relentless imperial interventions.

Reading Orientalism *in the Wake of the Iranian Revolution*

If Said published "The Arab Portrayed" in the wake of the 1967 defeat with a focus on the Arabs, by 1981 he would put out *Covering Islam*, which tackled the image of Islam in the West, particularly in the US, and the different uses it is put to.[18] From 1979 onward, a string of events, including the Iranian Revolution, the assassination of Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat (1981) in the wake of the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt (1978), and the aftermaths of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979), will increasingly put "Islam" at the center of media, policy, and scholarly attention. Said noted in *Covering Islam* the "critical absence of expert opinion on Islam" (18), highlighting in the process the experts' failure to understand that "much of what truly mattered about postcolonial states could not be easily herded under the rubric of 'stability'" (22) and how the area programs that house modern scholars of Islam are "affiliated to the mechanism by which national policy is set" (19). Around the same time, "Islam," long the preserve of Orientalists, emerged as an object of anthropological inquiry. Talal Asad opens "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," an essay that realigned the coordinates of the field, by saying that "in recent years, there has been increasing interest in something called the anthropology of Islam. Publications by Western anthropologists containing the word 'Islam' or 'Muslim' in the title multiply at a remarkable rate. The political reasons for this great industry are perhaps too evident to deserve much comment."[19]

The 1980s inaugurated the battle for the representation of Islam that took place on several fronts: the academy, the media, and policy centers. Ayatollah Khomeini is the icon par excellence of this decade, which heralded the post–Cold War politics of culture. A few months before his death in 1989, Khomeini addressed both the Eastern and Western camps. On January 1, he sent a long letter to Mikhail Gorbachev, the general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, which he concluded by noting that "the Islamic Republic of Iran as the greatest and most powerful base of the Islamic world can easily fill the vacuum religious faith in your society."[20] A few weeks later, on February 14, 1989, he issued his famous death sentence against Salman Rushdie, which alongside the burning of *The Satanic Verses* in Bradford, England, a month earlier, increased the hostility toward Muslim immigrants and saw the proliferation of discourses about Muslim "fundamentalism," "violence," and "integration" into the "host" society.[21] By the end of the 1980s, the battle for the representation of Islam was

a no longer a matter of "how we see the rest of the world," as Said's subtitle to *Covering Islam* had it. It gradually became an integral part of internal politics in Europe and increasingly in the US after the September 11, 2001, attacks.

"Maybe the biggest catastrophe that befell Arabs is Marxism as a set of foreign templates," said Maroun Baghdadi (1950–93), the young and talented Lebanese movie director in February 1979, to his interviewer Hazem Saghieh (1951–), a journalist at the Beirut-based *al-Safir* daily. "Until now, Marxism did not manage to find a place for itself in the Arab world."[22] The Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), which was founded in 1924, had been around for more than half a century when Baghdadi underscored Marxism's exogenous status. Having said that, this statement was not really an affront to the longevity of the LCP. Its shock effect, so to speak, comes from the fact that it was asserted only a decade after the birth of the New Left by one of its members. Both intellectuals, Baghdadi the movie director, and Saghieh the journalist, were previously associated with the OCAL.

As a result of a historical contingency, Said's US-based critique of Marx and contemporary Third World radicals was contemporaneous with the rise of the question of culture, one symptom of which was a wave of conversion of Marxist militants into supporters of political Islam in the wake of the Iranian Revolution. This conversion was particularly prominent among Lebanese and Palestinian Maoist militants and intellectuals, for whom swimming in the waters of the masses entailed this time around an exit from Marxism into the authenticity of the masses' creed. Roger Assaf, the prominent Lebanese theater director, who did his Maoist établissement in the Palestinian camps in the 1970s, was one of the converts. Assaf told his interviewer: "The passage to Islam was a putting into practice of Maoist principles. I went into Islam, like others go to the factory. But here in Lebanon, no one goes to the factory. There are no factories, or so few of them."[23] Nicolas Dot-Pouillard draws our attention to the fact that "the intellectuals of Fatah's Student Brigade began integrating a non-Marxist intellectual corpus: Ali Shariati, and particularly Ibn Khaldoun" before the Iranian Revolution.[24] I quote at length from Dot-Pouillard's interview with Nazir Jahel, a member of the brigades, who taught at the Lebanese University:

