

Acknowledgments

From the time the idea of this book germinated till its completion, a little bit more than a decade passed. Researching, and writing about, the 1960s New Left and its becomings in the times that span the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq and the Arab revolutions (2011–) was punctuated by a seesawing of intense political moods. Despair was washed away by revolutionary tides before receding, leaving in their wake those fortunate enough to survive the counter-revolutionary ordeal scattered and bereft. Revolutionary passion and political disenchantment moved out of the archive of theoretical texts and experiences I was writing about to lay claim on the present, mandating in the process a modulation of the major keys in which this past was cast and recast. I could not have kept on working and completing this book without the many gifts received along the way.

I am deeply grateful for the intellectual generosity of all the members of the 1960s generation of leftist militant intellectuals who took the time to share their own political experiences, answer my questions, and in the process help me work through the intergenerational blind spots that cropped up during our exchanges over the years. I would like to thank a few of them in person without whose offerings this work would not have been possible. I had very generative exchanges with Azza Charara Beydoun, Muhsin Ibrahim, Wajih Kawtharani, and Mahmoud Soueid. Reading Fawwaz Traboulsi's works and articles in the mid- to late 1990s was an integral part of my own political education. I later learned from him in person when he served as an external examiner on my master's thesis and have been in close, and enriching, conversation with him ever since. Ahmad Beydoun granted me full access to his personal Socialist Lebanon archive; without his trust and generosity, this book could not have been written. Abbas Beydoun's dialogues with Husayn Muruwwa were a source of inspiration. Reading the dialogues, it was hard to shake off the sense that as he sat down with the old man a few months before his assassination, he was very much aware of being a scribe to a vanishing world, as he came to terms with a share of his own inheritance. Beydoun's vivid, detailed recollections and the uncompromising honesty with which he revisited his own militant past were

a gift to this project. In the autumn of a life of intellectual sparring, a time of treason of many “secular” bishops of Arab culture, the late Sadik al-Azm stood up for the Syrian revolution. His fiery public writings were matched in private by a gentle and dialogic sensibility.

I have been in conversation with Hazem Saghieh for nearly two decades now. Those exchanges have seeped in more than one way into the veins nourishing this book. From Hazem I also learned how to sustain warmth and cordiality amid heated political exchanges and intellectual differences. The initial ideas for what years later became this book emerged in conversation with the late Joseph Samaha. I learned from him in more ways than I can now remember since we first met in the late 1990s. Joseph’s sharp analytical prose, his ethico-political disposition to not sell short his opponent’s positions, and the sheer conceptual firepower of his arguments took the art of political editorials to unmatched heights: ephemeral sculptures of the “here” and “now.” Waddah Charara concluded our initial interview by saying that he is less interested in future meetings in making speeches on “intellectuals” and “revolutions” than he is in being “questioned” and “shaken”—playfully borrowing Henri Calet’s words “do not shake me, I am full of tears” before swiftly adding, “not ideological tears, though.” These words capture something of Charara’s intellectual dispositions that are difficult to discern if one is only acquainted with his complex scholarly works and trenchant political commentaries. In the numerous exchanges I had with him, I experienced firsthand an openness to critical dialogue and a deep ethnographic attunement to listening to, and mulling over, his interlocutors’ words. I cannot help thinking that these deep antihierarchical dispositions are carryovers from his Maoist past. I cannot thank him enough for his generosity, which enabled a string of exchanges that began more than a decade ago as an expression of a desire for questions.

This book began as a dissertation in the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University, under the supervision of Brinkley Messick, who exuded a tranquil confidence in the potential of the project, which kept me going as I was feeling my way around my materials. I also learned from him how to go through texts with a fine-tooth comb looking for the worlds they construct, the practices they authorize, and the devices planted inside of them to preempt potential criticisms. Timothy Mitchell was generous enough to join my dissertation committee, and offer valuable feedback, in its last stages. I was fortunate to benefit from Rashid Khalidi’s encyclopedic historical knowledge, close reading, and generosity with his time and suggestions. Meetings with Rashid always left me energized and recharged to resume the solitary labors of writing. Taking a graduate seminar with Talal Asad on “re-thinking the idea of tradition” and

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I later on held a postdoctoral fellowship at the Europe in the Middle East—The Middle East in Europe program (EUME), where I was affiliated with the Center for Middle Eastern and North African Politics at the Otto Suhr Institute for Political Science at the Freie Universität Berlin. I cannot thank Georges Khalil enough for his ongoing hospitality, interest in, and critical engagement with my work. The year I spent at EUME, which made Berlin a hub for critical work on the Middle East, was memorable on so many fronts, not least because it coincided with the seismic event of the Arab revolutions. I was also fortunate to be part of a vibrant cohort of EUME and Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin fellows that year. My thanks especially to Elias Khoury, who read a chapter of this book, provided valuable comments, and generously shared elements of his militant and intellectual trajectory, as well as to Toufoul Abou-Hodeib, Kamran Asdar Ali, Gülhan Erkaya Balsoy, Behrouz Ghamari-Tabrizi, Hannan Hammad, Tamer el-Leithy, and Zeynep Türkyılmaz. Cilja Harders ensured that I felt at home at the Center for Middle Eastern Politics, and immediately integrated me into its intellectual life, where I worked on my book, and shared many ideas and meals with Naoual BelAkhdar, Malika Bouziane, Anja Hoffman, and Katharina Lenner.

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