> For us, what did Maoism and the passage to Islamism entail: it was reading our history, in order to transform it; reading our culture, our history, through apparatuses and conceptual tools that we could fashion ourselves through a return to traditions (turath), to history, to Islamic thought. We read Mao, Lenin, Gramsci, all the Marxists, but we also began reading Ibn Khaldun. . . . We reinvented a vocabulary with *Ghalaba*

[predominance], *'Assabiyya, Mumana'a* (resistance, refusal), Hadara (civilization). . . . All of this led us bit by bit to Khomeini, to Islam. Because Khomeini constituted an effective mass discourse, a popular discourse that articulated the intellectual dimension with the popular aspect.[25]

The conversion from Marxism into a Khomeinist militant Islam via Maoism's vector retained its Third Worldist anti-imperialism, but rearticulated it through Arab-Islamic conceptual tools. The conversion was both a personal and theoretical act of cultural decolonization as well as a political alignment with the Islamic masses, under the leadership of Khomeini, as the new revolutionary subject.

Souheil al-Kache, another member of the brigades who was swept by the tidal waves of the Iranian Revolution, criticized modernist Arab thinkers for reproducing the classifications of Orientalists, while underlining how for Islamists these two groups share the same theoretical framework and are associated with foreign political, ideological, and cultural interests.[26] In opposition to the sapping of Islam by colonialism and its internal agents, the Islamist discourse asserts, according to al-Kache, the continuity of the Arab and Islamic Self throughout history, refusing the narrative of its defeat by the West. This emphasis on the historical continuity of the self enables a politics of cohesion in the face of the central issue: "that of foreign domination, particularly on the cultural level."[27] The discourse of the Islamic Awakening, al-Kache argues, constitutes the resolution of the West's cultural domination since it affirms the Muslim Self, as a discourse of the master that escapes the resentment of the dominated. This discourse, he writes, stands for the end of the contradiction with "Orientalism and its shadow, the modernist Arab intellectual." Its fundamental concern in its hostility to Orientalism, he adds, is a political one, but it also leaves its marks on the methods and hermeneutics of Arab political thought. In advocating an affirmation of Muslim identity as a voluntary action, the "Muslim Self" is resuscitated "while ignoring the Other (the West). This Other then sees the universalism of its culture contested. Al-Khomeini is the best illustration of this discourse."[28] The revolutionary fervor of some of the converts to and fellow travelers of militant Khomeinist political Islam will subside in the wake of the Iran-Iraq War, and Khomeini's "quasi-total elimination of the Marxist Left and the Islamo-Marxist one in Iran."[29]

Marxists like al-Azm, who did not exit the tradition like Charara and Beydoun, or were not swayed by the Iranian Revolution, will increasingly become on the defensive. "Former radicals, ex-communists, unorthodox Marxists, and disillusioned nationalists" have come to form, in the wake of the Iranian

Revolution, "a revisionist Arab line of political thought," wrote al-Azm in his review of *Orientalism*.[30] "Their central thesis may be summarized as follows: 'The national salvation so eagerly sought by the Arabs since the Napoleonic occupation of Egypt is to be found neither in secular nationalism (be it radical, conservative, or liberal) nor in revolutionary communism, socialism or what have you, but in a return to the authenticity of what they call 'popular political Islam'" (234). The set of conditions that confronted *Orientalism*'s eastern travels couldn't have been more fraught. At a time when Marxists were being politically and ideologically attacked from their eastern flank, so to speak, came an additional theoretical blow, this time, though, from New York. In his afterword to *Orientalism*, written in 1994, Said wrote the following on the reception of his book in the Arab world:

> Moreover, the actuality I described in the book's last pages, of one powerful discursive system maintaining hegemony over another, was intended as the opening salvo in a debate that might stir Arab readers and critics to engage more determinedly with the system of Orientalism. I was either upbraided for not having paid closer attention to Marx—the passages on Marx's own Orientalism in my book were the most singled out by dogmatic critics in the Arab world and India, for instance—whose system of thought was claimed to have risen above his obvious prejudices, or I was criticized for not appreciating the great achievements of Orientalism, the West, etc. As with the defenses of Islam, recourse to Marxism or the "West" as a coherent total system seems to me to have been a case of using one orthodoxy to shoot down another.[31]

Indeed, al-Azm and Mahdi 'Amil spent a lot of intellectual energy on these few pages of Said's book, strenuously attempting to extricate the moor (Marx) from the charge of Orientalism. Marx's views on British rule in India in Said's work were put to work to reveal how a non-Orientalist's writings on Asia first reveal his "humanity" and "fellow feeling" for the suffering inflicted by colonialism to be shortly hijacked thereafter by Orientalist discourses when Marx posits that the British destroyer is also the creator of a new modern society. "The idea of regenerating a fundamentally lifeless Asia," wrote Said, "is a piece of pure Romantic Orientalism." Marx's humanity has succumbed in Said's reading to the "unshakable definitions built up by Orientalist science."[32] al-Azm's tone in his defense of Marx is harsh:

> I think that this account of Marx's views and analyses of highly complex historical processes and situations is a travesty. . . . Marx's manner of

analyzing British rule in India in terms of an unconscious tool of history—which is making possible a real social revolution by destroying the old India and laying the foundations of a new order—cannot be ascribed under any circumstances to the usurpation of Marx's mind by conventional Orientalistic verbiage. Marx's explanation (regardless of whether one agrees or disagrees with it) testifies to his theoretical consistency in general. . . . Like the European capitalist class, British rule in India was its own grave digger. There is nothing particularly "Orientalistic" about this explanation. Furthermore, Marx's call for revolution in Asia is more historically realistic and promising than any noble sentiments that he could have lavished on necessarily vanishing socioeconomic formations. (226–27)

al-Azm's strategy of defense lay in reinscribing Marx's views on Asia within his overall progressive historicist framework, undoing in the process any essentialization of East and West as a product of Orientalism's "ahistorical bourgeois bent of mind" (228). Marx, wrote al-Azm, "like anyone else, knew of the superiority of modern Europe over the Orient. But to accuse a radically historicist thinker such as Marx of turning this contingent fact into a necessary reality for all time is simply absurd" (228).

Said was most probably referring to al-Azm and Aijaz Ahmad, and maybe others, regarding the defense of Marx.[33] He may have not been mistaken in pointing out the dogmatic character of some of their defenses. Nevertheless, their harsh responses, al-Azm's at least, are not adequately and fully captured by just dubbing them dogmatic critics defending their guru and guarding the orthodoxy. They may be doing so, but what Said's reading overlooks is the character of the intervention Marx performed for these militant intellectuals in their respective fields, and how an epistemological critique of Marx's Orientalist discourses came hand in hand with, and could possibly be mobilized in, the intellectual and political battles they were fighting in the difficult conjuncture of the late 1970s and early 1980s. At a point when Marxism was attacked by the purveyors of authenticity for its foreignness, Said's critique, which repositioned Marx from the thinker of emancipation to one who is discursively complicit with Orientalists, could, to say the least, not be warmly received by cornered Arab Marxists. The discursive ground, on which ideological differences were organized, was being called into question simultaneously by the political heralds of authenticity calling for nativist solutions and the theoretical critics of Eurocentric epistemology.

Said, who never tired of calling for secular criticism and of drawing attention to the domestication of radical theories, and whose hypersensitivity to

closed systems and dogmas needs no further exploration, was as far as possible from nativists of all ilk in the East as well as poststructuralist pieties in the North American academy.[34] He, in fact, had much more in common with Marxists, such as al-Azm and 'Amil, than the fraught reception of *Orientalism* reveals. To say the least, they were in agreement on the question of secularism and religious politics. Here, however, I am less concerned with pointing to convergences and divergences than in fleshing out how political and theoretical developments led to the emergence of a fork in critical agendas between thinkers at home, who were attached to an emancipatory theory of politics under attack, and diasporic oppositional intellectuals in the metropole, who inverted those terms to focus on the politics of revolutionary theory and its entanglement with power. What I am after is an examination of the different analytical and political effects produced by traveling theories hopping from Paris to New York to eventually land in Beirut.

In the years following the Israeli invasion (1982), Mahdi 'Amil (1936–87) wrote a hundred-page-plus polemic against Said's book entitled *Does the Heart Belong to the Orient and the Mind to the West? Marx in Edward Said's Orientalism* (1985).[35] Hassan Hamdan, who was academically trained as a philosopher in France and wrote under the pseudonym of Mahdi 'Amil (the Laboring Mahdi), was, and still is, regarded as the most prominent theoretician of the Lebanese Communist Party. 'Amil, who had joined the party in 1960, was later elected to its central committee in 1987, the year of his tragic assassination. 'Amil's ambitious theoretical project ran counter to al-Azm's Marxist historicism. He had "meshed Althusserian influences with conceptualizations of the periphery inspired from dependency theory" in an effort to break away from historicist readings of Marx through his theoretical development of the characteristics of a colonial mode of production.[36] 'Amil's conceptual labors were as far as possible from epistemological naïveté. He sums up the overall argument of his *Theoretical Prolegomena* in the introduction to the third edition of the two volumes (1980) as an attempt to produce a "scientific knowledge of the mechanism of capitalism's colonial development in Arab societies" and of the national liberation movement, which is the peculiar form class struggle takes in this case, as well as "the tools of production of this knowledge."[37] Reflexivity was at the heart of 'Amil's project, which sought to produce a theory that thinks the conditions of possibility of its own conceptual building blocks as it is thinking its object. 'Amil's lengthy and at points repetitive Marxist critique of *Orientalism* begins by pointing to Said's idealist move, which affiliates Orientalism to Western thought in general rather than rooting it in the particularity of its historical class character. The title of the first chapter says it all: "The

Nation's Thought or That of the Dominant Class?" 'Amil's defense of Marx, in a similar vein to al-Azm's, is keen on shifting the terms of the debate from Said's categories of Orientalist Western thought to those of bourgeois thought. The exclusion of the historical class character of this body of knowledge, in 'Amil's reading, "banishes the possibility of existence of its opposite, which gives it a totalitarian aspect by which it occupies the whole cultural space."[38] In doing so, he seeks to steer back the conversation from one that rests on common discursive formation of European knowledges to one grounded in opposed ideologies.

More importantly for our purposes, 'Amil points to how *Orientalism*'s critique of Marx and contemporary Marxists is in line with the positions of his nativist political opponents in the Arab world. "The main ideological weapon used by counterrevolutionary forces in their counterattack on the advanced positions they began to occupy in the strategic historical horizon," wrote 'Amil in his characteristic tortuous theoretical prose, "is to portray this thought [Marxism] on the basis of the Self/Other binary, or that of East and West. As if it [Marxism] is bourgeois imperialist thought, since it is, like its class antithesis, Western thought."[39] Again, Said, of course, would have protested, as he did later on, that he didn't hold nativist views, of the Western thought is only valid for the West and Eastern thought for the East, but what I am after is less Said's retrospective views and more the political and theoretical stakes animating the problem-space into which *Orientalism* landed at a particular time and place. Not any time and place, for that matter, but the place to which its author is intimately related, and a time when he was becoming more and more immersed in public political and intellectual interventions.

Nearly five years after al-Azm's observation on the resurgence of a politics of authenticity, 'Amil criticizes Said in the wake of the progress of what he dubbed the "counterrevolutionary forces." On May 18, 1987, during one of the bleak episodes of the Lebanese civil wars, 'Amil was shot dead on the street. Like Husayn Muruwwa, who was assassinated on February 17, 1987, it is widely believed that 'Amil too was shot by Shi'i Islamist militants. Under the biographical details corner of the book's third edition (2006), published by the LCP's printing house, the publisher wrote that 'Amil was assassinated for "his commitment to the struggle for a unified, secular and democratic Lebanon." "He was called," the blurb continues, "the Arabs' Gramsci, since he was the only one in the Arab world who tried to construct a comprehensive scientific theory of the Arab revolution, and perhaps, of the revolution of underdeveloped countries, more generally."

In the wake of *Orientalism*, Marxists and liberals in the Arab world continue to be critically targeted by the rise of postcolonial studies in the North American

metropoles, which would collapse the question of the political into its episte-mology critique. What these quarreling critics shared, and what constituted the condition of possibility of a postcolonial critique, was an attachment to, and an interpretation of, a body of theory drawn primarily from the corpus of European thinkers. Their difference was located in how they both conjugated the relationship of theory to politics. If the age of national liberation (1952–82) was characterized by a high demand on theory as a guide for political practice, as the biographical blurb on the back of 'Amil's book tells us, the eclipse of the revolutionary subject and the rise of postcolonial studies would inaugurate the age of the politics of theory. It is not because they are dogmatic critics, although some may well be, that these thinkers singled out the passages on Marx in *Orientalism*; it is rather because, as Said would surely agree, traveling theories dis-able certain critical paths and open up new ones, stifling political projects while potentially boosting others, despite the best intentions of the secular critic.

Ending the story of *Orientalism*'s Marxist reception at this point will only reveal a set of resistances to the text. There is more to its travels than that. In the second section of his review of *Orientalism*, al-Azm productively and stra-tegically puts Said's insights to use to debunk the claims of Arab nationalists and of, mostly ex-Marxist, "Islamanic" intellectuals who had fallen under the spell of the Iranian Revolution. In this section, which is expanded from the five pages of the text's initial English version to twenty-six pages in the later Arabic iteration, al-Azm mobilized Said as an ally to counter antihistorical and nativist anti-Western pronouncements of Arab intellectuals.[40] "One of the most prominent and interesting accomplishments of Said's book," he wrote, is its critique of

> Orientalism's persistent belief that there exists a radical ontological dif-ference between the natures of the Orient and the Occident. . . . This ontological difference entails immediately an epistemological one which holds that the sort of conceptual instruments, scientific categories, so-ciological concepts, political descriptions and ideological distinctions employed to understand and deal with Western societies remain, in principle, irrelevant and inapplicable to Eastern ones. . . . This ahistori-cal, antihuman, and even antihistorical "Orientalist" doctrine I shall call *Ontological Orientalism. . . .* This image has left its profound imprint on the Orient's modern and contemporary consciousness of itself. Hence Said's important warning against the dangers and temptations of apply-ing the readily available structures, styles, and ontological biases of Ori-entalism upon themselves and upon others.[41]

al-Azm's *Ontological Orientalism* shares with Said the analytical and political worry of always pointing to the "Oriental" exception, eliding history, politics, and economics altogether to reproduce tautologies such as "Islam is Islam, the Orient is the Orient."[42] Said and al-Azm worried about the elision of historical transformations, which mask the contemporaneity of social dynamics, of the vast social, political, and economic shifts that did and still work on and in the area. Said's concern to get rid of Arab exceptionalism and to put Arabs back in history was applauded in *Ontological Orientalism* by al-Azm, who sought to uncover the claims of those who have fallen "in the temptations against which Said has warned," engendering "what may be called *Orientalism in Reverse*" (231).

al-Azm's reading of Said's work as fundamentally an antiessentialist critique enabled him to use it to counter Arab nationalist Ba'thist thinkers who "proposed to study 'basic' words in the Arabic language as a means to attaining 'genuine knowledge' of some of the essential characteristics of the primordial 'Arab mentality' underlying those very words" (231). It also enabled him to take a stab at the post–Iranian Revolution revisionists, such as the famous Syrian poet Adonis who, in the wake of 1967, like al-Azm, professed culturalist critiques of Arab backwardness. Adonis wrote after the Iranian Revolution that the "Western essence is 'technologism and not orginality'" and that "'the peculiarity of the Orient' 'lies in originality' and this is why its nature cannot be captured except through 'the prophetic, the visionary, the magical, the miraculous, the infinite, the inner, the beyond, the fanciful, the ecstatic', etc." (236). al-Azm concluded his review by alluding to recent debates on whether the "Islamic Republic" can be qualified as democratic, citing "the conservative 'Orientalistic' logic" of the prevailing argument that "Islam cannot accept any additional qualifiers since it cannot be but Islam" (236). As Ayatollah Khomeini, quoted by al-Azm in the last sentences of his review, put it, "the term *Islam* is perfect, and having to put another word right next to it is, indeed, a source of sorrow" (237).

Orientalism in reverse put the accent on the unmasking of essentialist assumptions in Arab thought and Islamic thought that point toward its self-sufficiency and its implicit and sometimes explicit superiority to its Western counterpart. al-Azm mobilized Said to shift the lens of critique from imperial discourses on the "Orientals" to the latter's own knowledge of themselves. These Arab thinkers share the same essentializing traits and methods of Orientalist scholars while reversing the normative value judgment to the benefit of the Orient, which comes out triumphant in its face-off with its materialist, decadent Western counterpart. *Orientalism in Reverse* is then not the self-

Orientalizing that Said warns against, and that al-Azm, with his critique of the backwardness of Arab society, can easily fall into, and is not merely Occidentalism, which is the reification of the West.

al-Azm's resistance to *Orientalism*'s treatment of Marxism, as well as his productive use of some its insights, are, of course, part and parcel of the same response to the newly emerging political conjuncture. On the one hand he was attempting to leave a breathing space for his historicist Marxist critique (of "backwardness," "religious obscurantist thought," and "tradition") by disentangling Marx from Orientalism, and implicitly himself from the charge of self-Orientalization—one that could too easily be used against him by the postrevolutionary currents. On the other hand, he uncoupled Said's epistemological and ontological critique from the West's will to dominate and reversed the terms to undo the antihistorical and self-congratulatory currents in Arabic thought of both the earlier nationalist and more recent Iranophile strands. *Orientalism in Reverse*, by inverting the terms of Said's work, from a criticism of the West's knowledge of the non-West to the internal criticism of the then current politics of authenticity in the Arab world, reveals clearly the emerging fork in critical agendas—that will solidify subsequently—between al-Azm and Said, whose births as public committed intellectuals we owe to the 1967 defeat and who were brought together personally and politically by their engagement alongside the Palestinian revolution in the late 1960s.

Coda: Culture and Imperialism

There are more interesting critical readings of Said's work that are not theoretical attempts to salvage Marx or Enlightenment thought from the charge of Orientalism, or to show how his binary divisions between East and West reinscribe in practice a certain nationalist logic. These readings underscored how Said's binaries, which focus on imperialism and the resistances to it, do not take into account the different modalities of power at work in colonized and postcolonial societies.[43] In the last pages of *Orientalism*'s introduction, under the subheading "The Personal Dimension," Said borrows Gramsci's words about the importance of "knowing oneself" through compiling an inventory of the historical processes that have deposited an infinity of traces on the self as a starting point for a critical elaboration. *Orientalism*, Said then notes, is an attempt to "inventory the traces upon me, the Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a factor in the life of all Orientals."[44] This practice of self-knowledge, like Freudian psychoanalysis, has an emancipatory aspect. The critical

awareness of colonialism's constitutive traces is a first step toward neutralizing their grip on the self.

Said's pathbreaking work, and this is not unrelated to its appeal, is a theoretical work with a therapeutic edge. By diving into the multiple sedimented layers of the inexhaustible Orientalist archive, while making a strong case for its repetition in the present, and rendering visible the patterns of its entanglements with power, Said's text contributes to undoing their hold not only over disciplines but also on colonial and postcolonial subjects. Postcolonial theory has a therapeutic dimension, particularly for diasporic subjects who experience everyday and institutional racism in their metropolitan homes. Said's theoretical practice, like psychoanalysis again, is not a normative one. The Lebanese and Palestinian Maoists who converted to Islamist politics in the wake of the Iranian Revolution—and for some, such as Roger Assaf and Munir Shafiq, who were born into Christian families, this entailed a religious conversion—were also critical of the cultural domination of the West. Their critique of the multifaceted dimensions of imperialism entailed a personal and political conversion that inscribed them in a nativist ideological universe.

Both Said and the Maoist converts to Islamism retain Western imperialism at the heart of their attachments. Said fought it through acts of theoretical deconstruction of its hegemony and a political alignment with the Palestinian national liberation movement. He held the tension alive between his critical theoretical practices and his national liberation politics. The Maoists, on the other hand, underwent a process of conversion to militant Islam that came to form the unified ideological and political, and at times personal, ground of their anti-imperialism.

al-Azm and 'Amil retained Marxism at the heart of their attachments. They attempted to salvage it from Said's critique and its association by Islamists with Western Orientalism and forms of cultural domination. They tried hard, in desperate political times, via different theoretical strategies to defend Marxism's promise of universal emancipation. They clashed with Said theoretically and Islamists politically. 'Amil was assassinated by Islamist militants. al-Azm retreated in subsequent years to a defense of Enlightenment values, holding very critical views of Islamist politics. In the last years of his life, he supported the Syrian revolution against the brutal Assad regime, steering away from his earlier hardline critiques of religious politics.

In the wake of his very early disenchantment with revolutionary politics, Charara turned into a harsh critic of leftist and anti-imperialist politics. This was compounded by his observation of how these emancipatory discourses

were put to use by political parties, national liberation movements, and regimes to strengthen their hold on power and silence their opponents. His early observation on the difficulty of establishing hegemony in a country divided by multiple communal solidarities put him at odds with Said's views on two main points. The first was Said's emphasis on the strength and effectivity of the webs of imperial power-knowledge discourses. The second was Said's theoretical silence on the multiple modalities of power and rule at work in these societies that are not part of the matrix of Empire. Charara called into question very early on the poverty of the categories of Western social theory to account for non-Western forms of power. Unlike the Maoists, whose nativist *ideological* concerns led them to fashion a political vocabulary from the resources of the Arab-Islamic tradition, Charara turned to some of the same resources, but for heuristic and *theoretical* reasons. His turn to Ibn Khaldun was coupled with an implicit normative horizon that saw in the logic of the state—which he didn't articulate—and more broadly in the logic of the autonomous functioning of institutions an antidote to the pervasive logic of subjugation. Unlike al-Azm, his immanent critique of the societies was never articulated in the reified stock phrases of modernist intellectuals that posit "religion" and "culture" as a problem and the Enlightenment or "democracy" as the panacea.

I illustrate some of these points, and bring this chapter to a close, with Ahmad Beydoun's generous review of Said's *Culture and Imperialism*.[45] After lauding the comprehensiveness of the work, and some of its brilliant readings, Beydoun notes that Said's defensive position, especially that he lives in the West, is very precise in its diagnosis of the different manifestations of Western racism.[46] Having said that, Said's work, Beydoun continues, is less precise when it comes to looking into, and analyzing, the suffering the dominated underwent at the hands of their rulers and fellows. Not taking the modalities of power at work in these societies and their cultures, alongside imperial ones, Beydoun writes, leads to "theoretical disasters in understanding historical catastrophes. This is the case in [Said's] dubbing Saddam Hussein no more than an 'appalling figure.'"[47] Beydoun's critique shows the limits of Said's binary matrix—colonizer/colonized, oppressor/oppressed, imperialism/resistance—to diagnostically apprehend the complexities and catastrophes of postcolonial Arab history. Beydoun notes how the theoretical emphasis on showing how Orientalists invent their Other, to assert the superiority of their own self-image, is an easy inversion of the racist position that locks the colonized in ahistorical essences. Difference in a larger scale is neither an ahistorical essence nor an invention of colonizers. He

finds theoretically wanting the confinement of the critique of power to imperialism. Toward the end of his review, Beydoun remarks that the vital question is whether there is a possibility for a critique of the practices of the colonized and the oppressed that finds its sources in their own culture—and not in the acts of imperialists—that both escapes essentialization and would not be dubbed an act of racism or self-racism.